

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Non-Technical Summary

A 1000 word (maximum) summary of the main research results, in non-technical language, should be provided below. The summary might be used by ESRC to publicise the research. It should cover the aims and objectives of the project, main research results and significant academic achievements, dissemination activities and potential or actual impacts on policy and practice.

Contemporary social policy in Britain has long emphasised the concept of community. Since 1997 in particular, notions of community have been inflected by evolving notions of community cohesion, participatory democracy and citizen empowerment. The representation of faith-based communities in the public sphere has assumed an increasingly important but equally problematic presence in contemporary debates. There has been an urgent need to examine the assumptions behind the idea of community when it is applied to religious and ethnic groups. *Contemporary Anglo-Jewish Community and Leadership: Coping with Multiculturalism* examined these issues with particular reference to contemporary British Jewry.

Community has a particular resonance for Jews, for whom shared communal identity is central to Jewish self-understanding and to how Jewish society is organised. Judaism has generally shunned individualist approaches to Jewish identity; it is within the community that Jewish practice becomes possible. This is true for religious reasons (such as the preference for prayer within a group of ten or more adult males); but also because Jewish institutions are needed to enable Jewish practices such as ritual slaughter and ritual bathing.

When Jews returned to England in the 17th century, the establishment of an organised community was an urgent priority. Since then, the Jewish community has constituted itself through a complex network of communal institutions. A central priority of these institutions has been ensuring communal survival. Jews have always worried about not just the physical survival of individual Jews, but also the collective survival of Jewish communities and their inter-generational perpetuation. This has been seen both externally, through building forms of collective representation and defence to address anti-Jewish prejudice; and internally, through developing educational strategies against the perceived threat of assimilation.

The continuing presence of a largely middle-class, well-integrated Jewish community in Britain appears to demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies. Indeed, Jewish communal forms of organising have acted as a model for other ethnic and faith-based populations, as in the case of the influence of the Board of Deputies on the Islamic Parliament and Muslim Council of Britain. Yet the assumptions behind the strategies behind Jewish communal survival have yet to be critically interrogated; the wider applicability of Anglo-Jewish models of communal leadership remains to be fully demonstrated.

In this research, we asked how the concept of community has been understood in post-war British Jewry and whether other understandings of community are possible or

desirable. Central to these questions is the role of communal leaders. Has the understanding of community used by the leadership changed over time? What implications has this had for how communal leaders gained or claimed legitimacy both inside and outside the community?

We examined the broad sweep of Anglo-Jewish history from the start of the twentieth century, taking in the responses to fascism and Nazism in Britain and Germany, and focused in on two recent case studies: the 1990s communal project of “Jewish Continuity” inaugurated by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, which sought to re-invigorate Jewish community and communal education, in order to address the perceived loss of Jews to out-marriage and declining rates of religious participation; and the “new antisemitism” of the early 2000s, described by the Chief Rabbi as “a tsunami of antisemitism”. For the case studies, we conducted interviews with key communal figures and closely analysed archival holdings.

Our conclusion is that there has been a transition from a dominant communal agenda preoccupied with the nurturing of communal security, which we call a *strategy of security*, to one that is concerned about an *excess* of security amongst British Jews, which we call a *strategy of insecurity*. Crucial to understanding this shift, we found, was the relationship between debates about community within British Jewry and wider debates about community and multiculturalism in Britain. The shift was a belated response to Britain becoming an officially multicultural community.