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Axiological Typology in an International Religious Youth Organization

The Case of Bnei Akiva

Erik. H. Cohen

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abstract: This study examines the value structure of members of a religious youth movement that has chapters around the world. A preliminary typology of values is developed based on an empirical case study of the international Jewish youth movement, Bnei Akiva. Using multidimensional tools, a structure of the values held by respondents is portrayed. Differences in emphases and relationship to the structure of values by 13 national subpopulations are compared. The results of this case study have implications for other educational settings struggling with the postmodern paradox of adapting to a global culture while imparting specific national, religious and ethnic values.

keywords: global ♦ values ♦ youth organization

Introduction

Youth Movements

Youth organizations bring together adolescents with shared interests and offer a variety of social, recreational and educational activities. Youth movements usually have some political, religious or social agenda and share some basic characteristics: discontent with society (or aspects of it); desire for community; an attempt to make a lifestyle based on ‘inner truths’; a collective will, spelled out in statutes and resolutions; sense of commitment to the movement and its ‘truths’; and use of informal education (Schatzker, 1992). Members share a vision of creating a subculture addressing the flaws they perceive in society.
Involvement in youth movements plays an important role in the identity development and value formation of adolescents (Hyman, 1976; Kahane, 1997). Adolescence is a critical time in value formation; a period of experimentation and exploration (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). For minority adolescents, youth organizations that promote ethnic and religious identity offer a peer group identified with the religion or ethnicity, in which youth are able to explore their tradition independently from the family structure (Navarro, 1995; Singla, 2004; Smith, 2003). Movement leaders are often only several years older than the members, offering role models who are more like peers than adults (Cohen et al., 2002). Youth organizations may offer a way for disenfranchised youth to channel energy into action for social change rather than violence and crime (Bloul, 1998; Navarro, 1995). However, the existence and historical impact of youth movements that promote racist or violent values cannot be ignored, whether officially sanctioned (Nolte, 2004; Peukert, 1987) or not (Bjørgo, 2001; Ward, 1996). Writers such as Althusser (1971) and Gramsci (1971) claim that social control and cultural hegemony are imposed via ideological institutions and apparatuses, of which youth movements may be considered an example, particularly those that are associated with the government or a political party. When the values of a youth movement conflict with those of the surrounding society, adolescents may either try to reconcile the various value systems, or may reject one or the other.

International youth movements have members who live in vastly different cultures. Some are linked by broad mission statements that are general enough to be readily adapted to specific situations. For example, the principles of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (1998) are ‘ Duty to self, duty to others, duty to law’. International religious movements stress core beliefs while allowing for different styles of practice, as expressed by the International Dominican Youth Movement (2004): ‘In many nations and in every continent IDYM offers a different way to find and live the Gospel’.

Informal educational tactics are often used to impart values. Youth movements are a type of informal education, characterized by many of the structural components of informality defined by Kahane (1997) in his comprehensive study of the field. Kahane emphasized the importance of informal education in youth movements and youth culture. Youth movements enable members to try out various roles, world views, lifestyles and values, which may be changed or dropped with minimal repercussions (termed ‘moratorium’ by Kahane). Autonomy, voluntarism, symmetry of relations between staff and participants and the importance of symbols are components of the informality widely found in youth movements. The opportunity to explore parallel and even conflicting orientations (such as competition and cooperation), named ‘dualism’ in Kahane’s terminology, is
particularly pertinent to the current case. These characteristics of informal education provide a context for experimenting with behaviours, norms and beliefs before a commitment must be made. They allow for flexibility of rules and norms within an international organization.

**Values**

Sociologically, a value has been defined as a belief that one type of conduct or state of existence is preferable to others (Rokeach, 1976), or as the criteria by which a group or society judges the importance of people, models, goals and other sociocultural objects (Fichter, 1957). Classic philosophers and sociologists such as Kant (1964 [1785]), Simmel (1968 [1921]) and Weber (1978 [1922]), described various ‘value spheres’ such as religion, science, aesthetics and law. Durkheim (1953) considered ‘value consensus’, the extent to which members of a group share values, a key feature of societal integration. According to Schwartz and Bilsky (1987), a belief must transcend specific situations in order to be considered a value, and a set of values has a hierarchical order of relative importance.

Guttman and Levy (1976) defined a value as a particular type of attitude vis-a-vis a certain object and judged in terms of its relative importance. They developed their definition of values using the Facet Theory approach (Canter, 1985; Guttman and Greenbaum, 1998; Levy, 1994). They identified three facets that define the concept of a value. The first relates to whether the value is a goal or a behaviour; the second relates to the modality (cognitive/affective/instrumental); and the third relates to the purpose. Guttman and Levy portrayed an axiological typology with a double polarity, in which values related to authority were placed opposite values related to autonomy and values related to altruism were placed opposite values related to egoism.

Following Guttman’s Facet Theory approach, Schwartz and his colleagues (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995) proposed a structure of 10 value-types: self-direction, universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism and stimulation. Schwartz’s typology is graphically represented as a two-dimensional model showing categories of compatible and incompatible value-types. Schwartz notes two sets of general moral positions: self-transcendence vs self-enhancement and conservation vs openness to change. Schwartz paid particular attention to the issue of value structure among adolescents (Knafo and Schwartz, 2001) and verified the cross-cultural validity of his model among adolescents (Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995).

The Guttman–Levy and Schwartz models have both been used and verified many times all over the world (Cohen, 2005; Moore, 1999; Sagie and Elizur, 1996; Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995) and it would seem that the universe of values is fundamentally *structured* in the same way in many
human societies. This observation regarding the structure of values does not relate to their actual frequencies or salience.

**Local Communities in an International Organization**

The beginning of the new millennium has been marked by parallel phenomena of globalization and a resurgence of ethnic, nationalistic and fundamental religious movements (Jensen, 2003; King, 1997). A global youth culture has emerged, primarily based on music, fashion and consumerism, linked through media and internet channels. At the same time, young people around the world are exploring their ethnic and religious roots as a way to assert their difference in a homogenizing and anonymous world, to find spirituality and meaning in their lives and/or in reaction to prejudice and disenfranchisement in the dominant society (McLoyd and Steinberg, 1998; Princeton University, 2004). What is more, according to some researchers contemporary concepts of ethnic particularism are formed within an international or global context (Greenfeld, 1992; Robertson, 1995).

This article analyses data from an empirical study of Bnei Akiva, an international Jewish youth movement, as a case study for examining value structure in various social contexts.

**Jewish Youth Movements and Bnei Akiva**

Jewish youth movements began organizing in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century (Schatzker, 1992). Jewish youth in Eastern and Central Europe during the decades preceding and spanning the Second World War and the Holocaust were experiencing a crisis. Jewish youth movements were able to provide members with a sense of support, camaraderie, purpose, enjoyment and values. Many members put their ideals into action by emigrating to British Palestine and establishing communal farms (*kibbutz*), or supporting those who did. Some joined the pre-state armies that fought to establish the State of Israel. Not all were Zionist, and some advocated helping Jewish communities in the diaspora. In Europe, some were involved with resistance against the Nazis, and in helping Jews (particularly children) escape (Silberstein, 1991; Zuckerman and Harshav, 1993).

Clearly, the situation for Jewish youth today is quite different. Nevertheless, Jewish youth movements as well as the less political youth groups and community centres continue to provide a Jewish environment for youth to develop friendships, a sense of identity and values.

The Bnei Akiva youth movement was founded in Jerusalem in 1929 by religious nationalists involved in the struggle to found a Jewish state in British Palestine. Its name means Children of Akiva, a reference to the shepherd Akiva ben Joseph who became one of the greatest Torah scholars of all time and was martyred at the hands of the Roman Empire in the first century. The Bnei Akiva logo includes two tablets inscribed with letters
referring to the Hebrew words for Torah and Service, a sickle, an olive branch and a stalk of wheat. Today, it is affiliated with the National Religious Party in Israel, although there are diverse opinions among members and leaders on such controversial political issues as disengagement from settlements and peace accords.² Such pluralism of political opinion within the movement is indicative of the pluralism of values, which is the main subject of this study. In diaspora communities, Bnei Akiva members are active in a variety of activities such as rallies in support of Israel, Torah study, recreational and social activities, Shabbat gatherings, summer camps and charitable community service projects.

Members of Bnei Akiva are not representative of their peers in their home countries: they are significantly more religious and connected to Israel than diaspora Jewish youth overall. This study of their values is not meant to indicate the value system of the larger Jewish communities in each of the countries, but rather to examine the variation found in an international movement and the interplay between the impact of the surrounding dominant society and the subculture of the youth movement on value formation.

The present study touches on two theoretical issues, one sociological and one pedagogical. The sociological issue relates to formation of values in local and international contexts. The pedagogical issue relates to the tension between centralization and decentralization in educational organizations (Caldwell, 2005; Hansen and Roza, 2005). Previous research on Jewish youth around the world have found that the political culture and social values of the surrounding (predominantly non-Jewish) society in which they live have a significant impact on the values and worldview of the Jewish minority (Cohen, 2002, 2004a; Cohen and Horenczyk, 1999).

For example, in a survey of participants of educational tours to Israel for Jewish youth, participants from the US gave greater emphasis to individualistic values such as ‘being free to do what one wants’, while participants from France emphasized more traditional values such as ‘honouring one’s parents’. Such differences stem from the historical, demographic, educational and political contexts in which the participants were socialized. Thus, it may be hypothesized that although the Bnei Akiva members, self-selected by their very membership, will share the basic values espoused by the movement, there will be differences in degree and emphasis among the youth in different social contexts.

Members live and are socialized within multiple social contexts, each with its own hegemonic perceptions: the national society (the US, France, etc.), the Jewish people as a religious-ethnic minority, Israeli cultural values (to the extent to which members of the nationalist-religious Bnei Akiva movement consider themselves linked to Israel) and finally to the youth movement per se. This issue is far from being unilinear. Certainly, each of these spheres does not hold equal weight in influencing the values and
world view of the young adults. Nevertheless, each does have an impact and they interact with one another.

Although gender may also exert an influence on values (Buetel and Johnson, 2004; Buetel and Marini, 1995), in my longitudinal international study of educational tours to Israel (Cohen, 2008), I found almost no difference between male and female participants’ attitudes towards Judaism, Israel and basic values, whereas significant differences were found between participants from different countries. In both the case of the youth tours and the present case, members of the national subgroups were similar in terms of educational background and socioeconomic status. Similarly, a study of Israeli youth co-authored by Schwartz, found no significant difference in values along gender lines (Prince-Gibson and Schwartz, 1998).

The analysis of the data related to values collected from the members of this movement serves as the basis for a preliminary typology of values that may be verified and adapted in subsequent studies of other populations.

Methodology

Survey

The first international survey of the Bnei Akiva movement included 1322 members from 23 countries. The survey was commissioned by a Jewish diaspora foundation, in order to explore the characteristics of the organization’s members around the world and ways in which the organization operates in relation to youth with various types of relationships to Jewish tradition and Israel.3

The study population was relatively homogeneous in terms of age (the vast majority were between 13 and 18 years old, the mean age was 17), religion, education (high school) and socioeconomic status (middle to upper middle class). The membership was fairly evenly divided between boys (53 percent) and girls (47 percent).

Bnei Akiva members were given a comprehensive questionnaire addressing such issues as their level of involvement in the movement, their Jewish educational background, their level of ritual observance and their relationship to Israel. The questionnaire was prepared in collaboration with a Bnei Akiva team in Jerusalem.4

The section of the questionnaire with which this study is concerned consisted of a list of 21 values, which respondents were asked to rate as ‘very important’, ‘important’, ‘not important’ or ‘not important at all’. This list of values was based on previously published research of the value structure of Jewish and Israeli populations (Guttman and Levy, 1976). This list of values was used for several reasons. First, it is more concise than the 40-item Schwartz typology, and therefore more appropriate for inclusion in a questionnaire distributed to a large number of students. Second, it was devel-
oped for use among a Jewish population, consisting of both general values and specifically Jewish values and yet may be easily adapted for use among other populations. This list has been verified a number of times among other Jewish study populations (Cohen, 2002; Levy, 1986, 1990; Levy et al., 2000). After consultation with the Bnei Akiva team, I added one more item to this list: ‘Going to the synagogue’, which represents a valuable and relevant specific issue in the context of the religious youth movement.

The questionnaires were filled out in the framework of camps and seminar weekends during the months of December 2003–March 2004. For the US survey, the questionnaire was available on a special internet site. The questionnaire was administered in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Italian. The survey was well received and the general proportion of questionnaires received from each country accurately reflects the general proportion of the activities and populations of participants (Grunwald Gael, general director of Bnei Akiva, pers. comm., 2005).

**Multidimensional Data Analysis**

The data are first examined in the form of a distribution table. While there is much to learn from the table, it is difficult to see the interrelationships between the data. Multidimensional scaling (MDS) techniques graphically portray large amounts of data so that their structure can be seen (Young and Haber, 1987). A technique called Smallest Space Analysis (SSA) (Guttman, 1968; Levy, 1994) is used. The first step in the SSA is the calculation of a correlation matrix. Here, Pearson correlations are used.

Using the Hebrew University Data Analysis Package (Amar and Toledano, 2002), the items in the correlation matrix are plotted such that the greater the correlation between two variables, the closer they will be located; the weaker the correlation between two variables, the further apart they will be. This procedure enables us to consider the correlations between all variables simultaneously. While the calculation of the matrix and the plotting of the variables on the map are objective (determined by the correlation between the data), the interpretation of the map and the designation of borders between regions and the titles assigned to them are subjective, guided by the theoretical approach of the researcher. This is analogous to a geographical map, whose features may be divided, depending on the purpose of the map, into regions based on political boundaries, habitat type, population density, etc.

Once the map of the original variables is created, external variables such as subpopulations may be introduced. This feature distinguishes the SSA from other similar MDS techniques. The external variables procedure enables comparisons of subpopulations within the larger structure of the data. A correlation matrix is calculated between each of the external variables and the original variables. The external variables are then placed
one by one into a ‘fixed’ map in such a way that the original structure is not altered. In other words, the placement of the external variables is determined by the original variables, but the placement of the original variables is not affected by the external variables, and the external variables are not affected by one another (Cohen and Amar, 2002).

Results

Table 1 shows the percentage of Bnei Akiva members from the various countries who gave the response ‘very important’ or ‘important’ to each of the values in the questionnaire item. Countries with fewer than 20 respondents are subsumed in the category ‘other’.

For the population as a whole, the most important values were ‘being an honest person’ and ‘helping other people’ followed by ‘feeling part of the Jewish people’ and ‘honouring one’s parents’, indicating a balance between universal and specifically Jewish values. Very high percentages of respondents also value ‘having a good time’, ‘realizing my talents’, ‘getting married’ (with an emphasis on endogamy), ‘excellence in studies’ and ‘finding myself’, showing a balance between altruism and personal enjoyment and development. Overall, the Bnei Akiva members are relatively religious and strongly identify with Judaism. The vast majority selected the items ‘being religious’ (including observing Jewish religious law), ‘going to the synagogue’, and ‘studying the Torah’. Materialistic values such as ‘having a lot of money’ and ‘buying a car’ are at the bottom of the list.

For some values there is wide agreement across national lines, while for others wide variation can be seen between the subgroups. Over 90 percent of all national subgroups said they valued ‘helping others’ and ‘feeling part of the Jewish people’. Eighty percent or more of all groups said they valued ‘being an honest person’, ‘honouring one’s parents’, ‘having a good time with friends’ and ‘finding myself’. More variation was seen in the responses to the specifically religious values. Participants from New Zealand and Sweden placed far less value on being religious, endogamy and studying the Torah than did participants from other countries, particularly the US and UK. Interestingly, while only 61 percent of participants from Sweden value being religious, 84 percent value going to the synagogue, indicating that in some countries the synagogue may play a social or identity-based role, rather than a strictly religious one.

We can also see wide variation in values relating to the role of the individual in society. For example, fewer than half of members from Argentina said they valued ‘being free to do what one wants’, compared to 100 percent of the members from Sweden. Sixty percent or fewer of the members from Italy, Argentina and Uruguay responded that the value of contributing to society and country was important or very
Table 1 Values of Bnei Akiva members, worldwide (percentage who responded ‘very important’ or ‘important’)

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<th>US</th>
<th>UK</th>
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<td>Helping other people</td>
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<td>Honouring one’s parents</td>
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<td>Finding myself</td>
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<td>Free to do what one wants</td>
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<td>Buying a car</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: US: United States of America; UK: United Kingdom; SAF: South Africa; AUS: Australia; NZ: New Zealand; FRA: France; SWI: Switzerland. ITA: Italy; SWE: Sweden; NET: the Netherlands; ARG: Argentina; BRA: Brazil; URU: Uruguay.
important to them, compared to 90 percent or more of those from the US, Australia and Switzerland.

The SSA map shown in Figure 1 enables us to see the structure of the value system held by the survey population overall. Four regions may be recognized, emanating from a common centre. This structure is known as a polar structure, and has been found previously in sets of variables related to values (Cohen, 2002; Guttman and Levy, 1976; Levy, 1986, 1990). The polar structure indicates distinct regions of equal importance (as opposed to a centre-periphery or a sequential structure). Opposed concepts are positioned diagonally from one another.

Starting on the left-hand side of the map we find a region containing nine values, which may be called traditional. This region has been divided into two subregions, one with universal traditional values, the second with specifically Jewish traditional values. The value ‘getting married’ was placed in the Jewish values subregion, although it seems to be a universal traditional value. However, its placement close to the value ‘marrying only a Jew’ may be understood intuitively and this ‘noise’ does not disrupt the overall structure of values.
Next, in the upper right-hand side of the map, is a region containing values related to enjoyment and personal development. ‘Travelling abroad’ is along the border with the lower right-hand region containing materialistic values. For many youth, travel is a part of exploration and identity development (Cohen, 2004b; Desforges, 1998). It should be noted that in this survey ‘travelling abroad’ is general, and travel to Israel is not specifically addressed. For Jewish youth, particularly those involved in a religious-Zionist youth organization such as Bnei Akiva, travel to Israel is likely to represent a very different value, or set of values, than travel to other tourist destinations. Previous studies of Jewish youth trips to Israel have found that travel to Israel combines enjoyment and intensive exploration and development of Jewish identity (Chazan, 2002; Cohen, 2008). Within the scope of the present study, however, only ‘travelling abroad’ is considered, and it is distant from the region containing traditional and religious values.

The final region contains three values, each related to a type of achievement. Though these values were not plotted close to one another, they form a contiguous semantic region. ‘Realizing my talents’ is a personal type of achievement. Making a contribution to society is an altruistic and communal type of achievement, and is close to the traditional values regions, and particularly to the Jewish values subregion. ‘Excellence in studies’ represents another type of achievement. The study population consists almost exclusively of students, for whom school is a primary venue for achievement. In later stages of life, this may be replaced by success in a career, and therefore this value is somewhat closer to the region of materialistic values. Excellence in general studies is distinct from studying the Torah, which is placed in the Jewish subregion of the traditional values region. General studies are linked to future career advancement or intellectual development, while Torah study is a spiritual pursuit and religious obligation.

The four regions may be seen as two sets of oppositions: achievement opposite enjoyment and personal development and materialism opposite traditional values. The values in the achievement region require a certain amount of self-discipline: study as opposed to recreation and making a contribution to society as opposed to only considering oneself. Similarly, the values in the materialism region are contrasted with traditional values such as helping others and keeping religious laws.

Figure 2 shows the placement of the national subpopulations. The placement of the external variables in the structure of values is determined by the correlation between each of the national subgroups for which we received more than 20 completed questionnaires and the 21 original variables. The structure of Figure 2 is identical to that shown in Figure 1. However, to facilitate readability, the individual values, the primary variables, are not shown. The majority of the subpopulations are divided between the achievement region and the enjoyment and personal development region. Bnei
Akiva members from Sweden and Switzerland are particularly close to the value ‘being free to do what one wants’. Members from the Netherlands and New Zealand are closest to the values ‘having a good time’ and ‘having a good time with friends’. Members from South Africa and Uruguay are also in this region, but closer to the centre of the map, indicating that they were also relatively strongly correlated with values in other regions.

Bnei Akiva members from Italy, Argentina, the UK, Australia and France were all located in the achievement region. Members from the US are on the border between the achievement region and the Jewish subregion of the traditional values region. Members from Brazil are in the universal subregion of the traditional values region.

None of the subgroups is located in the materialism region.

The common structuring of values within each national subgroup was verified by running a separate SSA for each. For each individual subgroup, a clear structure was found, similar to the structure for the population as a whole. In each case, we find the double opposition between enjoyment and personal development vs achievement and traditional

Figure 2  Bidimensional Geometric Representation (SSA) of the Values of Bnei Akiva Members, Worldwide, with National Subpopulations as External Variables (coefficient of alienation) = .15
values vs materialism. There were some differences in the relative placement of the individual items within these regions among the different national sub-populations. These maps are available upon request from the author.

**Discussion**

**Structure of Values**

The regions and structure in this analysis are similar, though not identical, to those identified in Schwartz’s typology of values (Schwartz and Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995). The materialism region lies opposite the traditional values region. This is similar to the opposition in the Schwartz model of values in which self-enhancement lies opposite self-transcendence. Self-transcendence may describe both religious spirituality and a universal benevolence towards others. Achievement lies opposite enjoyment and personal development. In the Schwartz model, achievement is opposite self-direction.

The results of another large study on values can help us to further understand the structure of values and lend credence to its wider applicability. In his book on the World Values Survey, Inglehart (2004: 11) identified two axes along which the 80 participating countries could be plotted: secular-rational vs traditional authority, and survival vs self-expression. Each of these two axes represents a combination of many values. These two axes may be recognized in the structure of values found among Bnei Akiva members, as seen in Figure 1. The left side of the map contains values related to traditional authority and a moral or religious code. The right-hand side of the map contains values based on a secular concept of individual freedom and benefit. Midway along the horizontal axis are values such as ‘excellence in studies’ and ‘developing talents’.

Along the vertical axis is the spectrum of survival vs self-expression. At the bottom are values such as ‘excellence in studies’ and ‘being active in sports’, which indicate physical strength and success on the students’ academic career path. At the self-expression end of the spectrum are values such as ‘finding myself’, and ‘being free to do what I want to do’. Within the Jewish traditional subregion we can see how the values are arrayed along this spectrum. ‘Marrying only a Jew’, related to survival of the group, is further down along the vertical axis, while ‘feeling part of the Jewish people’, related to personal self-expression and identity, are higher up.

The compatibility of the structures identified in the Schwartz and Inglehart studies and those found in this case study strengthens the findings.
Local Communities in an International Organization

The placement of the national subpopulations of Bnei Akiva members in the structure of values allows us to address the interplay between the global and the local. Bnei Akiva is an international movement with a unified set of goals and organizational structure, yet we see significant differences in the value priorities of the members. Two main groups emerge: those who are more closely related to achievement-oriented values and those more closely related to personal development-oriented values.

In his analysis of the World Values Survey, Inglehart distinguishes between materialist and post-materialist world views. The post-materialist world view is concerned with personal development, universalism and democratic values. The materialist world view is more concerned with personal, group and national survival and security.

The Bnei Akiva subpopulations in the enjoyment and personal development region, close to the secular and self-expression ends of the axes, are more closely correlated with post-materialist values. The majority of the other nations are in the achievement region, close to the survival end of the vertical axis and either in the centre or close to the traditional end of the traditional–secular axis. As seen in Table 1, some of the countries’ members place far less emphasis on religious values such as endogamy or keeping mitzvoth, while there is wide agreement on the more psychological ‘feeling part of the Jewish people’ as well as on universal values.

Given the large number of countries, it is beyond the scope of this article to examine the multiple social, educational, economic and historical factors that influence the values of the respondents living in each. The critical point emerging from this study is the recognition of different value orientations among members of a single, international movement. However, a few key observations may be made. For example, Bnei Akiva members in the US emphasize Jewish values and are located at the traditional and survival sides of the typology axes, in the Jewish subregion of the traditional values region. While the wider American Jewish population is experiencing high levels of intermarriage and alienation from religious and ethnic identification (Cohen and Horenczyk, 1999; Kosmin et al., 1991), Bnei Akiva in the US seems to attract youth who value Jewish tradition and particularism and may be reacting against this trend towards assimilation.

In contrast, Bnei Akiva members in countries such as Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands are located near the secular and self-expression sides of the typology axes, in the enjoyment and personal development region. One possible explanation is that countries with small Jewish populations can support fewer youth organizations, which must appeal to a wider spectrum of the targeted population. An observation made regarding Bnei Akiva in Norway (here subsumed under the ‘other’ category) may be applicable to branches in other countries with relatively
small Jewish populations: ‘there were not enough children to form more than one organisation, and B’nei Akiva became an organisation for everyone. . . . Religious, non-religious, Zionist, socialist, pluralist, liberalist – all are a part of the same community and the same youth organization’ (DMT, 2005). In the current political culture of Western Europe, this may mean downplaying religious and nationalist themes and emphasizing social activities in order to attract members. As noted by veteran emissary and educational director Haim Hayet (2001), ‘Among Jewish youth in Western Europe, strong anti-nationalist currents and sentiments are evinced, in light of the projected European unification, and Zionism loses its attraction. It is viewed as a parochial “national” theme.’ Additionally, the need for Bnei Akiva branches operating in small Jewish communities to widen their membership may help explain the distance on the map between Bnei Akiva in Australia (with over 100,000 Jews) and New Zealand (with only 5000 Jews). It is also possible that these countries are more secular in general, and thus the Bnei Akiva members are also relatively less religious than their peers in other countries. According to the World Values Survey (Inglehart, 2004: 328), the percentage of surveyed adults who consider themselves religious is 39 percent in Sweden, 57 percent in Switzerland and 62 percent in the Netherlands, compared to 83 percent in the US.

The World Values Survey provides a useful basis for comparison of the local variations in the values among Bnei Akiva members with those of adolescents in the various countries (see the data for 16- to 29-year-olds in Tables A001–A007 in Inglehart, 2004). It is interesting to note that in some cases the values expressed by the Bnei Akiva members of a given country differ dramatically from their peers. For example, the general population of adolescents and young adults in France (1 percent or fewer of whom are Jewish) gave an extremely low rating to the importance of religion in their lives: only 9 percent called it ‘very important’. In contrast, virtually all of the French Bnei Akiva members surveyed consider being religious and practising the religious traditions of Judaism of great importance. Similarly, in a survey of French Jews (Cohen, 2002, 2005), I found that the heads of French Jewish households (the majority of whom are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from France’s former North African colonies) are distinctly more religious than the French population as a whole. Thus, the youth movement may be considered a counter-culture to the dominant, strictly secular culture of Republican France, but not necessarily a rebellion against the value system of members’ parents. This may be seen as an example of multi-hegemonic value systems discussed earlier.

In other cases, the youth movement is more in sync with the values of the dominant culture. For example, Bnei Akiva members in Sweden put far more emphasis on ‘having a good time’ and ‘having a good time with friends’ than they do on ‘being religious’, which parallels the great
importance attributed to friends and leisure and the low importance attributed to religion among Swedish adolescents and young adults in the World Values Survey. Although it must be noted that the Bnei Akiva members put significantly more emphasis on religion than do their peers at large, in this case membership in the youth movement seems to be in line with the culture’s value for enjoying leisure time with friends, indicating a generally hegemonic value system.

**Conclusion**

Despite the relative homogeneity of the members of this youth movement, differences exist among their values, particularly in relation to religion. In the structural typology, two major value orientations are recognized: one oriented to personal enjoyment, the other to achievement. The exceptions were members from the US, numerically the largest sub-population, who were oriented towards traditional, specifically Jewish religious values, and the members from Brazil, who were also oriented towards traditional values, but of a more universal nature.

This variety in value structure among the members of Bnei Akiva is not trivial or self-evident. Compared to more general movements, such as the Scouts, which expect and encourage diversity among their members, Bnei Akiva has a well-defined objective targeted at a specific membership base. That such diversity in basic values was found among the international membership poses significant challenges to the staff and organizers. At the same time, it indicates the possibilities for a decentralized type of education in an international youth movement. Although Bnei Akiva has a central image of religious nationalism, the local chapters are relatively free to adapt their emphasis and activities to the needs and interests of their members. It may be this decentralization (among other factors) that enables a religious movement to succeed even among Jewish communities that are not strictly traditional.

Remaining true to their fundamental values (the ‘inner truths’ that in part distinguish youth movements from social clubs), while adapting to the different political, cultural and social environments in which the local chapters operate, is a challenge faced by all international youth movements. Sometimes difficult paradoxes emerge. For example, an analysis of the history of the World Scout Movement in Africa (Parsons, 2004) noted the paradox of racially segregated Scout chapters while Scout Law declared all Scouts to be brothers. He found that ‘Almost all local Scout organizations make key alterations to core Scouting beliefs to reflect local values and circumstances’ (Parsons, 2004: xii).

Youth movements that are created in response to specific circumstances and are not willing or able to adapt their core beliefs may decline
in membership when the circumstances change. This has been seen in the case of secular Zionist Jewish youth movements, which had strong memberships in the years when the creation and settling of the new state was seen as a critical goal, but which have diminished as Zionism has ceased to be a motivating force (or has even become unpopular in some Jewish communities).

In religious educational settings, specific and universal values are transmitted. This value transmission differs in formal settings, such as religious day schools, vs informal settings, such as youth movements. Within a given religion, value transmission may differ in liberal vs orthodox settings (Cohen, 2006). In all these various types of religious educational settings, we may see the impact of the ‘four common-places’ defined by Schwab (1973: 509): the learner, the teacher, the milieu and the subject matter. Each of these will affect the transmission of values. Bnei Akiva chapters include multiple, sometimes contradictory forces, from the international staff, the national and local staff, the parents and the participants themselves. The individual student receives influences from home, community, other students, friends, etc. The teacher or counsellor acts as a role model (Cohen et al., 2002), and thus value transmission may vary even within a given school, depending on the skill and personality of various teachers. Even within a specific organization such as Bnei Akiva, the subject matter may vary. Some local chapters emphasize Torah study while others emphasize community service. Finally the milieu, or social context, exerts an influence. Here we see the strong impact of the milieu, the surrounding society, on the transmission of values within a specific organization operating internationally.

In the present study, we found a multiplicity of value orientations among Bnei Akiva members in the various diaspora countries. Given that members in this voluntary youth organization are a self-selected population, and that little difference was found between genders or levels of religiosity, the difference in their value structure seems to be attributable primarily to differences in the local culture. The organization therefore must strive to achieve its goals, which include imparting certain religious and nationalistic ideals to members, within a variety of local cultural contexts. This finding may have implications for the internal organization of the movement, in terms of planning to include members with a range of attitudes towards religion and nationalism.

A challenge common to international organizations is how to remain flexible enough to allow for diversity among various communities while maintaining the underlying mission of the organization and its unified character. The characteristics of informal education, particularly dualism (the coexistence of conflicting value orientations [Kahane, 1997]), help to enable this type of flexibility.
The use of symbols, common to movements and organizations, may provide another key to this challenge. The rich and multifaceted symbolism of the Bnei Akiva movement name and logo enables local chapters to variously emphasize community service, such as operating a food kitchen, Torah study and religious practice, or activism on behalf of the Israel, and still feel united under a common banner.

The typology presented here may provide a basis for continued research on values. Most of the values in the typology are universal and directly transferable to studies on other religious, ethnic or general youth organizations. The specifically Jewish values, such as going to the synagogue and learning the Torah are easily adapted to other groups (i.e. going to church/mosque; studying the Bible/Koran, etc.). Studies of other youth movements would help verify and expand this preliminary study. Further studies may be carried out in general youth movements and international religious youth movements.

The typology may also be verified among other minority and diaspora populations, not necessarily associated with a specific youth movement. How do values differ among, for example, Moroccans living in Canada, France and the Netherlands, or among Indians living in Australia, the US and South Africa? Does the surrounding culture play a similarly strong role in their value structure? Does gender or level of religiosity exert a more significant impact than was found among Bnei Akiva members?

It would be valuable to verify the findings of this survey among other Jewish youth movements, particularly the non-religious movements that were founded around the same time as Bnei Akiva. The policies of each movement with regard to centralization and decentralization, as well as the similarities and differences in values among local branches, could be compared, yielding valuable insights into informal education, value formation and the relevance of various types of youth movements.

The parallel social phenomena of globalization and resurgence of ethnic and religious identity make international, religious and ideological youth groups increasingly popular and important. The values they impart to their members, and the degree of flexibility afforded to branches of these movements in emphasizing certain values, will impact the world views of the adolescents involved and, therefore, the future of communities in which they take part.

Notes

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1. The range for replies (from ‘very important’ to ‘not at all important’) itself defines the axiological dimension of the items (see Levy, 1994).

2. Although some Bnei Akiva leaders have taken a hard-line on Israeli politics (Shragai, 2004), at a memorial service for two Bnei Akiva counsellors who were shot by Palestinians in Hebron, Bnei Akiva’s USA-West Coast representative Dani Yemini said, ‘Violence is not our way, violence will not help’ (quoted in Eshman, 2005). Various opinions of Bnei Akiva members are posted in their various online ‘chat groups’, for example, www.bneiakiva.org/lishka/, which includes Israeli politics as one of its forum topics, www.bneiakiva.org.il and www.bneakiva.net/forum.htm. There may be individual members of Bnei Akiva and other Jewish youth movements who advocate or participate in violence (such as street conflicts with neo-Nazi youth or confrontations with Palestinians or with the Israel Defence Forces during protests), but these are not officially sanctioned activities.

3. The goals of the Jewish diaspora foundation in commissioning this survey were to address such internally important policy issues. The data were then analysed in the context of previous studies such as those of Inglehart and Schwartz in order to explore the theoretical implications.

4. It should be noted that I am not affiliated in any way with Bnei Akiva. Their involvement in the research design was minimal, yet crucial in both creating a positive environment for the survey, and in ensuring that the questionnaire was relevant. Lastly, Bnei Akiva was in no way involved in the interpretation of the data or the conclusions drawn.

5. Some of the other populations are not much larger than 20 (such as Uruguay and Argentina). Nevertheless, I wanted to balance the threshold for a statistically relevant population with the goal of comparing many diaspora populations, even small ones with small youth movements. As it is not claimed that they represent any population beyond their national chapter, and in these cases the chapters are small, it is reasonable to assert that they are representative of the branch of the movement of which they are members.

6. Since the French census does not permit asking one’s religion, exact figures are unavailable. This is based on independent estimates of the French Jewish population (Cohen, 2002, 2007; Della Pergola et al., 2004).

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