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Feeling “At Home” or Just Privileged Minorities? Perceptions of Jewish and Non-Jewish Respondents in Contemporary Budapest

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze patterns of integration and inter-relations in contemporary Hungary, as perceived by Jewish and non-Jewish leaders and involved community members from the academia, religious organizations, and the media.

Most diaspora Jews can be defined as belonging to native-born minorities; they perceive themselves as distinct national minorities that became minorities due to political and social changes in their homeland, while others are immigrants (Barak 2006). Thus, Jews constitute mainly an ethnic, native-born minority group, i. e., a group whose culture and religion are different from that of the majority and that is liable to experience relative discrimination (Lev Ari 2022; Macionis 2017; Yiftachel 2001). Jews generally prefer to live in large cities that provide opportunities for economic, social, and cultural development. Within these cities, Jews tend to concentrate in neighborhoods that match their socioeconomic status, provide nearby employment opportunities, facilitate social mobility, and offer religious services and the presence of Jewish organizations (DellaPergola 2011).

Currently, the majority of Hungarian Jews – approximately 90 percent (a number even higher than the worldwide average for Jews’ presence in large cities) – live in Budapest and constitute five percent of the city’s total population (Kovács 2010). Thus, this study will focus on Jews residing in Budapest as representing contemporary Hungarian Jewry as a whole.

Hungary is one of the post-communist countries in Central Europe. Three decades after the demise of totalitarian regimes and the fall of the Iron Curtain, the term “Central Europe” has a different meaning in terms of the construction of territorial identities and the politics of memory. Jews have played a very important role in creating the central European space which, at a certain point, also became destructive for them, as it became the scene of the Holocaust. In recent years, the debate on the concept of “Central Europe” has somehow lost its significance. Soon after 1989, the term was replaced by a new one, oriented more towards examining the influence of central European countries’ economic inclusion in the European

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110783216-007

Union than with developing a central European heritage stretching from Slovenia to the borders of Belarus and Ukraine. However, some central European frameworks continue to exist: for example, the alliance of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland, known as the Visegrad Group (V4). The Group has gradually become a central European voice representing specific regional interests within the overall European framework (Vago 2020).

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, quite a few Jewish religious, educational, cultural, and political organizations were revived or newly founded in Hungary. In 2000, Jewish communities were organized all over the country, in 26 different settlements. The first Reform community – Sim Shalom – was founded in Budapest in 1992. The Lubavitch movement established its institutions, too, operating a synagogue, a kindergarten, and a school in Budapest. In addition to the high school of the Neolog community named after Sándor Scheiber, there is also an Orthodox American Foundation School in Budapest as well as the largest Jewish school, the liberal-secular Lauder Javne elementary and high school, which also has a kindergarten. More than 1,000 students were attending these Jewish schools in 2003 (Kovács and Forrás-Biró 2011).

According to Barna and Kovács, "it is impossible to define the exact number of Jews in Hungary" (2019, 1). The obstacles to estimating the size of the Jewish population in Europe in general, including Hungary, stem from the fact that in response to a census question regarding religion, many respondents (including Jews) prefer to declare no religion (DellaPergola 2020a). Estimations made in 2019 showed that 47,300 Jews resided in Hungary, which rated the country as the world's thirteenth largest Jewish community (DellaPergola 2020b). Almost all Hungarian Jews (95 percent) are native-born, similar to the total population – 96 percent (Graham 2018).

The majority of contemporary Hungarian society is composed of three main Christian denominations: the Catholic, the Reformed, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Fifty-four percent defined themselves as Catholic, 16 percent as Reformed, and three percent as Evangelical Lutheran (Kovács and Forrás-Biró 2011). After 1990, the Hungarian Parliament passed a number of acts regulating individual and collective reparations for persecutions during the Holocaust. Another law, guaranteeing reparations to all religious communities for previously confiscated property, settled the matter of collective reparations for the Jewish community. According to this act, religious communities – including the Jewish community – could reclaim previously confiscated real estate if they wished to use it again. The Hungarian state took responsibility for maintaining more than 1,000 Jewish cemeteries that were not maintained by the community. The Hungarian Jewish Heritage Foundation was established in 2003 to deal with legal issues regarding collective reparations (Kovács 2010).

Through semi-structured interviews, perceptions of Jewish and non-Jewish respondents residing in Budapest were analyzed on micro and macro levels. On the micro-personal level, the focus was on interviewees' feelings of being "at home," namely cultural integration within the Hungarian society and in the structure of social networks. On the macro-level, findings demonstrate interviewees' perceptions regarding the relations between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish majority within the Hungarian society, the centrality of Jews in Budapest as a privileged minority or an integral part of the Hungarian society, versus implicit and explicit antisemitism. It should be noted, however, that the results are based on a small-scale version of participants and thus are not representative of the entire Hungarian population.

Theoretical Concepts

The main theoretical terms are related to socio-cultural integration of Jews in Hungary. The terms ethnic minorities, social networks, transnationalism, and antisemitism will be briefly presented in this section.

Finding a common definition of the concept of minorities is very complex. Nevertheless, until a few years ago, a sort of "soft" consensus on the notion of the minority prevailed in Europe, whereby a minority was described as a group of citizens of a state, constituting a numerical minority and holding a non-dominant position in that state, endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the majority of the population (Plasseraud 2010). Ethnic communities sometimes develop from generations of integrated, former migrants in nation states. Since 1945, "national models" for dealing with cultural differences, emerging in Europe as a result of de-colonization, have evolved along with the arrival of migration waves which led to cultural diversity and the formation of new ethnic communities in many countries. Policies towards these ethnic minorities varied between assimilation of individuals (regardless of their cultural uniqueness) and integration of entire ethnic minorities which maintain their own cultures, languages, and religions. The construction of ethnic minorities and their integration with the majority society depend on the immigrants' characteristics as well as on the attitude of receiving states and societies. Ethnic minorities could be excluded by dominant minorities based on their racial or cultural difference. They can also have collective and communal attitudes and perceptions, based on a common culture, religion, and history. Thus, an ethnic group can be defined as a social construct built both on an assignment to an inferior social position by the dominant minorities and a self-definition centered on the minority's own culture, community, and history. Ethnic minorities vary in their inner strength and vitality,

while dominant societies and states differ in exclusion policies towards them. However, ethnic minorities always suffer from some exclusion (Castles et al. 2014).

One of the concepts central to social integration of ethnic minorities within the majority is the social network. Social networks are sets of links based on kinship and ethnic origin (Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010). These networks help ethnic minorities cope with the economic, cultural, and social challenges of their integration. The size of these networks is determined by the number of people in a given group. The members can be loosely or tightly bound to one another. In tightly bound networks, the individual has frequent contacts as well as common identities and activities with the other members. In loosely bound networks, the individual is connected with other people on the basis of a single activity. If all the members of a network are connected to each other, the network is very tightly bound (Avenarius 2012). In some cases, social networks provide minority groups with financial help for housing, information, and help in finding work, social assistance, and emotional support (Avenarius 2012; Koser 2010).

There are three possible social circles of integration into the host culture that help understand the process involved in feeling "at home" in the majority society: the inner circle comprising home (family), the church (religion), and the school (education); secondly, public spaces shared by the majority and ethnic minorities, such as shops and markets; finally, cultural events and traditions that are usually reserved for the majority (Haug et al. 2007). According to the transnational theory, these social ties can be also found in diverse geographic and social spaces (Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010; Lev Ari 2008; Vertovec 2010). The media, the internet and social networks help reduce a sense of alienation and difference (Sheffer 2003).

In an era of living in the global village, cultural and social ties might be anchored in a variety of geographic spaces situated beyond national borders, namely transnational spaces (Lev Ari 2008; Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010; Vertovec 2010). Ethnic minorities might participate in transnational communities. This process has a substantial influence on the patterns of their integration in the majority society and sometimes generates multiple loyalties, split between two or even more countries (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004; Rebhun and Lev Ari 2010).

Moreover, these social spaces have more branches and minorities remain in contact with their national group in different places across the globe as well as with the native-born from their ethno-religious group (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Ethnic minorities can act simultaneously in different transnational spaces, creating a diverging set of mutual social, economic, cultural, and political ties.

Although most minority groups suffer from one form of discrimination or another, some constitute a "privileged" ethnic minority. In addition to having social and cultural rights in the country in which they live, they enjoy high socio-economic status. One prominent example of a privileged minority group is that of Amer-

ican Jews, who have "become white" over the generations (Brodkin 1998). Jews suffered for decades from discrimination and racism, but following their move to the suburbs – a process that began after World War II – and after improving their level of education, they experienced upward mobility from the working to the middle class, similarly to Poles, Irish, and Italians (Brodkin 1998; Horowitz 2008).

Thus, Jews generally integrate well into the society in which they live from the social, cultural, professional, and economic perspectives, even if they remain a distinct ethno-cultural group. As such, they are particularly vulnerable to attacks from the underprivileged, who direct their resentment towards mainstream society at Jews (Alidadi et al. 2012; Ben-Rafael 2017).

Antisemitism, in the most simplified caption, is a negative perception of Jews. Perceptions of antisemitism imply that some kind of phenomenology exists exterior to those who report about it. Clearly, every person or group of persons tends to report their perceptions of that phenomenology through the lens of their own characteristics, experiences, and, admittedly, biases. Jews' prevalent status as a minority in the society as a whole typically generated parallel positions of Jews versus the hegemonic others in different places (DellaPergola 2020c; Graham 2018). Classic antisemitism is defined as beliefs that Jews are bad by nature and cause disasters to their "host" societies. Furthermore, antisemitic myths accuse Jews of controlling banks and businesses, and incorporate the practice of discrimination against Jews. Recently, "new antisemitism" had been embedded in the political left, the right, and radical Islam. It denies Jews the right to belong to the family of nations (Ben-Rafael 2017).

In the next section, previous research findings regarding socio-cultural integration as well as relations between Jews and the Hungarian majority, including antisemitism, will be presented.

Patterns of Integration Among Jews in Contemporary Hungary: Previous Studies

Historically, Jews favored and were favored by multinational structures that were non-exclusive and culturally non-committal. Clearly, on this account, Jews – as any other sector of European society – shared and were bound to be affected by more general trends emerging, for better or worse. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the European Union has constituted the main area of residence and, hence, an influential frame of reference for Jews in Europe. Under these circumstances, the nature and quality of interactions between Jewish minorities and national majorities within European societies becomes of paramount importance.

The crucial issue is whether or not a tolerant and pluralistic environment can be created across the European continent – within the EU and outside of it – where the various components of national and religious cultures can be recognized as equally legitimate and where minority cultures not defined by a specific territory can obtain the same recognition and legitimacy as the territorially based majorities. Jews in Europe seem to be caught between two opposing challenges: hostility and antisemitism (implicit or explicit) on the part of the majority on the one hand, and acceptance by and assimilation with the society on the other (DellaPergola and Staetsky 2020). Furthermore, each local manifestation of antisemitism should be studied separately on the merits of the particular society and culture within which it occurred (DellaPergola 2020c; see also Graham 2018).

According to a 2018 FRA (Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union) report, 41 percent of Jews aged 16–34 have considered emigrating from Europe because of antisemitism over the last five years. Antisemitism's role as the main factor encouraging emigration might be enhanced by perceptions regarding governments' responses and efforts to eliminate it, which are considered overwhelmingly inadequate. A most recent report regarding Hungary submitted by the Kantor Center (2020) claims that although the government distances itself from antisemitism, the growing far-right discourse on public platforms includes antisemitic tropes. Antisemitic incidents also include vandalism and verbal attacks (Kantor Center 2020).

The rate of antisemitic attitudes among the adult Hungarian population remained similar between 1995 and 2006. However, after a moderate rise in the following years, a significant growth of antisemitism was observed in 2009. The results indicate that while the proportion of those latent antisemitic sentiments remained nearly constant, blunt instances of antisemitism became significantly more frequent; this increase could reflect radicalization of the previously moderately antisemitic group. A more recent study, which compared data from the 2011 and 2017 surveys, analyzed the relationship between three types of antisemitism: religious, secular, and emotional. The first two represented the cognitive component of antisemitism and were composed of variables measuring one's agreement with different stereotypical statements. In turn, emotional antisemitism refers to the affective component. The results show that only measuring the cognitive components of antisemitism is insufficient and should always be complemented by the measurement of its emotional intensity (Barna and Kovács 2019).

The hypothetical explanatory factor behind the change is the rebirth of the "Christian-national" idea which appeared as a foundational element in the new Hungarian constitution, according to which the Christian culture is the ultimate unifying force of the nation, providing the inner essence and meaning of the state. In this discourse, being Christian is equated with being Hungarian. Self-de-

clared and self-defined Christian religiosity plays the role of a symbolic marker for accepting the national-conservative identity discourse and belonging to the “Christian-national” cultural-political camp, where antisemitic prejudice occurs more frequently than in other segments of society (Barna and Kovács 2019).

Methodology and Participants

The study is based on semi-structured interviews. This method allowed us to explore relations between Jews and non-Jews, as described by the participants themselves, as part of a more comprehensive depiction of their everyday lives (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias 2008). The research tool was an interview guide which included questions regarding the micro and macro levels described in the introduction section.

The interviews were conducted primarily in English, some in Hebrew or in Hungarian, with translation to English. The language proficiency of the participants, particularly in English, varied, but the researcher tried to maintain the original wording as much as possible. The “snowball” (chain-referral) sampling procedure was utilized through contacts of colleagues and friends.

The participants included seven Jewish and four non-Jewish interviewees. In the first group, most were men (five out of seven). Their age range was between 39 and 80 (average age: 55 years). As for their occupations, there were two university professors, a teacher, a computer programmer, two business owners, and a journalist. Six out of seven are native-born – it should be noted that almost all Hungarian Jews are native-born (see also Graham 2018). In addition, four non-Jewish interviewees participated in the study. Three of them are men between the ages of 28 to 64 (average age: 45 years). The group is made up of a PhD student, a lawyer, a pastor (the head of a theological college), and a university professor. All non-Jewish interviewees are native-born. It should be noted that two out of four non-Jewish interviewees have Jewish fathers. However, one of them is a pastor and the other defined himself as “Roman-Catholic.” Thus, according to Jewish *Halacha* (religious laws guiding behavior in every aspect of life) and their socialization, they are non-Jewish by definition.

Micro Perceptions

Feeling "at home": "My home is Hungary"

This section will start with an analysis of themes from the Jewish point of view represented by seven interviewees. It seems that their affiliation with Hungary or, for some, Budapest in particular, ranges from strong feelings towards Hungary, through transnational affiliation (particularly with Israel), to total alienation. Their testimonies will be presented in order, along this spectrum, and integrated into a discussion at the end of this section.

K. is the one respondent who seems to be the most attached to Hungary: "My home is Hungary,"[1] he says and elaborates on his strong cultural attachment: "I'm Hungarian, I dream in Hungarian, I count in Hungarian and so on. I know Hungarian literature [...] I know Hungarian history much better than any other history."

J. also perceives Hungary as her home: "My home is Hungary. I feel good here." However, she is ambivalent regarding Hungarians – personally, politically, and culturally: "I don't like them so much [...] because of what they think [...] the politics [...]. At the beginning, we were democrats. Now it is over [...] but I do like many people here, lots of friends, the food [...] here I know how to do business."

The other Jewish interviewees express even more ambivalence regarding their feelings of affiliation with the Hungarian society. Although for G. Budapest is "home" culturally and ideologically, Hungarian people as a whole make him feel uneasy. His words contain an implicit hint of disappointment in them: "I don't really identify with the Hungarian narrative of history and this Hungarian identity. Hungarians mostly regard themselves as victims of others and this is the main narrative [...] but I feel at home in Budapest which is the town of culture and pretty much multi-cultural. It has a strong liberal tradition."

He feels at home in Hungary but mostly refers to Israel as his "second home." He further elaborates: "My son lived there for five years. One of my grandchildren was born there, so she is 'Sabra' [a colloquial term for an Israeli-born person – L.L.]. I am very proud that I have a 'Sabra' grandchild and I love Israel and when I can, I go to Israel."

P. refers to his affiliation with a broader perspective of Hungarian history, as being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He states: "I would hardly say that I'm Hungarian [...]. I'm a Hungarian Jew but it's very important to understand that – not only for me but for most of Hungarian Jews – Hungary refers to when it was

1 Repeated statement expressed by several Jewish participants.

Austria-Hungary [...] My family is partly from Slovakia, partly from Romania, partly from Serbia."

He does feel "at home" in Hungary but also has a transnational connection with Ukraine: "I feel at home here. At the same time, I feel [...] at home in Russia as well as in Ukraine." It seems that P. is not as rooted in Hungarian society as he claims, and reminds of someone with multiple-transnational feelings of affiliation.

S. is even more explicit and states that she does not feel at home in any country, not even in her home town: "[I don't feel at home] anywhere, I am the 'wandering Jew.' I lived in various places, lived in England for four years. In the United States [...] I am here because my family is here and I do not feel good here [...] due to politics [...] I am divorced and cannot move the children [...] I am stuck here [...]. My parents are quite old and I am the only child. This is also part of the thing."

Z., the only immigrant among the interviewees (although from another post-communist country), does not feel at home in Budapest at all: "I do not feel at home at all. No. Because those who are my age, now everybody left. Everybody is integrated in New York, probably. In New York I would feel at home." She elaborates on her antagonism towards Hungary:

> I don't understand them. It's a minefield. It was a big culture shock [...]. I thought that because I know the language it will be very easy to melt in. But then I went to law school and I was marginalized as are immigrants [...]. They have a different temperament: We invite people home immediately, we put food on the table, even if we don't have. It's a very different culture [...]. I respect them, they're very good professionals in many ways, but to make a joke I have to think four times because it could be offensive.

The four non-Jewish interviewees also expressed different feelings with regard to being "at home" in Hungary. They seem to be less ambivalent on this issue, although they are not totally committed. Some refer to particular cities or settlements which for them constitute a "home" in Hungary. Similarly to the analysis of Jewish participants' statements, their perceptions and feelings will be presented in sequence, from the most "rooted" to the one that is most critical.

L. seems to be the most attached to her family house in a small settlement near Budapest: "Feeling home is not just about place. It's also about the people around me. That for me is really important, the location as well. I live in a house with my family now, which was built at the end of the nineteenth century and the builders were my great-grandparents."

P.S. also feels at home in a specific location (Budapest) rather than in Hungary in general: "I feel at home in Budapest, Budapest is my hometown [...] I have strong connections with Budapest, I think, stronger than with Hungary. But I like Hungarian literature and music as well." In addition to that, P.S. feels at

home in various other places such as Rome and Vienna, where he used to live for several years.

H. describes several "homes" in Hungary and Israel, referring to his parents' different roots and ethnic origin:

> I feel at home in Budapest, in Hungary. But not everywhere in Hungary. For instance, there is another town in Hungary in which I feel at home – Szeged. Because this was the hometown, not only because my mother was born there, but also one of my favorite people, Emmanuelle, lives there [...] I also feel at home in Israel. Because Israel is a very important place. [...] first time I was there, I was with my father and I remember we were standing at the seashore in Tel Aviv [...] looking at the sea and he told me that this is the only place besides Hungary where he would have been able or would like to live.

I., who is a pastor, describes his relationship with his homeland, Hungary, in the most controversial way: "I don't regret that I was born here, on this soil. I like and love this place and language, although I had several problems with the authorities when I was young."

It seems that for almost all native-born Jewish interviewees, Hungary feels like "home" – emotionally and culturally, although with different intensity and a certain criticism. Political issues and the Hungarian society's transition from a post-communist, relatively liberal community to a more right-wing one constitutes the basis for criticism and even disappointment, as do some cultural norms. However, two interviewees do not feel at home in Hungary: one of them is an immigrant and the other feels "stuck" there and would prefer to emigrate. Most of them also perceive Israel as a second, or equivalent, home and a few have transnational affiliation with other countries.

All non-Jewish interviewees feel very much at home in their home towns in Hungary (for some of them it is not Budapest). The connections with their Hungarian roots are more prevalent than among the Jewish participants. This is obvious given the "majority versus minority" history in Hungary, which uprooted many Jews from the countryside. However, some of the interviewees also expressed transnational affiliation with other countries. In addition, two of them who had Jewish fathers expressed strong attachment to Israel as well. One of them even expressed critical attitudes towards Hungary, although he did not specify the reasons.

Although this study is qualitative and thus not representative of the entire Hungarian population, it seems that the two groups of interviewees, both Jews and non-Jews, feel at home in Hungary and are attached to its culture and history. In addition, non-Jews seem to be more "rooted" in the country. However, there are other countries which "feel like home"; some Jewish and non-Jewish interviewees are somewhat critical towards some of its policies, although it was not always expressed explicitly and in a detailed manner.

Social Integration

Social integration, which will be presented in this section, focuses on the structure of the participants' social networks: within their own ethnic group, with the majority society or transnational ones.

Let us start with the Jewish interviewees. G., who is a secular Jew, states that he has mostly Jewish friends: "I am obviously a child of Holocaust survivors and my friends and my acquaintances are mostly Jewish; [they] come from the same background." By "the same background," G. means that his friends share the same idealistic values and political attitudes which go against Orban's right-wing regime: "Here in Budapest, we are sharply divided with my own Jewish friends who are mostly liberal, democratic, anti Orbán regime." K.'s network is mainly Jewish as well, based on his community and work as a Chabad emissary: "Although I live in Hungary, almost all my friends are Jewish, I work with Jews, I deal with Jews. Thank God, many Jews live in Budapest, so it's easy to find Jewish friends." S. also has mainly Jewish friends who she knows from "high school, with whom [she] was brought up and later – from the university."

J. describes her social life in a positive way and claims she has plenty of friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, adding: "even my husband is not Jewish." A. reports having many non-Jewish friends, although he is very affiliated with the Neolog community. Since his time at school and university came during the communist era, no one knew who belonged to any religion:

> When I was a student in high school or at the university, it was the communist regime and this regime was against all religions [...] So, in my class there were 30 students and we never talked about religion. [...] Ten years after graduation, we met after the regime change, and we realized there that 'you are Jewish' [...]. So that's why I have a lot of friends who are not Jews and I have some friends who are Jews.

P. describes mainly professional, transnational social networks. From his words, it seems that he does not have what he calls "private" friends in either country: "So my friends are not [...] private friends but professional friends [...]. I don't have nonprofessional friends here. I have a lot of professional friends in Russia."

When asked about her best friends, Z. says she has primarily transnational networks and seems to have no Hungarian friends at all: "All my friends are from abroad. Armenia – my best friend, she's from Armenia, from Romania, from the US. I have one girl who's converted to Judaism who's Hungarian... I have colleagues with whom I get along very well [...]. I don't have any non-Jewish Hungarian friends. [...] I live here, I speak the language but no, I can't even recall one single person."

From the non-Jewish point of view, when asked about having Jewish friends, L. answered in a sarcastic manner. She jokingly referred to Jewish friends as part of a bizarre collection. Most of her friends, however, are not Jewish: "[…] of course: Lesbian Jewish friends, the best part. (Laughing) Yes. Yes. I collect them, sometimes, as I collect stamps, I collect this kind of people (laughing). No, this is just a joke, yeah, I have Jewish friends […] Most of my friends are non-Jewish, mainly Christian Lutheran."

P.S. describes his social network as consisting of Hungarian friends, but also as transnational, since his community is an international one: "My best friends are in Hungary and in Italy. And I have friends… because of the community, which is highly international. I have very good friends in other European countries, some of them even in Africa, but most of them are in Europe."

P. S. does not have Jewish friends, although it is important to him: "It would be important for me to have Jewish friends. Among my closest friends there are none, but it's not because I am… I'm not open to them."

I., who is a pastor, initially claimed he did not have many friends, but he did not specify whether they were Jewish or not. While describing his Jewish Israeli friends, he started to recall a few: "I don't have many friends, but I have a few very good friends. For example, one is a lady who lives in Tel Aviv, she's a journalist […]. There is another person and she comes to Hungary every August and September, there is also another teacher, a university professor."

Later, he adds: "I have lots of good friends in the Jewish community."

H. definitely prefers Jewish friends. Although he defined himself as non-Jewish, it seems that his Jewish identity is very strong, probably due to having a Jewish father who H. mentions throughout the interview: "I feel more comfortable with Jewish people. If there are two people, one of whom is not Jewish and one that is Jewish, and they are equal in all other terms, I would choose the Jewish."

Some Jewish interviewees, both secular and religious, describe social networks which are ethnic-based in their structure and constitute a kind of community with which they work and share similar values and attitudes. Others have mixed social networks – Jewish and non-Jewish – along with transnational connections. Only one Jewish interviewee seems to have no friends in Hungary and only transnational networks. One possible explanation for that might be that she is the only immigrant in the group. As for the non-Jewish respondents, they represent a spectrum: from having no Jewish friends to preferring Jews over non-Jews.

Macro Perceptions

Relations between Jews and Non-Jews – Hungary and Antisemitism: "They Smile at You but Behind Your Back, They Hate You"

When the seven Jewish interviewees were asked to describe relations between Jews and the majority society, they seemed to have different opinions. While those who are more religious expressed a rather idealized picture, those who are relatively secular and assimilated offered undeniably critical reflections. They also pointed to recent manifestations of antisemitism.

K., a religious Chabad member, has the most positive perception regarding relations between Jews and non-Jews in contemporary Hungary. He seems to believe that being Jewish in contemporary Budapest is particularly safe: "We can live a safe religious life in Hungary, nowadays. It's easy. [...]. I believe the safest place for living a Jewish life in Europe is Hungary today, there's no safer place in Europe than Hungary." He reiterates that point throughout the interview and elaborates: "You don't need to hide anything [...], so you can eat in a Kosher restaurant, [...] you can wear outside the Tzitzit, and the Kippah, so it's easy, as it was in New York, 30 years ago."

K. perceives antisemitism in Hungary as a result of the demise of the communist regime and the emergence of liberalism that followed it: "In the 90s, when the communist era collapsed, many political ideals have come up from ground zero, even the antisemitic [...], it's just freedom of speech and freedom of basic rights in a free country, can speak [about] everything, and antisemitism appeared immediately."

G. also thinks that after the fall of the communist regime things changed for the worse for Jews in Hungary: "After the Hungarian political system converted to the democratic way [...], antisemitism started immediately. Just like in other post-communist countries; this was a shock for Hungarian Jews."

Furthermore, K. emphasizes that Hungary actually had the largest number of Jewish survivors, compared with other European countries: "So this is why it hurts, the highest proportion of survivors came back to Hungary and started a new life, more than in any other country, for example: [..] The Jewish community in Poland disappeared." As a person in charge of an organization which combats antisemitism, K. is aware of data and facts on this phenomenon: "It didn't change in the last 20 years, whatever government came and went, one third of Hungarian society believes that antisemitic stereotypes are true." However, K. describes recent legisla-

tion against antisemitism: "They just try to use this rule against people who just shout antisemitic speeches, and since community dignity has been protected by law in Hungary in the last eight years, so, if someone breaks this law, he has to pay some fine."

Regarding Holocaust denial, K. says it is also forbidden by Hungarian law: "if someone says the Holocaust was not a real thing, he is punished immediately by the jury's decision."

A. who is also a religious person, expresses similar opinions to K. when it comes to Jews in Hungary. He describes them as an integral part of the country's social fabric: "Hungarian Jews are very integrated in Hungarian society, very integrated in Hungarian culture […]. We have been here for 200 years and we have a lot of interfaces with non-Jews." Similarly to K., he perceives governmental actions against antisemitism as very efficient and firm: "[…] Antisemitic attacks, verbal attacks, are fewer and fewer every year."

G. emphasizes that most Hungarian Jews perceive themselves as part of the majority in an extreme manner which is sometimes expressed by denying their Judaism: "The majority of Hungarian Jews regard themselves as Hungarian. Liberal Hungarians. They would even reject your suggestion that they are Jewish […] they may say that they have Jewish ancestors […]."

S. describes Hungarian Jews in similar terms: "The majority of Jews belong to this group; they are liberal, highly educated, multi-lingual and multi-cultural."

J., who is secular, also claims that life in Hungary is easy for Jews, but compared to K. and A., she is more aware of latent antisemitism, particularly outside of Budapest: "I think that being Jewish in Budapest is easy. It happens that I hear how they speak about Jews. I hear my employees who work in my restaurant saying that Jews are thieves, it happens. Outside of Budapest, in the villages, I think it is difficult [for Jews]. In the big cities, there is no problem."

When asked directly about recent developments, J. admits there have been some incidents involving antisemitism, racism, and homophobia and refers to Hungarians' actions during WWII:

> They [the Hungarians – L.L.] do not like Jews, gypsies, immigrants… blacks, homosexuals. This is Hungary […]. They are not ready to take responsibility. People still say: 'Enough with the Holocaust, I did not do it, what do I care?' But Hungarians helped. The Nazis had nothing to do, just to sit like that (she demonstrates sitting on a couch). If today anything would happen, I think it would be the same situation.

P. perceives the attitudes towards the Holocaust in a different way than J. He says Hungarian and secular-assimilated Jews share the same attitudes in this regard: "So, the average Hungarian believes that they have suffered as much as Jews did, and there is a big philosophical debate whether the Holocaust is part of Hun-

garian history or not. The assimilated Hungarian Jews naturally say it is part of Hungarian history, it is a tragedy for Hungarians as for the Jews."

However, P. briefly summarizes the situation by claiming: "There is antisemitism, there's no question, a lot. But even the strongest antisemite knows that it's forbidden to be antisemitic."

G. elaborates on his criticism towards the Hungarian government and its attitude towards the Holocaust as well as the responsibility of Hungarians in that context. This narrative appears in several of the interviews done for the purpose of this study, but G's attitude is the bluntest: "The Hungarian nationalistic government must have a new interpretation of the Holocaust which is that the Nazis are guilty and not the Hungarians [...] Hungary was an innocent angel, a victim of the Nazis. But Jews reject this message because Hungarians were deeply involved. So, Hungarian Jews are very suspicious of this new Holocaust memorial institution, memorial museum."

Z. describes contemporary antisemitism in Hungary. Even at her university, she senses antisemitic sentiments, even though there are no manifestations of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement ("I did not meet here BDS. No"). She contrasts it with the situation when she came to Budapest: "Ten or fifteen years ago, antisemitism was only in the margins. Now we obviously see that it's in the center, now we feel it. So, even in my university, on every single social ladder, we understand that it's not an advantage to be Jewish [...]. When I came here, it was cool to be Jewish, it was sexy to be Jewish, it was the Jewish Renaissance idea."

Z. goes on to describe the acceleration of xenophobia since the beginning of the refugee crisis in Europe, which also contributed to the rise of antisemitism in Hungary: "Diversity was cool and then suddenly, when nationalism became stronger after 2010 and, especially, after 2015, when the so-called refugee crisis started, [the situation] raised hatred and [being a Jew] became more than an offensive identity and Jews were kind of stuck together and again they turned to each other."

Jewish participants voice complex perceptions of relations between Jews and non-Jews as well as current antisemitism. On the one hand, there are those who emphasize the feeling of safety as a Jew in Hungary and claim that Jews are well integrated into Hungarian society. On the other hand, all of them acknowledge the existence of both overt and implicit antisemitism, although each of the interviewees attaches different importance to it. Some claim that contemporary antisemitism in Hungary emerged after the post-communist era, as a result of liberalism which has recently turned into xenophobia of all kinds, including antisemitism. Others said that Hungary is and has been an antisemitic society for decades, but has recently expressed it in more implicit ways due to the firm government policy designed to combat antisemitism. The issue of Hungari-

ans' responsibility for the Holocaust divides the interviewees into two groups: one claims that it is unforgivable, while the other seems to be more tolerant and attributes this denial to the Hungarians' constant self-imaging as perennial victims.

Perceptions regarding minority-majority relations in contemporary Hungary also differ according to religious versus secular affiliation. Those who are more secular tend to observe nuances of undercurrents of hate and antisemitism – despite the overt, positive, and allegedly inclusive policy of the government. Another point of view, expressed particularly by the more religious interviewees, is to acknowledge existing antisemitism, but focus on the "bright side" of current policy towards Jews and their successful integration into Hungarian majority. In the next section, non-Jewish perceptions regarding Jews in Hungary will be discussed.

Relations and Antisemitism in Contemporary Hungary: Non-Jewish Perceptions

Non-Jewish interviewees shared their personal experience and views regarding antisemitism. L. distinguishes between several groups of Hungarian Jews according to their visibility and also tries to connect that division with antisemitism: "Because if I am a non-Jewish person [...], it's easy to realize that they [Chabad] are Jews because of the hat, because of the hairstyle, the clothes, so they are visible. Actually, it's a form of antisemitism. I can believe that I am not antisemitic [...]. But with Neolog Jews it's more complicated because they are like you or me; they are not visible and they are always complaining, always [...]."

She elaborates on the description she gave and its connection with antisemitism in terms of "them" versus "us": "Antisemitism starts with thinking that they are different [...]. Because of the appearance or religious habits, but essentially they are different from us."

P. S. describes the atmosphere in his family of origin as antisemitic: "My grandfather was probably more antisemitic than my father was. My father occasionally spoke negatively about Jews, so did my mother [...] on the personal level, she had friends and she liked them, her Jewish colleagues." Although most of his family was antisemitic, P.S. himself claims he has not been. He attributes this to his religiosity as well as two socialization agents: his grandmother, who was religious, and his priest:

> As For me, I was never antisemitic because my grandmother was very religious, [...] the most Catholic person in the family. Interestingly, or maybe not, [...] she was not antisemitic [...]. It was forbidden to organize religious classes at public schools. The old priest who was there was following the Church's teachings which meant that antisemitism is bad [...]. He spoke with respect about Islam and about Judaism as well.

Although H. perceives contemporary Hungary as generally not antisemitic, he seems to be concerned about an extreme right-wing party, which he refers to as "Nazis":

> In Hungary, I think people are generally not interested in knowing who is Jewish and who is not. People usually don't know it. [...] There is, however, a political party in Hungary which is quite strong now, [...] which is far-right. [...] Its name is 'Jobbik,' an interesting name because it means right, it also means good. They are Nazis, but their popularity is not because they are Nazis but because they say the same things the communists said a long time ago and people like to hear: Ok, we'll raise the pensions, the salaries and so on. [...] This right-wing government is very much against this far right-wing movement and they [the extremists – L.L.] are very much depressed and repressed.

Contrary to others, pastor I. perceives Hungarian society as having been antisemitic for decades and even blames it for not doing enough to protect the Jews. It should be noted that I. had a Jewish father and part of his family died in the Holocaust: "We were not brave enough to defend our Jewish fellow countrymen. In my opinion, the truth is that we exploited, robbed, and killed them [...]. In Hungarian society there is quite a strong latent antisemitism which almost all political groups applied and were involved in. Even communists."

Some non-Jewish interviewees are aware of antisemitism; one of them was exposed to it as a child but is determined to fight it as an adult. Another interviewee was sensitive to antisemitism, but while her words and description of the Jewish community in Budapest implied the presence of antisemitic attitudes, she signaled no intention to fight them. Another one argues that although, on the surface, antisemitism is not an issue, its rise comes as the impact of the far-right which, for the moment, is under the control of the government. Only one of the interviewees criticizes Hungarian people as having been antisemitic for a long time and goes as far as blaming them for not doing enough to protect the Jews. He is half-Jewish and mentioned that his father was a Holocaust survivor.

The non-Jewish interviewees perceive antisemitism in a different manner than Jewish participants. While the former group seems to notice some antisemitic sentiments, the latter is more aware of their actual manifestations. Both are concerned with the problem or try to initiate a change through Christian-Jewish religious avenues, so as to address this phenomenon.

When asked about their personal motivation to be engaged with the Jewish community, L. is particularly interested in her home town's geographical area with regard to past relations between Jews and non-Jews. This inquiry is part of her academic interest as well: "The story of my family is part of the history of Hungary [...] I try to understand the representation of Jewish and non-Jewish communities [...], the economic and social connection between these groups in small cities in the countryside." In addition to her academic interest in Jewish lives in the past, she also mentions some distant Jewish roots which affect her in this regard: "Grandfather on my father's side was born in 1941 [...]. [He] was a Jew and his father's family was Jewish, but his mother was Christian [...]. When I heard about my Jewish roots, I was 13 years old [...]. Unfortunately, this line of my family tree is dead. Nobody is religious either, nobody is interested in Jewish roots except me."

P.S.'s personal interest in Jewish issues began in his childhood. He was about ten years old when he first encountered the subject of Jewish history and the Shoah. It was uncommon in Hungary to talk about it. He describes an incident which seems to have left a great impression on him:

> I was a child when I first heard about antisemitism, when I first [heard] about the Shoah, although it was suppressed. You know [...] people would not talk about it openly because the regime was not interested in it. I first came across this when I was, I think [...], ten or eleven years old. I was in class [...] and there were two boys in the class. One of them was of gypsy origin, the other was Jewish. They were both Catholic, but the father of the Jewish boy was a Jew. The half-Jewish boy insulted the gypsy boy for being gypsy, whereas the gypsy boy insulted him for being Jewish [...] The other boys at school were not kind to them. So it's not a kind thing to say to someone 'you are Jewish' or 'you are gypsy.' That was my first experience.

It seems that P.S. not only has pluralistic attitudes, but has also confronted antisemitic sentiments in his family of origin: "I sensed that there was antisemitism present among Catholics and Christians, but I never liked it, you know. I would not combat it at the time, but I didn't like it and I even contradicted my parents when they spoke badly about the Jews."

Pastor I. describes his engagement with the Jewish community due to his Jewish roots and the Holocaust, which affected his family as well: "I'm involved personally in the matter because my father was of Jewish origin and I'm also involved personally in the Holocaust because there are victims in my family."

The non-Jewish interviewees express different motives that urged them to be involved or interested in Jewish communities. While one of them has academic interest in Jewish history in her home town and very remote Jewish roots, the pastor declared that his interest stemmed from his Jewish origins and the Holocaust trag-

edy. Only one person from the non-Jewish group has no Jewish roots – in fact, he heard antisemitic sentiments expressed by his family and has felt compelled to stand up to antisemitism as part of his Christian values. He is not only interested in Jews per se, but in the well-being of minorities in general.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question of whether Jews in Hungary, particularly in Budapest, feel “at home” and integrated into the Hungarian society, or rather as a privileged minority. This subject, analyzed from the micro perspective, was accompanied by a macro point of view on minority-majority relations as well as implicit and explicit antisemitism, as perceived by Jewish and non-Jewish leaders and community activists.

The main findings of the study indicate that for almost all Jewish interviewees who are native-born, Hungary feels like “home” – “My home is Hungary,” most of them said. They feel strongly attached to its history and consider themselves integral parts of its culture and language, albeit their feelings vary in intensity. Furthermore, being socialized during the communist era, most of them were brought up as non-affiliates, or secular Hungarians, who did not have to identify as Jews. Thus, they can be characterized as an integrated or even assimilated ethnic group.

However, two interviewees do not feel at home in Hungary; whereas one of them is an immigrant, the other – although native-born – has transnational affiliations. As such, they can be defined as being more segregated from the Hungarian society. None of the interviewees, however, expressed perceptions or feelings of being a marginal ethnic group in Hungary.

In comparison, the non-Jewish interviewees are more rooted in Hungary and as members of the majority; they are of course part of Hungarian culture and history. However, two interviewees had Jewish fathers and although they define themselves and were brought up as Christians (one of them is a pastor), they express either transnational affiliations or more critical attitudes towards Hungarian people and culture.

Looking at their social networks, the Jewish interviewees have a mixture of friends: some have exclusively Jewish acquaintances, regardless of their religious affiliation, some have a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarian friends, while others prefer transnational social networks. As for the non-Jewish interviewees, the same pattern emerges: some have no Jewish friends, either by choice or due to an absence of Jews in their lives, whereas others have a few, perhaps even preferring Jewish over non-Jewish friends (the latter respondent is specifically a half-Jew).

As for antisemitism, it seems that the Holocaust plays an important part in its contemporary perceptions. It is a shadow that lurks over and emerges in most interviews. Some interviewees, both Jewish and non-Jewish, point to hidden but also overt manifestations of antisemitism which they perceive as being almost inherent to the Hungarian majority.

However, these perceptions vary particularly depending on the interviewee's level of religiosity. The more secular Jews perceive contemporary Budapest in a more critical way, although they admit that life in that city allows Jews to integrate with the majority society, at least allegedly. They sense an acceleration of antisemitism, albeit in forms that are not always overt. A possible explanation to these findings, which originate in some interviewees' words, is that those who are more religious are less critical regarding the government since they receive its support in building their own religious institutions and services. The Neologs or secular interviewees, on the other hand, seem to be more pluralistic in their attitudes and thus might expect to feel more genuinely included than in the past. However, the more religious interviewees seem to acknowledge the existence of antisemitism in Hungary as a fact, but they prefer to regard the firm actions of the current government against it as efficient and consider the integration of Jews to be extremely successful.

Non-Jewish interviewees also refer to relations between Jews and non-Jews, seeing the Holocaust as central to these relations. They believe Christian-Jewish religious organizations are bases for what they perceive as good relationships and cooperation. Antisemitism seems to be acknowledged by all of them, but in a subtler way compared to Jewish interviewees – they deem it hardly present today and note the government's firm stance against it. With one exception, all interviewees seem to be very careful with regard to the criticism of the current cabinet and the instances of antisemitism in Hungary throughout and after WWII. However, it should be noted that the non-Jewish interviewees were selected for this study due to their involvement and interest in the topic, whether academic or moral, or due to Jewish roots. Therefore, it could be expected they might have different and more positive attitudes compared to other Hungarians.

Although both Jews and non-Jews perceive Jews as a well-integrated ethnic group, it seems that the "glorious days" of Jews' impact on daily life in Budapest belong to the past. The non-Jewish interviewees perceive the primary Jewish contribution to Hungary in the cultural component, except for one who considers Jews an essential part of the city. If, hypothetically, one day Jews leave Budapest, it will "collapse," he claims. It seems those among the participants who are half-Jews voice more concerns in this regard, although they are both Christians and one of them is a pastor.

Conclusions

This qualitative study is a case-study which is limited in its results. However, the findings presented here imply that Jews in contemporary Hungary are well integrated in various fabrics of Budapest; most of them feel “at home” there and integral parts of Hungary, at least in the micro perspectives. However, some are aware of undercurrents of old and new antisemitism at the macro level – sentiments which affect Hungarian Jews’ sense of integration and affiliation. At the same time, it seems Jews have never before been protected by the government to such an extent, particularly compared to other contemporary European countries. Still, the degree of legal safeguards emphasizes their vulnerability as an ethnic group, as one of the Jewish (S.) interviewees bluntly summarizes: “We think it’s not the Hungarians who have to protect the Jews because we are also Hungarians. For us, it’s exclusion to give that specific statement; [it] means exclusion.”

These explicit and implicit streams, acknowledged by Jewish interviewees in particular (and some non-Jewish ones as well), might redefine Hungarian Jews (especially those living in Budapest) as a privileged minority rather than equal members of the majority – a status most of them have been striving to achieve for decades.

Future studies on a larger sample and utilizing quantitative methodology will increase our understanding of relations between Jews and non-Jews in contemporary Hungary. These further efforts, combined with findings from the study presented here, can serve as examples of majority-minority dynamics and suggest possible trajectories for better integration of minorities in contemporary Central Europe.