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Power, Identity, and Organizational Structure as Reflected in Schools for Minority Groups: A Case Study of Jewish Schools in Paris, Brussels, and Geneva

ZEHAVIT GROSS

This article compares the linkages between organizational structure, power relations, and group identities within the private schools operated by the francophone Jewish communities of Brussels, Paris, and Geneva.\(^1\) A school’s organizational structure and balance of power reflect its identity and its conceptual world. That is, its organizational structure reflects the forces operating within the school system, the power wielded by various actors, and the relationships existing between the system and the actors. A school’s balance of power is thus a practical manifestation of its inherent political inclination and identity. The main concern in this article is to analyze the ways in which the structural organization of the school influences the allocation of power and the school’s identity, and how this identity affects structural aspects of the curriculum.

Until recently, Jews possessed no geographical territory of their own and were an ethnic and religious minority in all nations. Minority status had an impact on Jewish education, because Jewish schools were considered the most effective antidote to intermarriage and assimilation.\(^2\) Until the Renaissance, Jewish education meant primarily the transmission of an intellectual tradition consisting of a diverse body of ideas, values, and practices, and a set of attitudes and emotional dispositions, through the study of canonical texts, in the belief that “right knowledge leads to right behavior.”\(^3\) The 1838 founding in Frankfurt of the first Jewish school teaching both religious studies and general studies (including mathematics, physics, and humanities) reflected a revolutionary

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\(^1\) To date, almost all research on Jewish education has been conducted in Israel or the United States. The francophone arena has, for the most part, been neglected, with the exception of one study on the education of French Jewry. See Erik H. Cohen, *L'étude et l'éducation juive en France ou l'avenir d'une communauté* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, Collection Judaisme [Toledot], 1991), and his report on a survey among French Jewry, *Les Juifs de France: Valeurs et identité* (Paris: Fonds Social Juif Unifié, 2002). See also David Saada, “L’école juive dans la communauté et dans la Cité,” *L’arche* 555 (2004): 44.


doctrine for Jewish education, one that fundamentally changed Jewish schools.\(^4\) The proportion of religious or Jewish studies (JS) and general studies (GS) within the school curriculum was subject to negotiation and reflected the extent of the openness of the school policy to the universalistic environment outside the protected Jewish environment. Since that time, most Jewish schools combine Jewish and general studies in their curriculum.

Relationships among school balances of power, identity, and structure are of considerable significance in an analysis of the overall school world and especially in regard to schools that serve minority groups, which are concerned with the delineation and preservation of their boundaries with the majority culture. The structure of the curriculum is a reflection of the tension between these three components. In its structural aspect, the curriculum reflects the relative status of Jewish studies versus general studies. Because the Jewish schools were established to transmit Jewish identity, we would expect the Jewish curriculum to be central rather than marginal. The reciprocal relations within the organizational structure and the power relations among its different components, the nature and identity that the school wishes to enhance, the relative positioning of the subjects studied, and the type of curriculum (open or closed) adopted—all influence the nature of the social order and the identity that is constructed through schooling. The multidimensional description presented here aims to reflect the reality in which this research is situated.

**Theoretical Issues**

This study is framed by the theoretical constructs of power, identity, and organizational structure. Organizational structure is a reflection of the identity and power allocation within a given system. I will first describe the concepts of power and identity and then elaborate on the organizational structure, which is formulated by both. I will then discuss the effect of the context on identity and power allocation as well as their curricular consequences.

**Power**

The sources and manifestations of power, which are key to understanding schooling, can be theorized within two distinct paradigms: positivism-realism and constructivism.\(^5\) Hans Morgenthau, who originated the realist approach, viewed human nature as a constant, embodying aspirations toward power and strength, some of which may include evil dimensions.\(^6\) In his estimation,\(^4\)

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politics is governed by fixed, objective, universal, and ahistoric laws, independent of time or place and rooted in human nature. Morgenthau also maintained that the essence of politics is the search for interests defined in terms of power. Subsequent studies, inspired by this research, conceive of power as a tangible, functional, and possibly deleterious concept. Kenneth Waltz further developed a neorealist-structural theory, claiming that contact among states, as economic societies, gives rise to structure, and that aspiration for survival compels states to adopt a certain series of fixed, uniform, predictable, and quantifiable behaviors. These two approaches, by Morgenthau and Waltz, have served as a basis for the empirical studies designed to provide an objective dimension of the concept of power, enabling the development of a more scientific theory.

In the late 1980s, Alexander Wendt developed an alternative paradigm with a constructivist orientation, holding that the system is the product of mutual relations obtaining among players who are dependent, in turn, on human conception and interpretation. The practical significance of this approach was an epistemological change that fostered comprehension of the system’s structure and its correlation with social activity.

Identity
The constructivist approach to studying identity builds on the work of Erik Erikson, who claimed that ego identity is “the final identity. . . . [It] includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and reasonably coherent whole of them.” Ego identity comprises religious, national, sexual, and professional subidentities, which are integrated into one structure that reflects the individual’s overall identity. Integrative identity develops “in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture.” To study identity in terms of power is an attempt to trace the relative power and the hierarchies obtaining among the individuals in their own estimation and in the estimations of others.

Organizational Structure
Just as in research on power and identity, scholars also debate whether administrative-organizational thinking is a universal or a culture-bound aggregate of methodical ideas. Differences among patterns of administration and

organization in different countries are dependent on environmental-socioeconomic factors, such as level of industrialization; ecological factors, such as level of education; socioeconomic variables; and factors generated by the organizational culture of a specific enterprise and not by society as a whole. Other scholars claim that administration is indeed culture bound. Despite accelerated globalization, increasing technological similarity, and cooperation among different countries, one may still perceive fundamental cultural differences across and within countries.

School organization has extensive implications for pedagogical-educational patterns, curriculum structure, and instructional methods. Educational administration studies reveal three major models of school organization: bureaucratic, which emphasizes school hierarchical structure, the chain of command and distribution of functions among employees, and the manner in which school events are documented; systemic, which stresses the development of relations among various parts of the organization for purposes of criticism, feedback, and functional refinement, and between the organization and the surrounding environment; and community, which focuses on relations obtaining among the various actors within the system and is characterized by high accessibility among all partners, open and free interpersonal relations, and mutual concern and assistance.


14 Michel Crozier, e.g., analyzed the shortcomings of the bureaucratic phenomenon on the background of conservative French culture; see his The Bureaucratic Phenomenon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Peter Clark, who examined Crozier’s approach in the United Kingdom, found British bureaucracy more flexible and adaptable to change than the French variety, owing to intercultural differences between the two countries; see Peter Clark, “Cultural Context as a Determinant of Organizational Rationality: A Comparison of the Tobacco Industries in Britain and France,” in Organizations Alike and Unlike: International and Interinstitutional Studies in the Sociology of Organizations, ed. Cornelis J. Lammers and David J. Hickson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 272–86. Otto H. Nowotny discovered substantive differences between European and American approaches to administration, maintaining that Europeans attribute great significance to history; to the past; to conventional, well-known, familiar, and accepted features; and to static, stable components, whereas American administrative culture prefers attention to the future dynamic features, rapid growth, and mobility. Quality is a priority for Europeans and quantity for Americans. Consequently, Nowotny claims, the specific culture of each society constitutes the most significant variable in shaping its administrative theory; see Otto H. Nowotny, “American vs. European Management Philosophy,” Harvard Business Review 41 (March–April 1964): 101–8; Anna Grandori, “Methodological Options for an Integrated Perspective on Organization,” Human Relations 54, no. 1 (2001): 37–47; Paul Rubin, “Hierarchy,” Human Nature 11, no. 3 (2000): 259–79.

15 Seymour B. Sarason, Revisiting “The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change” (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), and Educational Reform.

16 On models of school organization, see Shlomo Sharan, Hanna Shachar, and Tamar Levine, The Innovative School: Organization and Instruction (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999); on the issue of the
In essence, while the bureaucratic and systemic models concentrate on the formal aspects of an organization, the community model emphasizes informal features. In practice, no school conforms purely to any one of these models. Rather, each embodies a different combination of features representing all three types. Conversely, the varying combination of components of these three models, applied within the school organization, reflects the school’s identity, the forces that operate within it, and the relations obtaining among them.

The Effect of Context

According to Kurt Lewin, what most determines one’s attitude to the context is one’s sense of belonging. This is true both of the individual and of the collective. Every individual belongs to many social groups. The overlapping nature of these groups in society makes it difficult for individuals to know where they belong. As a result, one of the main characteristics of individuals who belong to a minority group is the feeling of uncertainty. “They are not only uncertain about their belonging to the group they are ready to enter but also about their belonging to the group they are leaving.” This causes them to become what Lewin calls “marginal persons.” Their search for belonging leads them to adopt the culture of the group into which they want to integrate. In their aspiration to cross the line that separates their group from others, they abandon their own culture.

Pedagogic and Curricular Consequences

Curriculum reflects what is considered by an education system as valid and legitimate knowledge. Basil Bernstein distinguishes between two types of curricula: collection and integrated. The collection type of curriculum is relatively fixed and closed, whereas the integrated type is more flexible and open. The contents in the collection curriculum are insulated by strong bureaucratic, see David A. Sousa and Wayne Hoy, “Bureaucratic Structure in Schools: A Refinement and Synthesis in Measurement,” Educational Administration Quarterly 17, no. 4 (1981): 21–39; on the issue of the systemic, see Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations (New York: Wiley, 1966); on the issue of community, see T. J. Sergiovanni, Building Community in Schools (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994); Seymour B. Sarason, How Schools Might Be Governed and Why (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997). At the core of this theoretical model is the conceptual distinction originated by German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, between Gesellschaft (company) and Gemeinschaft (community). The relations obtaining among people in a Gesellschaft are based on a formal contractual agreement, whereas those in a Gemeinschaft are of a family-like nature and based on a sense of emotional and moral closeness. See Ferdinand Tonnies, Community and Society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft, trans. and ed. C. P. Loomis (New York: HarperCollins, 1957); Sharan, Shachar, and Levine, Innovative School, 100.


19 Ibid., 148.
20 Ibid., 196.
21 Ibid., 197.
boundaries, while in the integrated type there is less insulation. Bernstein has claimed that educational systems in Europe are characterized by the collection type of curriculum, and Robert Connell distinguishes between the dominant and the marginal curriculum. The dominant curriculum, which Connell terms the “competitive academic curriculum,” is based on a hierarchy of academic knowledge and organizes the pupils’ learning in the form of individual competition. The subordinated or marginal curriculum relates to other subjects (like physical education, technical studies, art, and music). This curriculum focuses mainly on teaching sets of skills and is built much more directly on student interest, although within the educational system it is positioned as containing lower status content.

The Study

In this qualitative study, I examine 10 Jewish schools located in French-speaking cities: six in Paris, representing the different networks that operate the Jewish schools there; all three Jewish schools in Brussels; and the only Jewish school in Geneva. All the students in the schools are from families in which at least one parent is Jewish. Prior to discussing data collection and analysis strategies, I briefly describe the cultural landscapes as well as the political framework of public and private schools in France, Belgium, and Switzerland.

France.—With its highly centralized system and predominantly Catholic population, the concept of citizenship is at the core of education in France. State education is considered the key to political freedom and to national identity, achieved particularly through linguistic unification. The strongest normative pillar of French political philosophy is the separation of state and church, and thus education is secular. Education in France is selective and based upon a rigid system of examinations that dictates the content and method of instruction. The goal is to offer pupils equal opportunity in knowledge acquisition. Freedom in the choice of public schools is highly restricted; parents are allowed to send their children only to schools that are located in their neighborhood. Alongside the public school system, however, there

25 Ibid., 93.
are private schools that serve various groups in the population. Government support for these schools is dependent on the extent of the government’s pedagogical involvement. The Debré Act of 1959 introduced specific measures that determine how to adjust private schools to the official educational requirements of state schools. The mutual obligations of the state and school are agreed upon within a specific contract according to which all aspects of general studies—including curricula, teaching methods, exams, and so forth—are under government supervision. Private schools without a state contract do not receive government support. The Jewish schools investigated in this study have the official status of “schools with contracts” (école sous contracte). French law confers great power to the school principal, who represents the state in the schools.

About 90 percent of the Jewish schools in Paris serve students who come from religious or traditional Oriental (Sephardic) homes, mainly immigrants from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. The Algerian Jewish community is more secular than the other two communities. Most of the Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of European origin) in Paris are either secular or assimilated Jews who send their children to public schools. Among the large (350,000) Jewish community of Paris, about half of families are either traditional (moderate orthodox) or ultraorthodox.

Belgium.—Belgium is a federal state composed of three language-related communities (German, French, and Flemish) that are responsible for cultural matters, education, and health. The Belgian constitution guarantees the separation of church and state together with freedom of religion and public worship. Schools in Brussels used to be dominated by the francophone orientation. However, in recent years the parents have demanded special departments for teaching Flemish.

Belgium’s educational system is neutral. All public schools are obliged to offer a choice between instruction according to a recognized religion or secular universalistic instruction (what is referred to as leçons morale). Freedom of education guarantees parents free choice of a school that subscribes to their philosophical or religious convictions. Furthermore, any student in a public school can take 2 hours of Jewish studies with a special Jewish studies teacher who receives his or her salary from the government. This encourages Jewish parents to send their children to public schools. The official status of the private Jewish schools is “recognized” (reconnu), and they receive government support only if they agree to government inspection of the general studies curriculum and teaching methods. The Jewish community in Brussels (which numbers 15,000) is largely secular and sends its children to public schools or to the two less religious among the three private schools. Most of the secular students come from Ashkenazi families. The vast majority of pupils (95%) in the religious schools in Brussels are Sephardic and from families who immigrated from North Africa. Most of Brussels’ Ashkenazi orthodox
families send their children to private school in Antwerp where there is an ultraorthodox community and private school system.

Switzerland.—Switzerland is a small federal country that is subdivided into 26 cantons. The country includes three main language districts—German, Italian, and French. The dominant sociocultural landscape of Geneva, which is under the strong influence of Protestantism, is francophone. There is no central education authority and, therefore, no true educational planning on the national level. Each canton has its own obligatory curriculum for all primary and secondary schools.

The public educational system in Geneva is secular. Private schools are organized within a special association (Association Genevoise des Ecoles Privées [AGEP]) and financed by parents. When students transfer from a private to a public school, they are required to pass specific examinations. Hence most private schools strive to adjust their curricula to the official curricular requirements of the canton. The Jewish school is a private institution and is supported by sponsors in the community. Its students are mostly Sephardic Jews. The small Jewish community in Geneva (population 4,400) is generally secular and unaffiliated with a congregation. Secular and traditional Jewish parents in Geneva usually send their children to public schools because the Jewish school is considered to be too orthodox. However, for most orthodox families the existing private school is not considered to be religious enough. They often send their children to religious schools in France.

Data Collection

Principals of the 10 schools were interviewed in October 2001 using semistructured interviews. The main topics were Jewish parents’ choice of Jewish or public schools, the main problems of Jewish education in the francophone setting, the organizational structure of schools, attitudes toward Israel, the status of Jewish and general studies in the school, anti-Semitism, and so forth. In addition, I spoke with 40 teachers, 100 students, 30 parents, and 20 influential members of the three Jewish communities. These conversations concerned issues that arose during my interviews with principals. In addition, I observed 40 Jewish studies lessons and 10 general studies lessons. Finally, I collected official documents from all schools.

After brief initial visits to each school, on my second visit I met with the principals and showed them a diagram of the organizational structure of

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28 Except for two, all the principals have an academic background; some have formal certification from universities and some from teachers’ colleges. All the principals, except for one, have held leadership positions in education for at least 10 years.
schools in Israel and in England (see fig. 1). They were asked to examine it, to draw a diagram that reflects the organizational structure of their own schools, and to describe it verbally. I asked them to explain their perception of the functions of each component in the organizational structure and how each relates to the others. As my interviewees explained the organizational structure of their schools, I was able to elicit a large amount of information that I verified when interviewing the other informants (parents, teachers, students, etc.) and by analyzing the documents that were made available to me.

I used the diagram shown in figure 1 to overcome the reluctance by

![Diagram of school organizational structure](image)

**Fig. 1.**—The principal as the focus of school spheres of reference. Source: Dan Gibton, "Content Analysis and the Construction of Theory: Leadership of Principals of Autonomous Schools," in *Genres and Tradition in Qualitative Research*, ed. N. Sabar [in Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 2001), 503.

29 The schools investigated had not been previously studied, and perhaps for that reason, the principals were very suspicious and anxious, and they initially did not want to cooperate. My first visit to the field was very complicated; most of the principals were unwilling to answer direct questions, giving instrumental and technical excuses (they were short of time, etc.). They seemed to view the research as an existential threat to their professional careers, perhaps partly because it was being carried out by an orthodox Israeli (female) researcher affiliated with the Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research.
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principals to discuss their schools. The figure also served to anchor my analysis of the schools’ organizational structure. By referring to the diagram, the principals became more open and better able to provide accurate descriptions than was possible during others conversations, when principals had a natural tendency to emphasize desirable aspects of their school.

Data Analysis

Using a grounded theory approach, data from the three sources (interviews, observations, and documents) were analyzed, thus enabling triangulation. The analysis consisted of five stages: (1) open coding, in which recurring topics were identified and defined (e.g., order, stability, control, discipline, assimilation, state, hierarchy), (2) axial coding, involving the formulation of categories defining criteria and continuing theoretical sampling (e.g., the principal’s role, the teacher’s role, French consciousness, Jewish consciousness), (3) selective coding, which consists of refining and finalizing criteria to include a series of categories (e.g., types of rhetoric, teaching styles, relationships between disciplines), (4) formulating the hierarchy and identifying core categories (structure-process-content), and (5) creating a category-based theoretical structure linked to the literature and proposing a theoretical model.

Results

The Organizational Structure

The principals’ diagrams and interviews related to the several components of the organizational structure. These included the state, the school committee (Comité), principals, general studies coordinators and teachers, Jewish studies coordinators and teachers, students, and parents. In Geneva, the principal also mentioned the AGEP as a component located immediately below the state in the hierarchical model. In Paris, Jewish education is organized within the framework of six educational networks. Surprisingly, only one French principal of those interviewed included educational networks in his diagram.

Figure 2 is a composite diagram that reflects those drawn by the principals. The components of organizational structure, their functions, relative positions in the school hierarchy, and the relation of each with the others will be described below.

Principals’ views of organizational structure.—The principals of each school perceived their organizational structures to be relatively stable and hierarchical, in contrast with what they viewed as a dynamic, nonhierarchical model of school structure in Israel and England. Although each principal justified

his schools’ hierarchical model, two—from Brussels and Geneva—were somewhat apologetic about this, calling hierarchy the most appropriate administrative pattern for them. The following is a selection of comments made by the principals in the interviews.\footnote{In all quotations from the interviews (which are taken from field notes), my clarifications are in square brackets. The schools are not identified in any way because the principals were promised complete anonymity. As a result, only limited inter- or intracountry comparisons are possible.} One commented that “our system comprises subsystems. To preserve stability and order, we require a hierarchy that clarifies each person’s position.” Another principal argued that “hierarchies are essential to the system’s success because they reflect order, although they do isolate the principal. Principals live in a world of isolation that they themselves create, but this is unavoidable. Otherwise, there would be chaos. Hierarchies enable control and progress.”

All the principals I interviewed claimed that the dynamic pattern reflected in Dan Gibton’s diagram did not suit their schools’ administrative patterns.
or the francophone mentality that aspires toward order and stability. As one informant said, “This [Gibton’s] diagram appears very unstable and disorganized. Our school could not last one day with such a system.” As another principal explained, “You have to understand the French mentality to realize why what you’re showing me here [Gibton’s diagram] is not for us.” One principal elaborated: “Look, the [people in this county] love order. What this diagram displays is far too chaotic. You were amazed at our classroom order, yet you ought to know that one of the most frequent complaints I receive as a principal is that there is too much noise and disorder. Apparently, from your point of view, it looks like Paradise, but here in [our country] we demand absolute silence, even at recess. You say that the students appear quiet, well-mannered and European, but their parents say that they’re impudent. It’s a matter of point of view, of mentality, of culture.” Finally, a teacher at one of the schools commented to me that “the Sephardic tradition is very patriarchal. You have to understand the mentality of this place and its structure from this basic fact.”

The state.—The principals’ diagrams indicate that the hierarchy is headed by the state, which has de jure influence over school affairs. The more centralized the state, the more pivotal its influence on components of professional administration functions and school curricula. School principals in France indicated that they have more extensive reporting obligations vis-à-vis the state and that the bureaucratic procedures they have to follow are more complex than was the case for their peers in Belgium or Switzerland. This is probably related to the fact that, as representatives of the state, the Parisian principals exercise a great deal of power on behalf of the state, and thus their accountability is greater than the accountability of principals in the other countries.

School committee.—The school committees are equally as important as the state in the view of most principals. The principals’ diagrams show that the committee is the direct employer of the principal. The committee functions as the school’s executive body and is made up of key community personalities such as rabbis, wealthy members of the Jewish community, intellectuals, selected parents of high socioeconomic status, and official community representatives, with a membership hierarchy headed by its president. In practice, it exercises de facto control over school affairs, with far-reaching implications for school operation.32 Many parents expressed reservations regarding flaws in the functioning of the committee. One father complained that the committee was an unprofessional group, purporting to address professional issues on which its members lack basic knowledge: “They take a bunch of high

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32 Most members of the Comité are wealthy people or connected to wealthy people, or are rabbinical authorities who have a lot of power in the community, and people were unwilling to anger them—the interviewees did not mention any specific threat or consequence, but the reluctance to raise these issues was apparent.
society people who think they can run the world. What on earth do these people understand about education? They make decisions about issues that they never examined and never will.”

By contrast with this parent, most principals and teachers seemed reluctant to criticize the committee. As one principal confided, “at times, when I feel they’ve gone too far, I try to let them know. If I ever decide to quit my job as a principal, it will be because of them. There are some serious people there but they are not open-minded and lack even an elementary grasp of education.” In Geneva, the committee had a more central place in the discourse of the principal and is viewed more positively as an integral part of the school environment and management.

The principal.—Each principal is bound by state law and is subordinate to the school board. Principals attested only to tenuous contact with the local authorities, in contrast to the relations depicted in Gibton’s diagram (fig. 1). The principals are in charge of the general and Jewish studies coordinators and teachers, as well as the students.

The principals in France are less accessible than those in Brussels and Geneva. I witnessed three incidents while I was sitting in the principal’s office—two in Brussels and one in Geneva—of parents simply knocking on the door, entering the office, and talking with the principal. In the Parisian schools, access to the principal was more complex and less open.

Teachers.—The principals informed me that there was usually no professional or personal interaction between GS and JS teachers. In all schools, they conduct separate professional teachers’ meetings, and, in some, they even have separate teachers’ rooms. Principals’ verbal descriptions of the role of JS teachers generally diverged from their graphic depictions. While their diagrams showed the status of JS teachers to be equal to GS colleagues, principals’ remarks place the latter higher in the school hierarchy.

General studies coordinators and teachers.—General studies consists of disciplines such as mathematics, physics, art, literature, history. The GS coordinators and teachers receive their salaries from the state. The coordinator is generally involved in the administrative and technical aspects of the GS curriculum. At some schools, coordinators also teach certain subjects. Teachers of GS possessed formal certification and university degrees. Although some GS teachers were not Jewish, most felt comfortable in the school since their status derives from their expertise in their subject matter.

Jewish studies coordinators and teachers.—Jewish studies included subjects such as Bible, Jewish history, and Jewish philosophy. The JS coordinators are concerned primarily with staff management for the implementation of the JS curriculum. In all three countries, most JS teachers are paid by the Comité.

Several interviewees claimed that people belong to the Comité for prestige and pursuit of their own interests. For example, one mother said, “she’s on the Comité so she can rub elbows with [name of wealthy member of community] and [another wealthy person]. Nothing else interests her except that.”
However, because Belgian law mandates 2 hours of religious studies weekly, the state finances part of the JS teachers’ salaries, with the remainder provided by the Comité. Most JS teachers claim that their salaries are far lower than the official state pay scales. Principals, in contrast, maintain that there is full compatibility between state salary grades and the salaries these teachers receive.34

On average, the formal educational level of most JS teachers is lower than that of their GS counterparts. While some have teachers’ college certification, most lack formal pedagogical training. Principals consider men with rabbinic ordination or a background in Talmud study to be qualified teachers of Jewish subjects. Their lower salaries reflect their less extensive formal training. It is thus hardly surprising that students, teachers, and parents alike ascribe low status to JS at most schools. The JS teachers have no teachers’ union to uphold their rights as do GS teachers. Most do not appeal to the courts in case of disagreement with the school, seeking to avoid an adverse affect on Jewish social solidarity.

Parents.—Parents were not included in the principals’ diagrams, apparently because schools maintain no official, practical contact with parents as individuals except through ad hoc committees. At all schools in the sample, the decision-making structure is hierarchical, led by the principal or the Comité. Although the parents do not appear in the diagrams, parents’ opinions are very important to the principals, especially in Brussels and Geneva, where they have a prominent place in the discourse of the principals. In most of the Parisian schools, the principals barely mentioned parents in conversation. When they were mentioned, it seemed as if the parents were felt to be a burden to these principals. Principals offered several explanations of why they did not involve parents in decision making. One gave a practical explanation, saying, “Look, [having] two Jewish parents means [having] at least ten opinions; so I’ll never get anything done.” Another principal had a concern over the authority of parents to advise on Jewish pedagogy, complaining that “parents don’t really know what they want for their children. From a Jewish point of view, they want them to be Jewish without feeling Jewish.” Similarly, another principal felt that “most parents here aren’t religious at all, so what could they advise us, anyway? They can’t really be partners. We have no basis for partnership because they are simply [hesitates], that is, the majority haven’t even a minimal knowledge of Judaism. That’s why they send their children to us. Most of them rely on us.” Finally, another principal emphasized the respect the staff gives to francophone traditions: “This isn’t

34 A majority of the JS teachers supplement their income by teaching at several schools and/or working at other jobs. Because of their low wages, there is considerable annual turnover among JS teachers, rendering it difficult for principals to develop long-range curricula and permanent teaching staffs in JS disciplines. At most schools, individual contracts are signed between JS teachers and the principal, so that teachers generally are unaware of what their colleagues are paid. Public discussion of this issue is discouraged, and official data on salaries are difficult to obtain.
America. You have to understand their mentality. When parents send their children to school, they respect the decisions of the staff.”

Why did families send their children to Jewish schools? To help answer this question, I interviewed both parents who did and did not make that choice. Many parents mentioned that the Jewish school represents a protected environment, saying that Jewish schools were safer, with less violence, no drugs, and no anti-Semitism. One informant explained, “I want my son to grow up in a Jewish environment and to be protected.” Another parent argued that “Jewish continuity is dependent upon Jewish education.” The quality of education was higher, according to a third parent, who stated that “Jewish schools are known to be very professional.”

The main reason parents gave for not choosing a Jewish school concerned their educational level: One academician stated that “the level of Jewish schools is very low. If you want your child to be accepted to a good university, you should send him to a good public school.” Parents also chose non-Jewish schools out of developmental concerns for their children: “I don’t want my son to be in a Ghetto. I want my child to be prepared and adjusted to the real world early in his life.” When I presented those arguments to the principals, they replied that the main reason for Jewish parents rejecting Jewish schools concerned social positioning and status: “[Parents] only care for their social status in the general society—to send your child to a non-Jewish school means to position yourself outside the boundaries of the limited Jewish society. Therefore, they also choose to go to a non-kosher restaurant in order to be part of non-Jewish society, to meet with people and be accepted by them.”

Students.—Students are situated at the bottom of the school hierarchy and are supposed to adhere to the school curriculum and obey its teachers. Students take this situation for granted and accept it as part of the francophone tradition of hierarchy and order. Explained one student, “We are French. For us to attain fulfillment, it is clear that we require order and discipline. This is not America.” Another student stated that “even if they do ask at times, they do not really consult with us except perfunctorily, but we have no expectations and therefore are not disappointed. We come to school to learn and it is very important for us to realize that obedience and order are essential to study and to success in life.”

The Curriculum

All the principals claimed that the purpose of a Jewish school was to enhance Jewish education, exposing children to Jewish culture and creating a Jewish milieu where Jews could meet in order to avoid assimilation. All the principals indicated that, alongside Jewish education, it was important for the school to expose their students to modern Western culture. The more pluralistic was the religious self-definition of the principal and of the school, the greater was their receptivity to highlighting concepts and values of the
majority culture. In the secular and more traditional schools, the principals emphasized universal rather than particularistic Jewish values. In the words of one principal, “It is very important to expose students to the general culture and values of the society in which we live. We have to prepare students for life outside the protected Jewish environment. The more we expose them to the majority culture, the more we will prevent assimilation.” By contrast, another principal argued that “those who are overly immersed in the values of the majority culture will find that their children have become assimilated.”

The principals’ diagrams reveal two distinct curricular subsystems: general studies and Jewish studies. The GS curriculum adheres to the curricular demands applicable to all French, Belgian, and Swiss schools. Students take the same matriculation examination administered throughout the country. In some schools, the level of general studies is very high. In others, the lower status of the school is due to the low level of GS. In the entrance hall in some of the schools, there are posters showing the names of schools to which their graduates were accepted and the relative success of their students on the national examinations. In the elementary schools, JS represent 23 percent of the curriculum and in the high schools, 15 percent. The JS curriculum is not determined in advance but is structured at each school at the discretion and initiative of the JS coordinator and the teachers. In most schools there is no official inspection of JS. In all the schools, Jewish subjects are taught in French and not Hebrew. Teachers claimed that teaching in French was the only way of getting the subject matter across in the limited amount of time allotted. Not all JS teachers knew Hebrew, while some spoke it poorly. At all the schools I observed, Judaism is perceived as a religion in the narrow sense of observance of precepts and not as a civilization in the broader sense. The process of socialization places greater emphasis on behavioral aspects of Judaism (religious laws and practices) than on cultural ones. As one of the more religious principal told me, “We follow a general program that was set few years ago by the former principal. It is based mainly on what we think Jewish students should know about their religion. We concentrate on practical practice.” A principal from a traditional-secular school stated similarly, “I want the student to feel at home when he is in a synagogue even though he is not religious. Most of them are strangers to these places—the Jewish prayers are not part of their cultural world—we want them to function at least culturally [in terms of religious practices] as Jews.”

35 See Saada, “L’école juive dans la communauté et dans la Cité,” 47.
36 The fact that these are Jewish schools makes the question of the Hebrew language a fundamental issue from the point of view of identity. Most of the principals are fluent in Hebrew, though three (in France) barely know the language. In the offices of principals who speak Hebrew there are many Jewish religious texts in Hebrew. The three who do not know Hebrew define themselves as less religious than those who do, and their private libraries consist mostly of French literature. They tend to emphasize the importance of French culture and the value of French citizenship. One of the principals has a French flag in his office. I saw an Israeli flag in only one office and a map of the State of Israel in another.
Instruction in Jewish studies subjects is discipline specific rather than integrative, with each subject taught separately. Cluster instruction, that is, the application of interdisciplinary didactic methods, is not employed, despite the inherent internal connections among the different Jewish subjects.

Nearly all Jewish studies lessons are face-to-face lectures, where a message is transmitted unidirectionally from the teacher to the students. Very few lessons I observed addressed contemporary aspects of the Jewish culture. For example, I observed two lessons, one on the philosophy of the twelfth-century philosopher Moses Maimonides and the other on the thinking of contemporary sage Rabbi Shaul Israeli. When I asked the teachers about the implications of the message for the students’ world, they explained that they tend to conduct the lesson on an abstract level and not to render it concrete. Concretization through relevant examples is perceived as alien to the European mentality, as one teacher said, “That’s very American; we leave such matters on an intellectual level.” This may explain a typical student’s criticism of Jewish studies: “The Jewish studies lessons are really boring. They are not relevant to our present life. But it is important to know. Perhaps it is not nice to say but it doesn’t represent our real life. I’m not religious—my family is traditional. I’m less religious than my father. Judaism is presented in the lessons and in the books as an old-fashioned tradition. How do they want us to be part of this world?”

Remarks by principals and teachers, confirmed by observations conducted at schools, suggest there are more severe and more frequent disciplinary problems during JS lessons than in the GS lessons. Secular studies may be perceived by both teachers and students as more critical to students’ professional futures. As students must pass external matriculation examinations in general studies, teachers of those subjects have greater opportunities for imposing sanctions than do those of JS classes. As one student commented, “students know that if they disrupt [GS] lessons or fail tests, there is a good chance that they’ll be kicked out of our school.” A teacher added that students’ “fear of examinations leads them to behave differently in general studies classes. Teachers of Jewish subjects have a big problem: If they’re not personally attractive and charismatic, it’s difficult for them to conduct lessons and survive.”

Parents also referenced the two worlds as reflected in the curriculum. One of the parents, an academic, commented that “If it were up to me, I would cancel this polarity between Jewish studies and General studies. The two poles represent ambivalence towards western civilization and advancement. But if I suggested this, they would suspect my Jewishness.”

Another parent explained the general attitude toward Jewish studies in the following words:

Principals are under pressure from the outside—they understand that something should be done concerning Jewish studies but they are trapped by the market
forces. The parents don’t care about identity. They care about their children’s future jobs. Money is the name of the game. Will you be richer if you have a Jewish identity? They won’t say it out loud. It doesn’t sound good, so they cover it with stories. They send their children to reconcile their conscience; once they are there [and] within this framework Jewish studies don’t bother them. They transmit this feeling to their children so you shouldn’t be surprised that their children misbehave during the classes. They skip JS classes, but they would never dare to skip a Mathematics lesson. If you have a problem, you will cancel a JS lesson but you will never cancel a lesson in mathematics.

Discussion

My interviews with principals indicate that they function not only within a structure given to them. Rather, they create the organizational structures according to the final educational product that the principals wish to produce. In order to justify and perpetuate their bureaucratic organization, they claim it is part of the francophone mentality. But, in fact, power allocation and organizational structure are not objective entities as Morgenthau claimed. Instead, they are constructed intentionally by the principal, as in Wendt’s view. It is true that the organizational structure and power allocation are part of the francophone setting, but the principals perpetuate it in order to control the system and to modify Jewish identity as they wish. Generally speaking, the possible connection between organizational structure, power allocation, and identity can be understood more fully within a constructivist, rather than positivistic, framework.

Both in their diagrams and in their comments, the principals portrayed centralized school structures with strong bureaucratic elements. However, the level and nature of bureaucracy differed according to the schools’ respective political climates. In Wayne Hoy and Scott Sweetland’s terminology, the bureaucratic component was of a “coercive” nature in terms of formalization and centralization in Paris, while in Brussels and Geneva it had a more “enabling” and open orientation. The difference in accessibility of the principals between the three different countries shows this phenomenon. This difference illustrates the connection between structural organization and

37 Morgenthau, Politics among Nations; Wendt, “The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory.”
context, and it shows that power allocation is not a universal construct but, rather, is bound to a specific context.42

The most prominent similarity among all schools, as reflected in the principals’ diagrams, was the dual structure of school organization, comprising two subcurricular systems (general studies and Jewish studies). This duality on the organizational/administrative level corresponds to particularistic (Jewish) and universal (general) elements and reflects the ambivalence of the Jewish school toward the bicultural world in which Jews live as a minority. According to Jonathan Mercer, human beings function within a dichotomous view of their social realities.43 This dichotomy is an outcome of conflicting identities and may cause social conflicts. The general studies–Jewish studies split can be viewed, in Mercer’s terminology, as two dichotomous forces that are part of the basic identity dilemma of Jews in the modern world. The emancipation of Jews and the demise of feudalism in modern Europe created opportunities for acceptance as equals in the majority culture. But this same emancipation also posed an existential dilemma for European Jews, who devised a variety of ways to benefit from this new economic, social, and cultural equality while simultaneously retaining the particularistic features of their Jewish identity. The organizational structure of the francophone Jewish schools studied here reveals that this dilemma exists even today. Thus, the division of two curricular two subsystems is not merely of organizational significance: it is relevant also to Jewish identity. From a constructivist perspective, the organizational structure essentially shapes and is shaped by the balance of power among the various components of the educational system that in turn shapes the school’s Jewish identity.44

The dual organizational structure within a centralized system engenders disciplinary polarization (wherein JS and GS are perceived as opposites or at least substantively different), leading to processes of knowledge layering associated with the relative position of the school’s structural features and its overall priorities. The layering also raises ethical problems because of the resulting incompatibility between, on the one hand, the particular objectives for which the school was established and, on the other hand, the low status ascribed to studies intended to reinforce that particularistic identity. This incompatibility reflects Connell’s distinction between hegemonic and marginal curricula. The findings attest to the fact that Jewish studies are considered marginal in spite of the fact that the schools were created for the purpose of fostering Jewish identity. Jewish studies are not part of what Connell calls the “competitive” academic curriculum: the knowledge is tested but does not

42 Clark, “Cultural Context as a Determinant of Organizational Rationality.”
43 Mercer, “Anarchy and Identity.”
44 Brenner claims that changes in school organization may be seen as a manifestation of shifts in power relations. See Louis Brenner, Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
count as part of students’ academic future, and students relate to Jewish studies accordingly. Jewish studies deal with functional rather than conceptual knowledge and are structured around students’ needs as perceived by the teachers. The two separate study systems transmit an unmediated message to students that general studies is the only curriculum directly related to exams and thus related to “real life.” Jewish studies are unrelated to real life.

The fact that Jewish studies do not belong to real life may be a basis for an identity crisis. Inconsistency in school objectives gives rise to cognitive dissonance, reflecting the intensity of school identity problems. The socialization process carries a dual message for students. Overtly, they attend such schools to strengthen the social solidarity of the minority group to which they belong and to internalize the Jewish values. In practice, however, they perceive the particularistic curricular content to be of inferior status, and students therefore prefer to invest in subjects thought to guarantee their future through their integration into the majority culture. Erikson claims that a coherent identity is established on the basis of what he defines as “sameness and continuity.” The fact is that in students’ homes, even those whose parents are less orthodox, Judaism is often considered to be the “essence of life” and “real life,” but at school Judaism is part of the nonacademic, noncompetitive, and marginal curriculum. This lack of integration conveys a message to the students that Jewish studies are, in practice, less relevant. This message undermines the strength of Judaism in its role as a pillar of identity guidance and instead causes doubt and mistrust.

The structure both reflects and perpetuates the inner identity conflict. The external culture, namely, that of the majority, influences the particular religious culture of Judaism and creates a dichotomy between the inner and outer worlds. Nonetheless, in real life, modern Jews function simultaneously as Jews and as ordinary citizens. Instead of dealing with the problem, the organizational structure of the school deepens the dichotomy, feeds it, and in certain ways makes the educational system an artificial entity.

My interviews reflect a gap between declarative and practical spheres. The principals drew organizational diagrams showing two subsystems of equal status. But their verbal descriptions indicated that the GS subsystem was of greater scope and enjoyed higher status. The principals have a formal commitment to provide a respectable and suitable venue for Jewish studies. However, in practice, this commitment is subordinated to universalistic goals. This may also indicate that the principals’ marketing accountability is greater than their professional accountability, in Greg Garn’s terminology. That is, they declare the importance of Jewish studies for Jewish existence in their discourse as well as in the circulars, official documents, and advertisements. At the same

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45 Connell, Teachers’ Work, 87.
46 Lewin, Resolving Social Conflicts.
47 Erikson, Identity, 18.
time, by agreeing to accept staff with less formal, professional education to transmit these studies, they indicate that what is important is how Jewish studies appear in the Jewish “marketplace” (in Garn’s terminology) rather than in the classroom.48

In addition, the widespread preference for a transmission form of instruction in Jewish studies does not result solely from this method’s salient features. Rather, it is primarily due to the compatibility of its organizational characteristics with the schools’ bureaucratic model and educational conception. Bureaucratic organizational patterns reinforce the need for a transmission model of instruction and vice versa so that classroom instructional methods cannot be changed without a corresponding change in institutional organization.49

The discipline-specific instructional style, the collection-type curriculum, and the processes practiced in Jewish education conform to bureaucratic thinking that compartmentalizes knowledge. It thus seems that the teachers’ professional behavioral patterns and the processes of education and instruction are affected by the school’s organizational structure and the educational climate it engenders.

Émile Durkheim distinguished between sacred and profane elements of culture.50 Those that are considered sacred are superior in the hierarchy of entities. However, the clear-cut division between the GS and JS in the schools, which is at the core of the school organizational structure studied here, reverses this hierarchy. This paradox stems from an explicit view of Jewish studies as “sacred,” a view that is part of the official commitment of the school to Judaism. But this hierarchy is not implemented in the schools by providing the most formally qualified teachers. As a result, many students have contempt for Jewish studies. Conversely, there is a “sacred” attitude toward the general studies lessons that represent the “profane” domain. The principals’ diagrams and interviews present this discrepancy—there is a juxtaposition between the realistic hierarchy, where the profane is higher than the sacred, which is in opposition to the pretended attitudinal hierarchy. This hierarchy, which is an essential part both of the francophone tradition and of the Jewish tradition, causes a dynamic of conservatism and preservation that is typical of traditional systems.

A dialogue between the two systems could break the dichotomy and help to create a modern system. But to achieve a structural change that will alter a school’s balance of power and identity there is a need to invert the pyramid,

49 Sharan, Shachar, and Levine, Innovative School, 17.
change emphasis, and shift the focus of administration to a process with pedagogical value rather than one that is merely of a procedural-technical nature. The influence of organizational change on content and processes is likely to have far-reaching implications.