Silences in Public Policy Discourse: Organizational and Policy Myths

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Abstract

Myths are not only tales told by "pre-scientific" peoples about the origins of their universe. We also find myths constructed by modern, Western peoples in the arena of public policy, where they direct attention away from equally valued societal principles which are contradictory. Agencies created to implement policies also construct myths. Policy myths and their related organizational myths are constructed at those points where the implementing agency is most vulnerable: around actions undertaken to achieve "verboten goals" -- those goals which are publicly unspeakable because there is no explicit public consensus underlying them. Policy myths, in other words, fill silences in discourse about public policy matters. Yet, these myths also facilitate the tacit understanding of and communication about verboten goals. These points are illustrated in a case analysis of the Israel Corporation of Community Centers, an agency created to implement national social policies.

Post-modern thought requires that we pay attention to what is not said, to the silences in discourse.[1] One situation where we encounter silence of a particular kind is when we are faced with accommodating in daily life the mandates of two (or more) irreconcilable values. In the face of such incommensurables, we often create myths, which hold competing values in a tension of temporary resolution and direct our attention elsewhere.

We find incommensurable values in the realm of public policies, particularly of a social nature, as well as in the realm of administrative behavior in the implementation of policies. We would thus expect to find policy myths and organizational myths. This article proposes a specific understanding of myth which is analytically useful in these circumstances. While the discussion is applicable, I believe, to myth analysis in general, I am concerned here with the realm of public policies. One is likely to encounter myths of both types in the analysis of policy implementation.

The article begins with a definition and discussion of myth, which are then illustrated by a case study. Analysis of the case considers three organizational myths and their relationship to incommensurable values and "verboten goals," those goals which cannot be made explicit because they lack the social consensus that would support their public discussion. The article concludes with an examination of policy implementation and public silences.

POLICY AND ORGANIZATIONAL MYTHS DEFINED

Myths are usually understood to be stories or fictions, at least in contemporary U.S. culture (see, for example, Elder and Cobb 1983, 54). This may be in no small part because what we learn as "myths" are typically the tales of gods and goddesses which have been widely read in the elementary and secondary curriculum in the United States or the Biblical myths of Genesis

that are taught in religious school. These tales are told in story form: they have settings, actors, plots, conflicts, and resolutions. They are treated as fictions: made-up moral tales which entertain, which perhaps teach wrong and right, and which are assumed not to have taken place in reality.

Such stories have their counterparts in American political myths. The story of George Washington and the cherry tree would be one example; young Abraham Lincoln walking miles and miles to school and doing his homework with little light in a drafty log cabin is another. These also are entertaining tales which teach young people and new citizens the American values of truth-telling, diligence, and sacrifice for later gain. But emphasizing the storied aspect of myths diverts attention from the reasons that myths are created and from the existence of non-fictional myths. In looking for fictions we may miss the myths which characterize policy issues and organizational action, myths which do not always have plot lines and transparent morals.

Myth analysis has traditionally focused on the ancients or on so-called "pre-scientific" peoples engaged in myth-making activities or on comparative studies of religions. Although some have contended that myth-making is an activity which characterizes the pre-scientific mind (e.g., Cassirer 1946), there is growing recognition that myth-making is also an activity undertaken by rational, modern, Western society. Recent writings have attended to the roles of such American myths as the founding fathers myth (Nimmo and Combs 1980), the Thanksgiving myth (Robertson 1980), the "Emma Lazarus myth" (Boston Sunday Globe 1981), and Western myths of modern administrative practice (Westerlund and Sjostrand 1979, Ingersoll and Adams 1986).

Reviewing studies of traditional myths, Cohen (1969) found that myth analysts attributed to myths seven types of purpose: explanation; creative

expression; manifestation of the unconscious; socialization; legitimation of social institutions; symbolic and/or ritualistic expression; the reconciliation of conflicting principles (cf. Thompson (1955) and Honko (1972) for other classifications). Drawing on Cohen's classification and on traditional theories of myth-making (e.g., Honko 1972; Thompson 1955), I propose the following definition of myth for use in the context of policy analysis: a myth is a narrative created and believed by a group of people which diverts attention away from a puzzling part of their reality. This definition includes the following elements.

First, policy and organizational myths are stated in a narrative form. To say that is to comment on the nature of the language they use. They are not propositions of logic, nor are they the arguments of rhetoric. Their language is not explicitly persuasive. Myths are matter-of-fact statements, but they are "immune to factual attack" (Cuthbertson 1975, 157). Policy and organizational myths need not necessarily be fables or fictions entailing heroes or villains and discernable plot lines. The case discussed below illustrates organizational myths of rational goal-setting, of organizational flexibility, and of uniqueness, and an unnamed policy myth -- none of which has the structure of a story (with heroes and heroic action) or uses the language of persuasion.

Second, myths are social constructions rooted in a particular time and place, in a particular culture. Myths are produced in response to the needs of the moment (Tudor 1972; Cuthbertson 1975). That is, they are not necessarily universal.[2] The myths analyzed in the case study which follows are particular to the organization at that time; they may or may not be found in other organizational settings or in the same organization at a different time. This means that myths may be transitory: a newly created myth may

replace an existing one. This is not to suggest that such replacement is easily accomplished. Beliefs are often held tenaciously, as demonstrated in the recent revival of the old debate from the 1925 Scopes trial over teaching evolution versus creationism in schools.

To say they are social constructions means that policy and organizational myths are public, not individual or private. Yet, they are not an explicitly conscious, intentional creation. No one says, "Let's sit down and make a myth." They evolve in much the same socially constructed way that the rules of society do (see, e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1967, Part II).

Third, myths are believed. The concepts they express are reality for those who subscribe to them. "When in doubt, the transmitted myth can deliver you from skepticism -- you know. For the believer the myth expresses what exists...." (Westerlund and Sjostrand 1979, 3).

Fourth, policy myths are typically found when a policy entails incommensurable values -- two or more equally valued, but incompatible principles embodied within a single policy issue. Incommensurable values may produce "verboten goals": goals for which there is no explicit underlying public consensus. Were these goals to be spoken and discussed publicly, public turmoil would result -- when the public is not yet ready for this. It is this second condition which gives rise to policy myths: myths which mask tensions between or among incommensurable values. In the face of such conflicting values, we construct a myth which allows us to believe, however temporarily, that the conflict has been reconciled. The construction is not done explicitly or necessarily with the explicit intention of deceiving or manipulating; rather, it is a product of tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1966), created tacitly and communicated tacitly. Our knowledge of the contradiction masked by the myth is tacit knowledge. The suspension of conflict works as

long as the group maintains its belief in the myth. The contradiction, and the myth's role in temporarily resolving it, are only revealed explicitly when analytic focus on the myth yields up the competing values which underlie it. If the myth is publicly identified and labeled as such, the suspension may dissolve, the conflict reappear, and the myth's power to mask the irreconcilable differences may be lost.

One way of holding irreconcilable contradictions in a tension is to provide a solution which "block[s] further inquiry" (Cohen 1969), deflecting continued attention away from the incompatible, yet equally valued principles. Cohen cites a Talmudic legend that wonderfully illustrates the point.

The Biblical creation story opens in Hebrew with the word "B'reshit" -- "In the beginning," the first letter of which, the "bet", is written] . The Talmud asks, "Why was the world created with the letter 'bet'?" and it answers: "'Bet' is blocked on three sides and open only on one; therefore, one has no right to demand knowledge of what is above, what is below, what is before, only of what comes after, from the day on which the world is created." (Bialik and Rabinitsky 1939; remembering that Hebrew moves from right to left, before is to the right of the letter 'bet' and after is to the left.) Myths similarly direct attention toward what can be known, away from continued analysis of that which is contradictory and puzzling.[3]

This does not mean that policy or organizational myths are explicit explanations of puzzles. Typically, they do not explain anything in an explicit way. As Polanyi noted (1966, 4), we often "know more than we can tell," and we can also communicate this knowledge without making it explicit. Myths are one way in which we do this; they allow us to communicate knowledge about policy and organizational matters without making the knowledge explicit -- thereby maintaining silences in public discourse.

This discussion suggests the epistemological and cognitive aspects of myths. Myths provide a way of knowing about the world. They socialize, as they teach a way of behaving. They compel emotional as well as intellectual belief, and they thereby prompt action. Myths validate and authorize not only belief, but also customs, ceremonies, rituals and rites; they create, alter, and are created by them (Cuthbertson 1975; Patai 1972.) Furthermore, myths legitimate the social, political, and economic order as it is vested in existing institutions.

Since policy and organizational myths are believed in and are not subject to factual disproof, they are difficult to perceive. Myths are protected by their believers, because they have been created at points of tension or uneasiness to mask those very sensitivities. Since myths shut off further inquiry, they are difficult to discern and fathom. As they redirect attention, it is hard to see through or beyond them, adding further to public silences.

This concept of policy and organizational myths is useful in analyzing the case study of the Israel Corporation of Community Centers, an organization created to implement a national social agenda.

THE ISRAEL CORPORATION OF COMMUNITY CENTERS: 1969-1981

The Israel Corporation of Community Centers (ICCC) was created in 1969 when the Knesset passed a law establishing it as a Government Corporation whose purpose was to provide educational, social, and recreational facilities and activities for residents of the development towns.[4] Operating initially under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Culture where the idea had originated, the ICCC opened its first newly-constructed Community Centers

in 1971. By 1981, the ICCC had opened over 100 Community Centers and was operating them throughout the country, in far-flung small towns and in city neighborhoods, in Arab villages as well as among Jewish populations, some in pre-existing buildings but most in new construction. By many objective measures -- numbers of personnel, amount of program activities, budget size, physical plant, fundraising -- the ICCC could be judged a success. In terms of public acclaim, the ICCC had succeeded in establishing an organizational identity such that people from neighborhoods without Community Centers demonstrated in the streets, demanding that the government build them Centers too.

Yet, evaluating the ICCC and its programs in light of policy goals is difficult, for two reasons. First, the publicly-stated goals were many: as the societal context changed, the ICCC added new layers to prior goal statements, without displacing earlier goals. The ICCC is a good example of what Weiss and Rein (1969) called "broad-aim programs" -- difficult to evaluate given their broad mixture of social goals. Second, the social mandate of the ICCC consisted of verboten goals, which could not be used explicitly as benchmarks for evaluation.

After presenting the explicit goal history of the ICCC, I will turn to the verboten and tacit nature of its policy goals and myths.

<u>Agency Goals: 1969-1970</u>

On May 4, 1969 the Prime Minister's Cabinet Committee for Economic Affairs voted to establish the "Corporation for Culture and Sports Centers (for Youth and Adults), Limited" -- the literal translation of its Hebrew name. "Israel Corporation of Community Centers" is the translation which the agency adopted

for use in English language publications within Israel. The name reflects two of the original goals of the ICCC. First, it was intended to provide programs for residents of the development towns where Centers were located. Three planning reports (Zipori 1967a and 1967b; Pozner 1967) initiated by the Minister of Education and Culture, Zalman Aranne, had established that there were insufficient public, non-partisan facilities to support recreational activities for development town residents, and that much of what did exist was inadequate and run-down.

Second, the name embodies one of the agency's innovations: to provide programs for both youth and adults under the same roof. Until this time, most Community Center-type entities were youth clubs, typically sponsored by the youth movement affiliate of a national political party. Some of the parties' women's affiliates offered weekly or monthly programs for adults, primarily for women or for the elderly. The ICCC intended to provide activities for the broad range of ages in each community, without any party ties or sponsorship.

This concept of providing recreational and cultural activities to people of all ages drew on an idea current in the late 1960s: the notion of "leisure" time -- time free after work and family chores -- and its "constructive" use. As presented in Israel, governments were responsible for helping citizens develop appropriate uses of leisure time:

> The central problem posed by leisure is the question of how a civilization...can assist each of its citizens in achieving an optimal balance in his free choice of his needs for rest, entertainment and participation in social and cultural life. ...[This problem] is one which should occupy a special place in the society's order of preference. Appropriate leisure behavior of the individual in society

will not develop on its own, but as a result of education, social conditions and the possibilities available. (Raskin 1979)

One national study, based on 4000 interviews in 56 settlements, reported among other things that residents of small or new settlements, such as the development towns, complained about the lack of appropriate outlets for leisure-time entertainment. It also reported that first generation Jewish Israelis who immigrated from Arab countries -- the typical development town population at the time -- attended theater and concerts less than those of European origins, where both were of the same age and schooling. In the second generation, this gap narrowed among those who attained higher education (Katz and Gurevitch 1972).

Providing facilities for programs of a social, educational, cultural, and recreational nature became one of the ICCC's initial goals. This goal became conflated with a second set of emerging issues: the desire to stem out-migration from the development towns and over-crowding of the metropolitan centers.

The "development towns," Israel's version of British "new towns," were built between 1955 and 1963 to house new immigrants. Residents of the development towns were, and are, primarily those Jewish immigrants from the Arab countries of North Africa and the Middle East: Spanish and French Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Yemen. They were joined by immigrants from India and from Romania and Poland, from Soviet Georgia in the 1970s and more recently from other parts of the former Soviet Union. Most of the original settlers had begun their lives in Israel living in tent "cities," transit camps ("ma'abarot") set up in the early 1950s to house new immigrants. Many of the development towns were built on the sites of these ma'abarot, whose tents were converted to tin or wood shacks.

The people who were settled in the development towns were, by and large, unskilled workers or people whose skills were not in demand in the growing state (cobblers, for instance). They had little formal education; many were illiterate; they came from a housing culture which was unlike that of Western Europe, the source of the State's political and social elites. They tended to have larger families than European immigrants, and most of the development towns provided little in the way of employment opportunities. The towns on the geographic periphery of the State and in the rural hinterlands were largely removed from sources of employment, and there was little transportation joining them to factories where they might have found work. As a result of these various factors, a high percentage of development town residents were on welfare. In the town of Or Akiva, for example, 90% received welfare support of some kind in 1972: 30% received grants twice a year for shoes and clothing, or refrigerators or washing machines; 60% received monthly subsidies.

The towns brought together people who happened to arrive in the country at the same time, or who were sent there as housing became available. There was little other reason for people to be neighbors. The persistent rumor recited in the town of Dimona characterizes the way residents of many other development towns felt: it was said that on a certain day, all immigrants who had arrived in the port of Haifa (in the north) were loaded onto a transport bus and sent into the Negev (the southern region, a desert), and Dimona was built where the bus ran out of gas. Relations among different ethnic groups varied. Romanians and Moroccans got along well, but Moroccans and Tunisians were typically at odds. Stereotypes developed: Kurds are stupid; Moroccans carry knives and are quick to use them.

Development towns as a whole acquired an unsavory reputation among the public at large. This image was accepted by development town residents themselves. "Anyone who is successful, leaves," said one resident. "I wanted my children to learn good Hebrew, and to really know what Independence Day is all about," a woman told a Jerusalem Post reporter (5/6/77), explaining why she chose not to move to a development town despite government incentives to do so.

By the end of the 1960s, it had become a public issue that the development towns were losing residents, while the cities were gaining. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, annual out-migration rates in development towns grew from 7.1 per 1000 in 1970 to 8.9 per 1000 in 1975 (reported in the Jerusalem Post 1/26/81). Jobs were scarce. In particular, young people were not returning to the towns after army service or university. The solution proposed by the National Conference of Mayors of Development Towns, meeting in January 1969, was "to improve housing facilities, amenities, tax and credit options." (Dar 1969)

Stemming this out-migration became one of the goals of the ICCC. It would do this through the provision of social, cultural, and recreational programs and facilities, so that development town residents wouldn't feel that such things were available only in the big cities. It was hoped also that this would change the poor image of the towns held by their residents. Dr. Yael Pozner, in an interview, recalled that at the time, when she was Vice-chairman of the ICCC's Board of Directors and Chair of its Executive Committee, agency planners intended the Centers to be a meeting place to fill free time. In drawing people together to "hang out," the Centers would provide services (day-care, self-help, etc.) and give neighbors with no shared history the opportunity to integrate and create a community.

Haim Zipori (1972), the founding Executive Director of the ICCC, noted that members of the agency's planning committee held one of three ideas about the goals of the Community Centers: providing educational opportunities; effecting comprehensive social change, turning a coincidental gathering of immigrants into a community through techniques of group development; or raising the quality of local individual, family, and group services. According to Pozner, as the planners and founders continued to develop their ideas about the goals of the Centers, they discovered more about the problems which the Centers could address. "The social problem aspect joined the 'leisure time' concept, as we learned that the problems [of the development town residents] weren't characteristic [solely] of leisure time [with nothing to do]."

Agency Goals: 1970-1973

The changing social agenda at the beginning of the 1970s affected public perceptions of the development towns, their residents, the nature of their social problems, and the relation of the ICCC to these. Conceptions of the Community Centers' goals were influenced by public perceptions of societal problems.

The social agenda in Israel following the establishment of the State in 1948 had focused on "absorbing" immigrants, as more and more arrived in the aftermath of changing political circumstances abroad. Attention had been focused on state-building and on incorporating these people into a modern, Western state. Building new communities, housing, and roads, expanding manufacturing and providing jobs, teaching a new language and expanding the network of schools -- these constituted the public agenda of the 1950s and 1960s. Although there had been an outbreak of ethnic tension in the Wadi

Salib (Haifa) riots of 1958, an awareness of social problems existing among immigrant groups -- that many had not been "absorbed" into the population -- was a new idea to many in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"It was as if we awoke suddenly to find that two Israels had developed between 1950 and 1960," said Dr. Pozner.

> We didn't expect it; we didn't anticipate it. In the 'first' Israel, the children were well-integrated; but in the development towns, in the 'second' Israel --- a tremendous gap was revealed between the two populations. We had an enormously troubling problem: how to deal with this gap. There were two routes: the Reform[5] and informal education. The Community Center program fell into the latter category.

Some attributed the public's new awareness of societal problems to increased physical and economic security following the 1967 war (e.g., Iris and Shama 1972); others, to the dramatic increase in immigration from the Soviet Union (Macarov 1974). This Soviet immigration, together with an increased immigration from Western Europe, Latin America, the British Commonwealth, and the U.S., highlighted differences in the treatment and status of newer immigrant groups from Western countries in comparison with earlier immigrants from North African and Middle Eastern countries. In an effort to match the standard of living which the Western immigrant was leaving behind, the State extended tax rebates and customs exemptions which, among other benefits, allowed new immigrants to escape the 100% duty that veteran citizens had to pay on cars, radios, televisions, ovens, refrigerators, and other "luxuries." The result appeared as a pattern of conspicuous consumption, making visible the "gap." In addition, the impact of the social programs of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the U.S., as well as

the professionalization of social work, influenced public definitions of what was socially "problematic" as well as perceptions of appropriate "treatment."

The "gap" that was discovered between the "first" Israel -- Jewish Israelis from Western countries, called Ashkenazim, who predominate among the country's social, political, and economic elite -- and the "second" Israel -- those from countries of North Africa and the Middle East, called Sfaradim -- was revealed in measurable disparities in family income, job status, educational attainment, housing density. It also consisted of Ashkenazi perceptions of "difference" between themselves and the Sfaradim. Some labeled these perceptions discrimination on the basis of skin color. Others saw the difference as inherent in people who came from less developed countries, who were not accustomed to indoor plumbing, sharing common spaces in apartment buildings, and other lifestyle differences ranging from numbers of children per family to accents, cuisine, and ways of dress.

The gap was perceived and presented as an "ethnic gap" between Ashkenazim and Sfaradim, but it also entailed a geographic division between urban and kibbutz dwellers on the one hand and residents of development towns and poor city neighborhoods on the other. The divisions are not clear-cut: there were Sfaradim among the urban middle class and economic elites, while development towns included Ashkenazim from Romania, Poland, and Russia among their residents.[6] In speaking of the gap between the first and second Israels, the reference is clearly to the intersection of distinctions between ethnic membership and geographical residence. One reason for this confusion has to do with the notion of ethnicity within Israel, a subject to which I will return.

The situation exploded with demonstrations -- rare in Israel until then -- in January 1971. Young urban Sfaradim, adopting the name "Black Panthers"

from the African-American protest movement, marched on the Knesset, demanding job opportunities, vocational training, an end to overcrowded housing, better roads, facilities for leisure time activities, as well as an end to discrimination and being underprivileged (Jerusalem Post February 5, March 1, March 12, 1971). At the same time, it became public knowledge that juvenile delinquency, drug use, and prostitution existed within the State. The number of juveniles referred to probation services grew from 3650 in 1966 to 11,000 in 1968 (JDC-Israel report, 11/9/72).

In May, 1971 the Prime Minister appointed the Commission on the Plight of Underprivileged Youth, chaired by Dr. Yisrael Katz. The Katz Commission report, delivered in November 1972, recommended changes in existing patterns of formal and nonformal education, recreational facilities, and other social services, as well as a minimum guaranteed income (Prime Minister's Commission 1973).

The Katz Commission added impetus, budgets, and legitimacy to the ICCC's efforts. It also expanded the agency's goals. In May 1971 the Executive Director wrote that the ICCC was preparing

> for a major undertaking...in connection with a new plan in the battle with poverty, in consequence of the arousal of sensitive groups to the subject of the social gap. We have just crystallized a program to build another 30 Centers in distressed areas of the large cities (until now we have attended to development towns only)....

The JDC-Israel, a foundation which supported the ICCC, described the Centers at the end of 1971 as "a new experiment...to advance weak communities in need of social integration and community development." The document continues:

> Last Spring, when the Israeli public's attention was drawn to the problem of poverty by the Black Panthers, the mayors of the development towns and

> large cities began to plead for more Community Centers in their poverty stricken areas. ...There was a general feeling that Community Centers can advance social integration and reduce ethnic tensions.

ICCC publications and documents show that the goals of integrating populations, narrowing the gap, and combatting juvenile delinquency and drug use were added to the earlier goal of providing leisure time facilities and programs. The implication of these new goals was that by physically entering the Center building and attending its programs, the development town and city neighborhood resident would become integrated into Israeli society and the gap between Sfaradi and Ashkenazi would be narrowed, if not eliminated altogether.

Agency Goals: 1973-77

The impetus of this new attention to social problems was interrupted and then diverted by the October 1973 war. In filling a variety of home front needs during the war and its aftermath, the Centers established themselves as Multi-Service Centers, "providing a wide variety of community services in addition to the recreational and educational activities which had been their primary endeavor until [then]" (JDC-Israel document). The multi-service idea, popular in American social service circles in the late 1960s, came into its own in Israel as the Black Panther crisis receded. The Katz Commission had laid some of the groundwork for this idea by recommending comprehensive revisions of the social service structure, coordination of the various youth-serving agencies, and a "super-agency" of welfare services. The idea of coordinating multiple services fell on already fertile ground in the ICCC, whose programs crossed Department and Ministerial budgetary lines and whose original goals had been in part to upgrade the level of local services.

The Executive Director now called the Community Center "the integrator of welfare services" at the local level. To their existing programs the Centers added day-care, elder-care, delinquency programs, "laundry clubs" (offering adult education and child care while making washers and dryers available), toy libraries (combining parenting classes with child care and recreation) -- all programs which crossed Ministerial and Departmental lines, requiring the coordination of effort to provide comprehensive services.

Agency Goals: 1977-1980

In 1977 Menahem Begin's party, in the opposition for thirty years (and part of the pre-State opposition underground before that), led the Likud coalition in sweeping the elections. He rode in on the support of the Sfaradi population. It was a victory of urban, petit bourgeois politics over the agricultural, anti-urban, socialist labor coalition, an overthrow of the Establishment. Shortly after his election, Begin announced a dramatic urban renewal plan which would infuse money into the development towns and poor urban neighborhoods for social as well as physical rehabilitation. Project Renewal, budgeted at $60 million, was to be carried out locally, where possible, by the Community Center staffs who were so familiar with local conditions.

In Begin's coalition, the Ministry of Education and Culture passed into the hands of the National Religious Party for the first time in the State's history. Attention was focused on the role of the Community Center in inculcating Jewish religious values among its Jewish participants. The ICCC hired a National Coordinator of Jewish Programs to develop this new focus of activity.

At the ICCC's National Convention in January 1979, one Center director asked the Executive Director what the goals of the agency were. Zipori answered: "improving the quality of life -- values, spirituality, attitudes, and so forth."

INCOMMENSURABLE VALUES, VERBOTEN GOALS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL AND POLICY MYTHS

In analyzing the foregoing case study of the ICCC's changing goals, we do not find myths in the form of fictional tales explaining organizational or other origins. We do, however, find several points where incommensurable values produced verboten goals, which in turn gave rise to organizational and policy myths. The organizational myths might be called "the myth of rational goal-setting," "the myth of flexibility," and "the myth of uniqueness." They are linked to a central policy myth.

Myth of Rational Goal-Setting

It might appear from this overview that the ICCC was changing goals so rapidly that it would be difficult to keep track of them, or that the agency had no goals at all and grasped at whatever new idea came along. Neither situation appears to be the case, looking at agency publications, correspondence, records of meetings and in talking with personnel. Extensive attention was devoted constantly, in in-service training sessions, individual supervision, agency publications, quarterly and annual meetings, and so forth, to the goals of the ICCC and their translation into programs and objectives.

But something puzzling does emerge from this study. At the end of 1979, the ICCC's Head of Research and Planning wrote that the agency's goals and operating principles were only then beginning the process of "crystallization." Does this mean that there was no clear understanding prior

to 1980 of what the agency's goals were? Yet, the ICCC behaved during this time very much as though it had clearly understood goals: it hired staff, built buildings, raised funds, created and carried out programs, established an identity. Moreover, every year for at least the first ten years since the first Centers were opened, at the Annual Meeting, with all Center directors and some other staff in attendance, the Executive Director would ask: "What are our goals and objectives?" Given the full attention devoted to that question in other settings, one might wonder why it was necessary to ask the question at all, and why in a public forum such as the Annual Meeting.

Furthermore, when Prime Minister Begin decided, soon after his election in 1977, that Israel's slums and development towns needed "renewal," the ICCC became the coordinator of the new Project in those sites where Community Centers were already in operation. The explicit mandate of the ICCC was to provide social, educational, cultural and recreational facilities and programs to development town residents. There was no mention of housing or neighborhood redevelopment. What was there about the nature of policy or organizational goals that allowed the ICCC to accede to this request, and to implement it, without arousing the criticism of evaluators or of the public?

These actions embody the organizational "myth of rational goal-setting." The succession of goals between 1969 and 1981 moved from the early ideas of providing "someplace to go" in development towns and building nonpartisan facilities for recreational activities for achieving social integration, filling increased leisure time, and retarding the exodus from development towns; to the middle group of narrowing the social gap, advancing weak communities, reducing ethnic tensions, combatting juvenile delinquency and drug use; to the later goals of providing Multi-Service Centers and comprehensive coordination of social services; ending with providing quality

of life. But this is not the case of an agency which has achieved its goals and needs to replace them or else cease to exist (Sills 1961). The gap was no narrower in 1980 than it had been in 1970, to judge from reports on income levels, employment, social status, and the image and reputations of the development towns. Ethnic tensions and crowded housing conditions were just as severe in 1991 as they were in the 1970s (witness the residents of urban neighborhoods setting up tent cities after losing their apartments to new Russian immigrants; reported in the Jerusalem Post, August 1990 through June 1991).

The explanation lies in the difficulty of implementing such diffuse goals as achieving social integration, advancing weak communities, narrowing social gaps, providing quality of life, and of demonstrating successful implementation of these goals. It can be difficult to sustain an organization over a lengthy period when one cannot point to progress in attaining its goals. It is not only personnel who need to be exhorted to continue in the name of the goals; skeptical publics also need reassurance (Edelman 1964). In focusing attention on the ritual of setting goals, deriving objectives from them and a plan of operations from the objectives, attention is deflected from the goals themselves and their questionable attainment to the process of setting goals rationally.

Rituals are the physical enactment of myths, and they preserve and propagate the values embedded in those myths (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In the repeated attention to the need to determine goals, the mechanics of goal-setting and its processes, the ICCC's ritual of asking "What are our goals?" supported the belief that agency activities are goal-oriented. As the Polaris missile system created the image of success through its use of PERT (Sapolsky 1972), so the ICCC created the aura of success by appearing to

pursue goals rationally. The ritual of discussing what the goals are at the Annual Meeting sends the messages to members and stakeholders that the organization is a modern, rational organization and that it is doing its work properly, even if it is difficult to demonstrate accomplishment of those goals. The ritual enacts the myth of rational goal-setting.

Not only does the appearance of rational, goal-oriented behavior grant the agency legitimacy and public support; it also creates a buffer between the goal-setting activity and the actual technical operations of the Community Centers, which serves to put the latter beyond the public's inspection. As long as the public <u>sees</u> that the agency is setting and pursuing goals, as it does in the annual ritual, the public <u>believes</u> that actual agency programs are goal-oriented.[7] As Manning (1977) wrote:

> Complex, industrialized societies have committed themselves to a public posture of rationality, and the rational myth legitimates organizations and institutions within this society. It is not surprising that organizations of central symbolic importance should call upon the legitimating powers of the myth of rationality to justify both their existence and actions.

The myth is narrative in form: it is presented as a statement of fact, without argument. It is a social construction -- not the intentional creation of an individual but the evolving property of the group. Its specific expression -- in the form of annual discussions -- is particular to this organization, although the myth is commonly found in other organizations with similarly broad goals.[8] The discussions are believed -- they are taken by organizational members to be bona fide deliberations about the goals of the organization. And the myth reconciles the conflict between two incommensurables: the value of the stated goals themselves, which cannot be

demonstrably achieved by this agency with its limited resources; and the value of maintaining organizational existence, which requires (among other things) that the agency demonstrate success in achieving its goals. By directing attention to the processes of goal-setting, the myth diverts attention away from the conflict between members' desires to achieve agency goals and the impossibility of doing so.

Myth of Organizational Flexibility

Together with the "myth of rational goal-setting," the "myth of organizational flexibility" worked to deflect attention from the unattainability of the agency's social goals. Both myths allow the agency to continue on in face of this difficulty.

Staff were excited at discovering a new organizational goal -- of finding that the provision of leisure time activities could also address the new problem of out-migration, or the new problem of social integration. The excitement of these discoveries also deflected attention from the specifics of Center programs and their relative ineffectiveness in solving these massive social problems. When questioned why they asked about goals every year, organizational members answered that continual re-examination of agency goals was a positive undertaking. They said: "It keeps us from bureaucratizing or stagnating;" "it's a sort of zero-based planning where we continually re-examine our premises;" "after all, if the Community Center is a tool for social change, and society is constantly changing, then we should continuously raise the question of what are our goals."

Such flexibility -- a willingness to change in light of a new situation -- also ensures an ambiguity -- Centers will always be adding new programs. The "myth of flexibility" makes evaluation impossible, since the criteria are

always changing. This myth is also presented as a matter of fact (e.g., our goals change because society changes). It is a construction of the agency as a whole, and it is believed. The belief is enacted in the same ritual of goal-setting; the recurring attention supports the myth of flexibility -- that the agency's goals are adaptable to society's changing needs. The myth deflects attention from the conflict between the need to show goal attainment and the difficulty of evaluating against constantly changing criteria.

The Myth of Organizational Uniqueness and the Policy Myth

The need for silence in public discourse on the subject of the policy goals being implemented by the ICCC gave rise to a third organizational myth. The ICCC was charged with solving major social problems; several analyses had indicated that these problems would be resolved through economic means -- providing employment opportunities, tax incentives, credit options, larger housing, and a minimum guaranteed income -- none of which were within the purview of the ICCC and its resources.

The "myth of rational goal-setting" and the "myth of flexibility" were needed because the ICCC undertaking was based on a policy myth: that the actions of this agency could close the social gap. The "social" nature of the gap is itself a myth, diverting attention away from its economic and ethnic character and its geographic basis in development towns and urban neighborhoods. The situation is not unlike the "other America" which Harrington (1963) identified in the U.S. Like the poverty which he found that had been ignored, the "ethnicity" of the Israeli Jewish population is something which until recently has not been publicly spoken of explicitly. It is in the connection between unspeakable ethnicity and agency practice that we

find the policy myth, a myth which runs to the heart of national identity and purpose.

The ICCC presented itself as a new and unique institution. The agency argued, for example, against purchasing professional supervision from other organizations on the basis of "the Community Center's unique message...which distinguishes it among other agencies...." The bases for this uniqueness claim included: services provided to all age groups; its non-partisan nature; the multi-service nature of Centers' programs; the multi-functional physical space; its foundation on principles of participatory planning; the voluntary, public nature of its Boards.

In point of fact, Community Centers were neither new to Israel or to their clientele, nor were they unique with respect to these claims. Indeed, there were Community Centers by other names around the country in 1969: the Jerusalem YM-YWHA, Bet Rothschild and others in Haifa, the kibbutz prototype (called "Bet Am," People's House), and so forth. As they pointed out to Pozner, Israelis who emigrated from Casablanca had had a community center there; there were centers in Jewish communities in Iran; similar institutions existed in Poland, Romania, and elsewhere (Patai 1980). The Israeli predecessors included some which were non-partisan, some whose facilities were multi-functional, and some whose programs included a variety of activity types for a wide age range. It is true that the ICCC was an innovation in the development towns, and that the agency pioneered the ideas of participatory planning and public Boards. These have always been only partial bases for the ICCC's claim to uniqueness, however.

Any agency would claim to be unique when faced with establishing itself in a field of existing agencies performing similar activities. The ICCC Centers needed their own unique name and identity to set them apart from others, so it

would be more difficult to eliminate them through budget cuts and absorb them into a competitor. But there were other factors which were unique to the ICCC, on which it could have based such a claim. The ICCC might have claimed uniqueness as the first and only publicly-funded, national institution to supply recreational facilities and programs to entire communities. Or it could have based a claim on its mission as the first government agency to implement an expressly social mandate. It did neither. Why should an agency lay a claim to uniqueness based on elements which were not unique, especially when other criteria were available?[9]

The other criteria represented "verboten goals," and to invoke them would have involved making them subjects of public discourse. This phrase is related to Harold Garfinkel's notion of a "publicly unmentionable goal," discussed by Edelman (1977, 39). But it is not only that such goals cannot be mentioned in public, which suggests an individual uttering something in conversation. Rather, the point is that they are not part of the explicit public agenda, they are neither speakable nor discussable, because there is no public consensus supporting them. That is what makes them verboten: there is a cultural prohibition against talking about them. Our public discourse is silent on their subject, and the prohibition itself is culturally verboten. In fact, it would not have been uncommon for an Ashkenazi to express in private the personal opinion that Sfaradim should meld into the mainstream culture. Indeed, the two-culture problem was explained away by many when they pointed to rising intermarriage rates, the assumption being that Ashkenazi culture would dominate in the intermarried household. But this was not part of the explicit public agenda.

Their explicit discussion would bring to light contradictions and conflict which would be more disruptive than what the society was prepared to

handle. Claiming uniqueness on the basis of implementing a unique government-mandated social policy would have focused explicit attention on the nature of that policy. There was no consensus behind publicly declaring the Ashkenazi population and its values as the superior group to which all others must be educated. This would have required explicit attention to the notion of "ethnicity", which was studiously ignored through the first 30 years of the State's existence (Avruch 1987; Goldberg 1987). It also would have focused explicit attention on the meaning of the metaphor of immigrant "absorption" -- absorbed into what? -- and challenged the notion that all immigrants would be blended into a single identity (much like the American melting pot concept). To say that the ICCC's goal was to erase the Levant from Sfaradi peoples and imbue them with the values and behavioral repertoire of middle class, Ashkenazi culture would raise, explicitly, a set of issues which existed in the realm of private, not public, communication. Doing so would have brought onto the public agenda a volatile subject which the public was not yet ready to discuss, publicly and explicitly.[10]

On the other hand, to proclaim that a policy or program will "narrow the gap" is a goal which all strata of society can support: those at the lower end of the gap who wish to close it, as well as those at the upper end who accept the metaphor that immigrants will be "absorbed." Israel was founded on socialist principles which were opposed to social stratification. "Narrowing the gap" is a publicly discussable goal.

The ICCC needed an organizational "myth of uniqueness based on the not unique" to establish itself organizationally while drawing attention away from its social mandate. The uniqueness myth was necessary to stop further questioning as to the nature of the agency and whether this new institution could tackle society's verboten goal of "absorbing" Sfaradim into Ashkenazim.

In laying claims to uniqueness based on the not unique, the ICCC anticipated charges that it was duplicating services. Meeting these charges head on diffused them, at the same time that it diverted attention away from what could not be spoken of publicly. This was achieved through the policy "myth of the all-doing agency implementing Herculean societal goals."

SILENCES IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The case study presents policy and organizational myths as the non-fictional social constructions of a group which are believed and which, at least temporarily, divert attention away from incommensurable values and are believed to reconcile them, temporarily, in practice if not in concept. These myths were constructed tacitly: they embody a tacit knowledge of the incommensurable values, and this knowledge is communicated and shared tacitly through regular "artifactual interaction" (Cook and Yanow 1990) with the rituals and other organizational artifacts and daily activities which support the myths.

"Myth" is widely used today in a pejorative sense, implying fiction, purposeful deception, lie, false belief. This attitude may derive from the belief in rational scientism developed by the positivists and logical positivists of the 19th and early 20th centuries. This legacy may also have contributed to the assumption prevalent in traditional anthropology that mythmaking is an activity belonging to pre-scientific or primitive peoples, a stage which civilized people outgrow. Popular understanding of myths as hero-stories about gods and how the world came to be compounds this view. From a contemporary vantage point, belief in such tales is a false belief, and their perpetration can only be for purposes of intentional deception. Myth is seen to belong to the realm of religion or of fairy tale, both of which have

been replaced in modern times by science, both physical and social. Hence, many believe that myths do not -- or should not -- exist for us today.[11]

But policy and organizational myths are very much part of contemporary life with its inherent contradictions and incommensurable values. They allow us to maintain public silences about those contradictions. To label something as "myth" is to assume the stance of critic, the non-believer for whom the myth no longer resolves contradictory principles. Only when the reality of Haitian boat people tossed about on the Atlantic blatantly contradicted the belief in the U.S. as a haven for refugees did the Boston Globe (November 1, 1981) chide the public for its "Emma Lazarus myth." When a myth is labeled as such, the contradictions which had been contained and communicated tacitly are made explicit, and the myth ceases to divert attention away from them. At that point, public silence is replaced by public discourse or by an attempt to reconstruct a myth and divert attention and discussion once more.

Under what conditions will policy stakeholders be likely to change their beliefs and, hence, their myths? Lasswell (1952) postulated that a political myth will more likely not be rejected if its adherents are indulged rather than deprived. That is, individual believers in an established myth will more probably begin to challenge it if their security (power, wealth, respect or other value) is threatened; if they see that a different myth brings greater value to its adherents; if converts to the other myth are rewarded, ensuring its continuation. By extension, we may expect an established myth to be successfully transmitted from communities more indulged to ones less indulged.

We see this in the case of the ICCC. The challenge to the policy myth that immigrants were being absorbed came from the Sfaradim who were deprived -- of status, income, adequate housing, education, etc.: residents of development towns and urban neighborhoods. What was not challenged then or

subsequently was the policy myth that the ICCC could mitigate this deprivation. (In fact, demonstrations in the 1980s calling on the Government to erect Community Centers in "deprived" neighborhoods illustrate the extent to which having a Community Center itself became a symbol of recognition and reassurance.) Explicit public attention to ethnicity began to grow in the early 1980s. It was shunted aside by the intifada, the Palestinian uprising in Gaza and the West Bank. But immigration from the now-former Soviet Union and Ethiopia brought more newcomers in 1990 than any year since 1951. One result appears to be the return of the subject of ethnicity and the status and treatment of Westerner versus Easterner to the forefront of public discourse. If the present analysis is correct, the Sfaradim can be expected once again to challenge myths masking verboten goals. We can only wait to see whether this time the myth of the ICCC as the answer to social integration will be dissipated, or not.

This discussion raises further questions about evaluating policy implementation in light of policy intent (Palumbo and Calista 1990). Assuming "intent to implement as written" becomes problematic when what is written constitutes publicly speakable goals, whereas the agency is also implementing verboten goals. Blaming implementation problems on ambiguous language posits the norm that policy ends should be stated explicitly. Yet verboten goals are no less real because they cannot be stated explicitly. Governments must, at times, accommodate conflicting values. Adopting Arnold's (1935, 131) comment on the criminal trial, we may say that the implementation of public policies "bring[s] into sharp relief various deep-seated popular moral ideals [of justice, while appearing] as an efficient means of enforcement and working order." And further (p. 49):

> An official admission by a judicial institution that it was moving in all directions at once in order to satisfy the conflicting emotional values of the people which it served would be unthinkable. ...The success of the law as a unifying force depends on making emotionally significant the idea of a government of law which is rational and scientific.

So with a public agency implementing verboten goals.

If value conflict in public policy relates to matters of status or status-based power, then we might expect some of the policy's goals to be verboten. In those cases, policy language is more likely to be ambiguous or vague, and we are more likely to find policy or organizational myths which deflect attention away from that which is publicly undiscussable. The issue here is not so much explicit <u>versus</u> ambiguous language as it is policy wording which allows for multiple interpretations. Explicitly worded policy may still mask goals whose explicit public discussion is verboten. And verboten goals may still be understood by policy legislators and stakeholders: this understanding is made through tacit communication by way of policy symbols.

According to this view, implementation success or failure may ride on the construction of meaningful, believable myths or other symbols and their associated ambiguities, rather than on the direct pursuit and achievement of explicit policy goals. This is the moral of the ICCC case, of the Polaris missile case (Sapolsky 1972), of the Farm Bill (Moseley 1990), of the Japan External Trade Organization (Nakamura 1990), and of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's administrative reorganization (Maynard-Moody and Stull 1987). We should look to see whether it is operative in other cases as well.

This analysis supports the argument that the policy process is not exclusively about instrumental behaviors. Another very real part of it is its expressiveness, a public play about the allocation and validation of symbols of status as much as the reallocation of tangible resources subject to administrative controls. As Arnold's (1935, 13) point continues: "...if the results are more important than the moral lessons which are to be taught by the process -- we move the settlement of the dispute into a less symbolic atmosphere." The ICCC case suggests that the arenas of policy legislation and implementation are also expressive settings, where the tension of incommensurable values may require silences in explicit public discourse about policy issues, and where such silences are supported by policy myths as well as by the organizational myths of their implementing agencies.

Notes

1. See, for example, White (1986), Martin (1990). I would like to thank Guy Adams, Scott Cook, Martha Feldman, Harvey Goldberg, Steven Maynard-Moody, and Dennis Palumbo for their close readings of drafts of this article. An earlier version was given at the Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting in Seattle, March 21-23, 1991.

2. Joseph Campbell maintained in several publications (e.g., 1972, 1979) and on the public television series with Bill Moyers that myths are universal. He was referring to tribal myths of origin and other story-type myths and not to the policy myths under discussion here, and even with respect to these there is debate about his conclusions (see, for example, Doniger 1992). My argument that myths are social constructions parallels part of Nimmo and Combs' (1980) definition of myths.

3. Others have also seen myths as ways of temporarily resolving conflicting values. Robertson (1980, 346) wrote: "Myths are the mechanism by which people believe contradictory things simultaneously." Westerlund and Sjostrand (1979, 31) noted that myths "make for peace and quiet so that they [people] can work." Cuthbertson (1975, 158): Myths "function to bridge tensions...." Arnold (1937, 356 ff.) wrote that institutional creeds, which he also called myths, express contradictory ideals, allowing the contradictions to co-exist.

4. This case study is based on three years of participant observation (1972-75), followed in 1980-81 by six months of interviewing, document analysis, and further observation. The ICCC also built and operated a small number of Community Centers in Arab villages and neighborhoods. For reasons of language and access, they were excluded from the original study, and the present analysis also does not pertain to them, but only to those in the Jewish sectors of the country. The story of the case as related here, as with all postmodern tales, represents the author's interpretation, but does not imply that it is that of the ICCC.

5. The "Reform" program restructured secondary education through the creation of "junior high schools" which cut across neighborhood boundaries, pulling together students from various backgrounds and elementary schools. The intention was to pull the "disadvantaged" up to the level of their urban cohort before sending them on to high school, in a manner similar to U.S. urban school desegregation programs.

6. Part of the confusion lies in the label of the Sfaradi category. Properly speaking, Sfaradi (the adjective or singular noun) refers to those who trace their ancestry to the Jewish communities expelled from Spain ("Sfarad") and Portugal (in 1492 and 1497, respectively). This typically includes people from the modern states of Bulgaria, Greece, Spanish Morocco, among others, although there are also Sfaradi communities in England, the U.S., and Latin America. Jews from Northern African states are often called Maghrebi Jews, while those from Iraq, Iran, India, and so forth fit neither category. Taken together, they are referred to as "the Tribes of the East" in Hebrew, or - incorrectly - as Sfaradim (noun, plural). Historically, they have been called "Oriental Jews" in English, although the name Sfaradi or Sephardi has become more widely used.

7. Meyer et al. (1977) noted a similar process with respect to public schools, which must appear to carry out societally-mandated "rules" in order to garner public support and legitimacy. The technical aspects of schooling -- curriculum and teaching -- are less important in shaping the public's belief. (Their professionalization has also removed them from the public's purview.) As a result, the organizational structures of schools are "de-coupled" from the technology of schooling.

8. Ingersoll and Adams (1986) argue that the "rational technical myth system" characterizes American culture generally. See also Westerlund and Sjostrand (1979, 36-42) on the myth of rational goals.

9. Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin (1983) call this claim to uniqueness based on the not unique "the uniqueness paradox." Interestingly, they found that such claims are widespread among organizations. The present analysis differs from their study in linking one organization's uniqueness myth to the myth of the policy it was created to implement.

10. See also Westerlund and Sjostrand's (1979, 40) "taboo aims" which are like verboten goals. After this article was written, Guy Adams brought to my attention his work with Virginia Ingersoll which also talks about myths as tacit, "undiscussed and, perhaps, undiscussable" (Ingersoll and Adams 1986, 365).

Edelman (1977, 39) claims that we accomplish such goals by focusing on popular ones. As an example, he presents vagrancy laws as society's control mechanism for people made poor and unemployed by a disintegrating economic system, who might violate the law. As vagrants they are labeled "criminals" and thereby controlled under the general rubric of "crime control," a mentionable goal. This view, says Edelman, is more comfortable for people to live with than to face the complex realities of the economic system. He is, in other words, suggesting that we deal with the incommensurability of two values by creating a way of deflecting attention from them, which is the process I have discussed as myth-making. Now that vagrants have been re-labeled "homeless," we have forced ourselves to "see" the economic system -- but in many places we have passed laws making homelessness a crime.

11. Ingersoll and Adams (1986) searched the management literature for articles using "myth" in the title and found that of 85 such, only one in sixteen suggested myth as a serious analytic tool.

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