

BEYOND ASSIMILATION:

*Dilemmas of Jewish Identity in
Contemporary Hungary*

by

VICTOR KARÁDY

Delivered at Collegium Budapest

Budapest, 28 April 1993

Discussion Papers No. 2.

ISSN 1217 - 5811

ISBN 963 8463 05 8

Collegium Budapest/Institute for Advanced Study

H-1014 Budapest Szentháromság utca 2. Tel:(36-1) 156 1244 Fax:(36-1) 175 9539

The Transformations of Hungarian-Jewish Identity after the Shoah.

(Collective Identity, Some Generalities)

It is common sociological wisdom, that the study of collective identity belongs to the most complex problem areas of the social sciences, especially because of the difficulty to find objective indicators applicable to the social definition and the self-definition of groups. One author recently summed up this complexity by saying that 'Jewry is partly religion and partly nationality, in a changing mixture'. This was of course meant as a catch phrase, necessarily simplifying the problem, while it quoted some of its essential ingredients. Among the latter one should obviously stress the fact that collective identity is a construction, made of variable components, which, on its own turn, implies that it is always a matter of voluntary or arbitrary definition. If this is so, forms of collective identity must have basically historical characteristics, changing as they are with time and the (social) setting. Out of such over-simplified statements one can in many ways elaborate upon the real nature of collective identity. I will shortly refer to some of the major elaborations useful here, before applying them to the post-Shoah situation in Hungary.

Once it is accepted that collective identity is a historical construction out of various elements, it must be understood that the importance and weight of these vary strongly over time. This is in fact a fundamental statement if one reviews the best observed references of Jewish identity markers ranging from denomination and religious practices, language and language use, folklore, physical traits, socio-economic separateness and competences, intellectual frame of mind or community of destiny. Obviously enough, religion and economic specificities bore more weight in the ghettos or, generally, ere legal emancipation had taken place or secularisation started than later. In contemporary borderline cases it is possible to find people in the Diaspora or

even in Israel with a strong feeling to belong to the Jewish people but deprived of any 'objectivated' forms of 'Jewishness' whatsoever. Converts or culturally 'assimilated', 'modern' Jews may show, in many instances, decisively 'Jewish' spiritual or anthropological characteristics.

Once identity is considered as a matter of definition, it is inevitable to ask: definition by whom? Members of a community define themselves as distinct from others differently as outsiders may define them. To boot, both insiders and outsiders may suggest several concomitant definitions. Hence there are often competitive internal definitions of Jewishness, that is ways to fix who is a Jew and how is (or should be) a Jew by those who consider themselves as Jewish, as well as competitive external or social definitions, were not liable to much divergence, since religion was the paramount reference, though insiders and outsiders could complement it by various moral, economic, intellectual attributes. In the setting of secularization and modernization, both internal and social definitions of Jewishness tend to diverge vastly and give rise to conflictual elaborations.

Conflicts indeed emerge from various collective uses of the definition of identity, which as a rule respond to specific social purposes. The question is not only for whom, but also to what ends one defines oneself or the others in a particular way. 'Modern' or secular Jews in the Diaspora would stress, for example, the spiritual, intellectual or ethical implications of Judaism as well as the specific historical contribution of Jews to modernity, as against traditional evocation of denominational distinctiveness. Outside definitions can vary from positive or negative stereotypes and attributes to all sorts of (mostly antisemitic) phantasmagoria. One can add that most of these conflictual statements about who and what is Jewish display a large measure of interdependency. Both Jews and non-Jews refer to definitions put forward by each other to oppose, modify or specify them. Such statements thus constitute a vast spiritual battlefield where the stake is often one's own social

exclusiveness and distinction. Evidence is abundant to this effect for antisemites, for whom making Jews scapegoats for all social ills operates a sort of primitive classification allowing to put themselves on the right (or noble) side of society. But the matter is not less essential for Jewish groups, especially as regards the tensions between those having reached different historical stages or degrees of secularization and social mobility. Self-definition in terms of Orthodoxy or 'modernity' appears to be a powerful means to legitimize one's options as distinct from and superior to those adopted by others.

Once this kind of relationship between conflicting definitions, especially between self-definitions, is stated, it is unavoidable to raise the question concerning another conflict situation generated by the experience of a given collective identity. Such conflicts are particularly persistent and vehement in groups under pressure or in danger like Jews. In contemporary circumstances everyone concerned can, indeed must develop attitudinal schemes to come to terms with his or her identity, accepting or refusing, claiming or dissimulating, being proud or ashamed of, hating or appreciating it, just to name the opposite extremes. Thus in the historical past of modern Jewry it is easy to differentiate between people having a very same social or intellectual standing but displaying utterly different relationships with their given Jewish condition. This confirms the thesis that identity is by no means only objectively determined by birth, education, social consensus. It is at the same time always a matter of choice or of existential strategy. In borderline cases one can actually escape from the implications of identity imposed from outside - as did many Jewish converts from the consequences of Jewishness - without fully parting from the experience of the 'difference'.

Thus, in the study of identity, a distinction should be systematically made between objective markers of identity (language, anthropological traits, cultural competencies, etc.) and those merely related to experience from the

inside, that is states of consciousness. The meaning of the former can go together with or be different from that of the latter. In modern circumstances the autonomy of identity-consciousness tend to become maximal in the sense that the experience of extreme forms of alterity may be matched with none the less accomplished forms of 'assimilation'. This explains both the dependency of definitions of identity -- as an experience -- on historical circumstances and its transformations over time -- sometimes even within a generation --, that is their remarkable changeability often equalling to forms of reversibility for the same groups or individuals during their life cycle. Strategic attitudes can indeed evolve with situations, especially with such dramatic changes as those Jewry was exposed to before, during and after the Shoah in East-Central Europe. The Hungarian case will offer striking examples of similar reversibility.

(Background circumstances of post-Shoah identity strategies.)

In order to interpret findings concerning new identity choices of surviving Jewry, one must remember that pre- and post-Shoah Jewry in Hungary differed not only in size -- reduced as it was to one-third of its former numbers -- but also by its socio-professional and intellectual make-up as much as by its prospects for further mobility within social hierarchies. The social profile of a group is strongly connected, as we shall see, with its identity options.

One major factor of this evolution can be clearly linked to the social selection operated by the persecutions themselves. Selective bloodletting was due in Hungary to a various set of circumstances. Propertied and/or educated sections of local Jewry were to some extent exempted from the Final Solution owing to efforts of their Gentile friends and allies or even of the government (ere complete Nazi take-over). Deportations into death camps uprooted almost fully the provincial half of local Jewry but only partly the other half living in

Budapest. This also meant that a hitherto unprecedentedly high proportion of the latter could seek conversion (which their provincial co-religionists did not have the time to attempt) in the panic-stricken months of spring and Summer 1944. Though solicited under pressure and duress, those numerous acts of baptism deeply and definitely modified the denominational composition of the persecuted. Those from some provincial cities (like Szeged and Debrecen) were deported to Austrian camps where risks were somewhat reduced compared to Auschwitz. Certified degrees of assimilation, such as demonstrated by baptism or mixed marriage, entailed a measure of protection by social partners, official authorities or the Churches. The rich and the best established ones could sometimes buy their freedom via corruption or by collective bargaining. The escape of the powerful Weisz family or the 'protected train' escorted by the SS to Switzerland offered notorious instances of this.

Thus, even if selectivity did not always operate in the sense of some sort of 'survival of the (socially) fittest' -- since, for one counter-example, women and the elderly from Budapest were less exposed than men or younger people in general -- it did introduce a well qualifiable bias in the destruction. Globally it brought about, paradoxically enough, a move toward upward mobility and modernity of the survivors both in terms of socio-professional stratification and traditionalism. With the quasi-elimination of provincial communities Orthodox Jewry all but disappeared in Hungary. Rural Jewry suffered much heavier losses than that of the capital city. The higher brackets of the urban middle classes were generally less decimated than rank and file low class Jewry. Converts or those prepared for assimilation survived in larger proportions than others. As a general conclusion one can state that survivors represented the culturally more Magyarized and socially better integrated sections of Jewry in Hungary.

These basic traits became more marked by the new prospects of social mobility and integration opened up by the Liberation, for rather obvious reasons. The new regime not only immediately lifted all restrictions that had been enforced against Jews by the antisemitic legislation after 1938. Indeed in many ways aspects of the earlier negative discrimination turned into a positive one, so that Jews were more tempted than ever before by a new start implicating the abandonment (if not desertion) of the rests of their particularistic identity. The call for entry into the new power structure was immediately effective: Jews could not help being considered as the natural political supports of the new regime, duely certified anti fascists as they were. The 'change of the guard' of a new type pushed for the rapid replacement of the disqualified civil service staff of the old regime. The need for reliable public servants and a new political personnel put Jews collectively in a good bargaining position in many markets of traditional middle class activity on the strength of both their 'political capital' and specific educational assets. It also opened up hitherto inaccessible avenues of success in the armed forces, in diplomatic careers and in the newly shaped political bureaucracy of the Party-State, which, for all practical purposes, offered better chances than ever before of complete social integration.

Such unprecedented new prospects for professional success in the State apparatus proved to be all the more tempting that other, more traditional roads to middle class careers were progressively closed down following the Communist take-over. Now the classical road of 'independent bourgeois' existence was the one most compatible with the maintenance of various forms of particularistic Jewish identity. The more and more hysterical anti-bourgeois discourse of the new regime started as early as in 1946, the period when the new coinage was introduced and when the main capitalist enterprises were nationalized. This was followed in later years by the expropriation of the trading and industrial petty bourgeoisie and by the transformation of the liberal

professions into wage-earners in State run firms. Thus the new patterns of integration, offered by the regime, changed soon from a mere temptation into an almost inescapable imperative, once Stalinist rule came to be definitely established after the 'watershed year' of 1948. Its social price was as high as the elimination of all the major paths of socio-professional ascent hitherto open (and often preferentially reserved) to Jews. Thus the attraction of the Communist way was matched in the same time by the brutal rejection, indeed destruction, of earlier Jewish social life-worlds and economic modes of existence.

Hence the bloody process of re-stratification and the post-Shoah socio-political conditions in Hungary were only partly favourable to further Jewish social mobility. For many Jews they represented a new kind of economic and existential disaster. However these conditions were shaped, they acted as a mere framework or an outside determination of identity choices. They did demonstrate a hitherto unknown degree of objective assimilation and signified for many a call for a new experience of social integration, but still left open a set of options or strategies which could include just as well as exclude the Communist path. Here we have ingredients of a pilot case for an identity crisis. On the one hand 'objective' identity factors and many apparently not less 'objective' interests most often militated in favour of the positive integration in the new regime, but many other factors drove Jews to make opposite choices. On the other hand all these 'objective' reasons were over-determined by the 'subjective' experience of the Shoah, which on its own turn, could lead to utterly divergent elaborations.

Socio-political predispositions, attraction and constraint were not enough to channel Jewish identity choices in the very same direction, whatever heavy their impact proved to be. To boot, opposing choices could find equally satisfactory reasons of legitimacy. Thus post-Shoah Jewry in Hungary found itself in an exceptionally 'open' historical situation, in a

properly 'Promethean' state, where background circumstances could motivate various opposite options without being sufficient to impose any one of them exclusively of others. This unique character of the historical situation was due to the uniqueness of the experience of the Shoah.

(Identity choices as responses to the Shoah.)

Obviously enough, the traumatism caused by the Shoah was the primary experience in the determination of all further existential choices for surviving Jewry. Whatever background variables could come into play, the paramount importance of the Shoah consolidated the consciousness of Jews of their radical collective alterity and hence limited Jewish options to those which broke with the past.

It is well known that in earlier times Hungarian Jewry was strongly committed to Magyardom in cultural as well as political terms. This meant among other things that its majority and officialdom successively espoused the great national causes since the Vormärz (which excluded support for the Zionist or Folkist type dissimilationist movements) and that in Trianon Hungary its mother tongue was already almost fully Magyar. Most Orthodox or even Hassidic communities shared this national identification with the host country, though they firmly opposed any concessions to denominational laxism or secularization. Now this 'Jewish-Magyar symbiosis', comparable only to Western European patterns, collapsed as a consequence of the Shoah, contrary to Western or even other East European developments. Indeed, unlike in Poland or in the Nazi-occupied West, Hungarian Jewry fell above all victim of local 'national socialism', though the German occupation in March 1944 served as a necessary condition of the realization of its tragic fate. Elsewhere the Nazis were just as enemies of Jews as of the nation state or, for that matter (like in Poland) of the national elite and the remaining

population. This basic fact could to some extent unite Jews and non Jews, even in a basically antisemitic society like Poland, in their fight against Fascism and make Liberation a common euphoric experience (though such unity had no chance to be maintained afterwards). In Hungary there was no noteworthy movement of resistance nor much significant collective action to protect Jews (in spite of individual acts of bravery of some Church leaders, both Catholic and Protestant, or anti-Nazi officials), so that the defeat of the Reich and its Hungarist acolytes left the bulk of Jews and non Jews as divided as ever. What was undoubtedly Liberation for Jews appeared much more like another occupation for most non-Jews. The Army of Liberation was received here as the instrument of foreign domination. In due course the public image of the new regime came to be identified with that of the earlier social underdogs, that of the Jews and the 'proles'. In such circumstances the earlier normal pattern of Jewish-Magyar identification could not be maintained. All further identity choices included a marked distance from the national past which was considerably re-evaluated to the negative among the survivors.

But 'objective' markers of 'assimilated' or 'modern' Jewish identity could not escape neither a revaluation in terms of the consciousness of 'normality'. The souvenir of the persecutions and the mere idea that such monstrosities could occur, forcibly developed the feeling of radical Jewish alterity valid henceforth for future times. This was of course true not only of Hungarian circumstances. Still, the post-Shoah pattern of alterity was probably an even more crucial existential experience in Hungary where the survivors had been received with mixed feelings, where there was no or few organized public share of mourning or sorrow, where the authorities refused the idea of specific material compensations on the pretext of the country's being far too poor (and also because, as a communist fellow traveller put it: 'in the old regime the whole working people had suffered'), where 'petty Nazis' enjoyed far-fetched immunity within the Communist 'mass party' and where the new

regime's populist demagogy admitted, from 1946 onwards, unpunished collective manifestations of antisemitism whenever they were directed against the 'exploiting classes'.

Thus instead of playing down the disastrous effects of the Shoah, generalizing the consciousness of Jewish alterity, the consequences of Liberation enlarged the gulf between Jewish self-perception -- basically as victims -- and the social definition of Jewry -- basically as undesirable aliens. The tension between the two gave rise to the new patterns of Jewish identity which, in each case, tended to bridge the gulf either by the self-conscious acceptance of alterity (but of a qualitatively different kind compared with what antisemites suggested) or by the minimization or dissimulation of alterity on the strength of the communist or liberal-national value system. Whatever these choices could be, it must be stressed that each was a reaction to the emerging post-Shoah situation. The reconstruction of Jewish identity after 1945 could hardly draw upon traditional or inherited assets, such as specific cultural goods, anthropological particularities or socio-economic competencies, as in earlier times, on account of the above-mentioned advancement of 'objective assimilation'. In this respect Hungarian Jewry could be regarded as fully 'Westernized'. Thus Jewish self-definition became, more completely than ever in modern Hungarian history, purely reactive or reflexive by nature, with sole reference to collective perils and necessities in the recent past and, by implication, in the present -- whether they were openly or tacitly admitted, dissimulated or relegated among 'repressed' thoughts. Beyond the variability of actual identity options the essentially responsive character of Jewish-Hungarian self-understanding served as an implicit pattern of unification of post-Shoah Jewry.

This did little though to minimize conflicts between strategies of management of the self: indeed reactions to the same collective trauma took three utterly different shapes, those of Communism, Zionism and the

remodelling of earlier assimilationist options. Elements of these could in some cases be combined or they could be adopted successively in time, without ceasing to be conflictual, one opposing the others. In this respect conflicts emerged not only within families or circles of friends and allies, but also within one's own choices made in different periods of one's life. Identity crisis was raging within groups but also inside the self. Adults could join the Communist Party and have their new-born children baptized in the same time or push their younger kins to get enrolled in the Zionist youth movement (while this was legally possible). During the years 1945-1949, which figured the heyday of both Zionism and the popularisation of Communism among Jewish Hungarians, the rate of baptism was as high as during the rising tide of fascism in 1932-1933.

Responsiveness of new identity options, however conflictual they were, also meant that each included an often ambiguous, confused or contradictory combination of attitudes and ways of behaviour representing forms of disinvolvement with earlier 'naively' (that is sincerely) adopted assimilationist options, which had proved their illusory social effectiveness. Practically the desire to 'break away from the past' did not mean that earlier assimilationist schemes were rejected outright (like mixed marriages or baptism): on the contrary. They were occasionally as consciously resorted to as before, but in a next key. Thus Communist cadres could marry daughters of working class extraction to increase the 'political capital' of their family. Even baptism was differently sought for than before, since entry into a Christian Church was not always preceded by exit from Judaism. The declaration of the latter was indeed often 'forgotten', for obvious strategic reasons (for example, not to cut sources of Joint aid...). Nothing but the monstrous trauma of the Shoah can explain the ultimately disorderly character of and simultaneous recourse to identity options, which would have excluded one another in earlier times.

(The three options. The functional equivalence of Zionism and Communism.)

Still, 'breaking away from the past' marked each option. In this respect Zionism and Communism became, in the first years of the new regime, strongly competitive and functionally equivalent, if not, to be sure, always exclusive options. (Members of Hashomer Hatsair rightly felt that they joined socialist ideals to Zionism.) Both signified and guaranteed indeed, however differently, the most radical departure from past practices, particularly as far as basic Jewish attitudes to society and to identity were concerned. Let us sum up some of the essential similarities first and then the major dissimilarities of Communism and Zionism in Hungary. In spite of appearances, the former seems to have carried as much weight as the latter.

First, both Zionism and Communism were conceived of as a project with reference to social Utopias or ideal societies to be build by several generations. In both such societies the load of Jewishness in a hostile social environment would be fully removed and 'Jewish alienation' radically done away with. This was the spiritual foundation upon which rested the functional equivalence of the two options.

Secondly, both resided upon universalistic, though contrasting principles. Communism promised the 'normalisation' of the social condition of Jewry by its integration in the classless social set-up ('the melting in the masses') which, among other types of social differentiations, would ignore racial, denominational or ethnic discrimination. Zionism appealed to the none the less universal principle of nationhood. Jewry would be 'normalized' as a separate people and an established nation state among other peoples and states. Their secular character (since religious Zionism was hardly existent in Hungary) confirmed the ideological kinship of Zionism and Communism in this respect. Both in fact proposed an ideology of modernization along universal

lines, though for Zionist such modernity must be embodied in the new Jewish state, serving as a home for Jews dispersed all over the world.

Thirdly, and as a consequence, universalism was a major component not only of Communist and Zionist ideology, but also of their political practice via their paramount reference to an ideal community. Obviously enough, for Communists this community encompassed the whole 'progressive' or 'peace-loving' part of humanity (as against the 'imperialists', the 'reactionaries', or the 'war-mongers'), while for Zionist it was limited to the Jews of the Diaspora. Still, in whatever different forms, both options developed or legitimized a sense of (and the feeling to belong to) a universal community, hitherto impossible or repressed, especially for Jews. Earlier much stigmatized 'Jewish cosmopolitanism' could thus find its positive correspondent in 'proletarian internationalism', while the formerly not less vehemently denounced manifestations of 'Jewish solidarity' across the borders won a reappraisal as assets in the overdue unification and resettlement of the Jewish people. Let us add that this reappraisal was just as spiritual as practical. As inter-dependency was operationalized on the political, economic and even military level among movements and countries of the 'progressive world' (as dictated by Moskovite interests), so did world wide Jewish mutual aid make feel its effects in Budapest and elsewhere in Eastern Europe through the philanthropic services of the Zionist organisations or the famous Joint.

Fourthly, in a more historical and sociological view, both options were new for Hungarian Jewry inasmuch as before the Second World War they touched only a slight minority among them. Communism, in spite of its transitory success in 1919, all but disappeared in the inter-war years from the political landscape of the country and of the Jewish intelligentsia, not lastly since most of its leaders and activists were staying (or perishing) in emigration. Zionism had always been marginal among modern Hungarian identity options as against the dominant assimilationist credo. It was actively

fought against by the officialdom of community organizations. It emerged only from the Jewish resistance and the Shoah as a major identity choice. Thus in the general depreciation of established values, both Communism and Zionism proposed a new start with new principles that could not be as yet compromised and was shrouded in the heroic halo of non-conformism.

Fifthly, their very radical ideological standing allowed and motivated a high level of over-investment of both options with affective, moral, political and even aesthetic values. The militant organization of Communist and Zionist movements obviously added to this over-investment inasmuch as it emphasized their collective rituals, the warmth of the community of militants and the fervour expected from those committed to them. But specific Jewish hopes attached to these Utopian choices were themselves instrumental in enhancing their over-invested character. Jews could, indeed, expect -- especially from Communism -- higher symbolic and social rewards than others, since they were indebted to this salvation ideology as Jews, not only as members of a dominated class (unlike 'working class cadres' promoted from the ranks). Over-investment responded for both Zionists and Communists to an attitude of revenge against the tragic fate of Jewry and of readiness to oppose the risk of murderous antisemitism.

Lastly, on an essential psycho-sociological level, Communism and Zionism matched each other by staging, though in different ways, the subversion and transgression of the Jewish relationship with society, inherited from the past (as a 'host' environment, where Jews were merely 'tolerated') such as it was reflected in stereotypical behavioural patterns. They actually implemented the elimination of Jewish submissiveness by the disruption of age-old attitudes of the shameful or dominated Jew. Henceforth either as sharers of Communist power or would-be citizens of the state of Israel, Jews would assert themselves with a positive self-consciousness, discarding earlier customary ways, like the fear of others, the avoidance of open conflicts, the

reluctance to answer anti-Semitic provocations or challenges. The underdog pattern was to be definitely condemned to disappearance from Jewish manners. Communism and Zionism thus contributed to a revolution of a kind, that of traditional Jewish public behaviour.

Such common features explain, at least partly, that passage was relatively easy from Zionism to Communism and vice versa. Early hour Zionist in 1945 could become fervent Communists by 1949 and later (after 1956) come back to ideals of the Jewish state. Zionism and Communism offer multiple examples of the reversibility of contemporary Jewish identity choices.

Still, obviously, the two main options also contrasted with each other in many ways. Not only did Communism stress purely universalistic values as against Zionism with its insistence of the particularistic nature of Jewish historical destiny. Communism appeared from the outset to be incompatible with most of the cultural ingredients of Jewishness, such as religion above all, but also with many other traits of traditional mentality, with traditionalism proper, for that matter. While Zionism was destined to integrate Jewry of all spiritual shades and social brackets, Communism proved to be highly selective in its recruitment and brought about (as we shall see) the drastic levelling off and forced dissimilation of whatever was considered as properly Jewish in those who were admitted among its militants.

All this said, one must not disregard the third, on the whole more traditional identity option, which could reveal itself at closer scrutiny a majority choice, that of the continuation of a revised form of the national assimilationist pattern. After the transitional years of the coalition government (1945-1947) Zionism was indeed forbidden and became liable to persecution. For years, no legal emigration was admitted. But most probably Communism neither did not involve the majority of surviving Jewry. Most of the latter sought a modus vivendi under the Stalinist duress without committing themselves more than it was evitable. This was all the more so, that the destruction of the 'bourgeois'

conditions of living considerably restricted the freedom of choice in matters of social identity too. Religious practice was strictly confined to the synagogue and the regime's official anti-clerical move affected the Jewish community (notably by the forceful self-dissolution of the Zionist association and the not less arbitrary unification of the three religious organisational networks) just like other Churches. In these circumstances political conformism was the common lot of Jews and non-Jews as well. The pressure of the regime equalized economic conditions and the strategies of survival. Relegation to underdeveloped rural areas was equally inflicted upon Jewish and non-Jewish sectors of the formerly well-to-do urban middle classes, just as much as political purges rarefied indiscriminately their ranks in the public administration. The Stalinist predicament created a common platform between uninvolved Jews and non-Jews and implicitly prepared the field for further rapprochements. Common suffering acted like in earlier focal moments of community in national history. The 1956 October Revolution and its aftermath (with a united 'Popular Front' type resistance to Communism) will be a crucial common experience in this respect, comparable by its importance to 1848 for the reconstruction of a new kind of Jewish-Hungarian understanding. It is not astonishing that indicators of assimilation -- like mixed marriages outside the Party circles -- clearly demonstrate the strength of this neither Communist, nor Zionist 'neutral' identity option.

(Communism and Jewish identity)

Since, undoubtedly, Communism was the most dramatically new choice as well as the less orthodox chance for the reconstruction of post-Shoah Jewish identity, one must scrutinize its implications more closely. If it was not necessarily a majority option for all the survivors, it did engage a good part of the younger generations and those economically active, for whom it could

obviously contribute to the improvement of career prospects. Since out of 190.000-200.000 registered survivors in 1946 the number of emigrants (whether Zionist or other) can be estimated at less than 30.000 before the definite fall of the iron curtain, and since the Shoah had brutally reduced the size of Jewish families, entry into the nomenklatura affected directly or indirectly (through kinship ties with political executives) most Jewish circles. It must be stated, though, that most new cadres were to be sure not Jews. Still Jewish presence in Hungarian Communism proved to be even more spectacular than elsewhere, because of the heightened public visibility of positions they occupied in the press, in the upper echelons of the forces of repression and in the political bureaucracy: the four main party bosses (among them 'the best pupil of Stalin') being of Jewish birth. Thus from the early years of the regime, its public image became that of a 'Jewish rule'. If realities of Party policy often and cruelly invalidated this image, Jewish commitment to Communism continued to carry more weight for the very fact that it appeared to be more compromising: this could only increase the above-mentioned over-invested nature of the Jewish-Communist option. Here we must turn to its practical implications as a borderline pattern of Jewish identity based on a high degree of collective self-assertion combined with the forceful dissimulation, indeed suppression of markers of particularism.

Ambiguity of its inception and its outcome was indeed from the outset an in-built component of Jewish-Communist commitment.

Being a shareholder in the Party-state offered obvious advantages. But this must be paid by complete behavioural alignment and conformism excluding, among other things, the manifestations of any aspects of particular Jewish identity. It actually imposed the highest possible degree of assimilation in a new key. Jewish cadres were expected to adopt not only the political 'platform' of the Party but also as 'populist' manners as possible in clothing, speech, habits of behaviour, way of life. The 'Party line' was supposed to

transcend and annihilate differences between cadres of various origin to mould them into one common shape. Jewish cadres self-consciously accepted the pattern. Their children were educated in the lay spirit, so that they would declare if asked, that they belonged to no denomination, 'being atheists and Communists'. Voluntary silence over Jewishness became indeed the rule even inside the families. Children were regularly brought up in the ignorance of their own ancestry, of the martyrdom of their parents and kins, of the historical fate of Jewry, of the Shoah. Many learned about their being Jewish only when facing demonstrations of everyday anti-Semitism at school, in the sports association or at private parties. Such a privately observed taboo of Jewry was meant to act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If one completely dissimulates the fact of being Jewish, it will cease to exist...

Communist doctrine also imposed a veritable public taboo on all matters Jewish since 1949 onwards. Till then hundreds of books, articles, pamphlets had been published and films and plays performed yearly relative to the Shoah. Afterwards practically no mention could be explicitly made even of historical anti-Semitism. Jews as targets of the Final Solution were mixed in the euphemistic Stalinist vocabulary with other 'victims of fascism'. State controlled media and schoolbooks alike insisted on the anti fascist resistance as a popular experience without evoking Zionists or the role played by Jews. This taboo affected the literary fiction, the political discourse and the social sciences (historiography, demography, folklore, ethnology) indiscriminately. In a way both the Shoah and the Jewish past in Hungary were expelled from collective memory (as were, to be true, discarded all other references to particularistic communities of ethnic or denominational nature, when they did not fit into the evolutionist scheme dictated by official Marxism based on 'class struggles').

The Jewish past was not the only casualty of the arbitrary revision of history of Stalinist workmanship. So was the Jewish present outside the

country. After the foundation of Israel (strangely enough with joint efforts of the Soviet and American diplomacy) an anti-Zionist campaign was launched in the satellite states, resulting in the brutal suppression of the rests of the Zionist movements. Since the boarder between the fight against Zionism (a 'hellhound of imperialism') and anti-Jewish measures were difficult to trace, the campaign took often (especially in Czechoslovakia and in Russia) explicitly antisemitic overtones. So it was during the trial of Rajk too (which had several Jewish victims) and in the persecution of 'Zionist leaders'. Family or friendship ties were forcibly cut down with those in Israel and in the West, just as much as official relationships were forbidden henceforth between the Israelite Community and World Jewry.

But even well established Jewish cadres could not feel themselves in security due to their allegedly middle class extraction neither. From 1949 onwards they were not infrequently taken as targets of internal Party purges as 'bourgeois elements'. More importantly, ideological conformism did not protect Jews form discrimination proper, since the management of the nomenklatura precisely espoused principles that helped to exploit and manipulate potential divisions between Jews and non-Jews inside the hierarchy. Thus, instead of neutralizing the effect of background variables, Communism maximized their significance as an asset or as a liability in political careers. Jews would be placed in positions to control 'non Jewish lobbies' and vice versa, or were dispersed, so that they should be less 'visible'. Consequently, instead of disappearing or weakening, the consciousness of being Jewish was enhanced under the cover of official Communist policies of non-discrimination.

Thus the dirty tricks played to Jewish believers by the Stalinist Utopia added to the price Hungarian Jewry globally paid to the regime via the socio-professional déclassement that most of its members had suffered in the early 1950s. This price was to be even higher with the rapid dissolution of the

Communist mirage in the aftermath of the death of the 'Father of progressive humanity', which was marked in Hungary by the 'June 1953 programme' of the first Imre Nagy government. Having 'over-invested' their commitment to Communism, Jewish cadres were among the first to turn against Stalinism and re-invest their hopes in 'democratic socialism'. The ensuing fight against Moskovite despotism re-created a new type of Jewish attachment to collective national causes, since many Jews and non-Jews joined efforts during the years of the 'thaw' and in the revolutionary 'popular front' of the October days of 1956, as they suffered together the neo-Stalinist repression (in and outside the prisons) just as well as they were standing the test of the dissident movements in the 1970s and 1980s. It is true too, though, that many former Jewish cadres (as well as others) maintained their earlier bonds, upon which their career continued to depend. This was much less true of their offspring. Globally Jews were strongly over-represented among the rebels of 1953-1956, the intellectual heroes of 1956 and the leaders of the later dissidence. Jewish-Hungarian identity choices were thus enriched with a new pattern marked by a renewed nationalist (if not chauvinist) engagement and - in the 1980s - by the liberation from the taboo of Judaism. Many became prominent among the champions of the Transylvanian-Magyar cause as well as in the process of normalization of Jewish community life.

Let me only hint at these recent developments: their interpretation in terms of the reconstruction of a Jewish-Hungarian symbiosis and an integrated identity in a new key must be reserved for another study.