

RECONSTRUCTING JEWISH IDENTITY IN CROATIA: TOWARDS A REFINED SYMBOLIC ETHNICITY

*Nila Ginger Hofman
DePaul University, Chicago*

This paper has two aims. To begin, it examines whether the symbolic ethnicity model is relevant to identity negotiation among Croatian Jews. In symbolic ethnicity, individuals are not so much interested in the maintenance of traditional lifestyles as they are with choosing how to express cultural identity. In the past, scholars have either employed the model to discuss identity negotiation among ethnics in the United States and other core societies, or they have dismissed it altogether. The second aim describes the existing tension between the self-images of the Croatian Jews and those projected on them by others. Both Croatian “cultural diversity campaigns” and international Jewish support organizations consider Jewish identity to have an essentially religious core. Programs sponsored by these constituencies have constructed pronounced cultural differences between Croatian Jews and non-Jewish Croatians.

The symbolic ethnicity model has not been employed to analyze identity negotiation in cross-national comparisons. Although the model’s treatment of identity negotiation continues to be highly applicable to ethnics in core as well as post-socialist societies, I suggest that the model needs to be refined to include cultural forces that highlight temporal and political aspects of identity construction. Community based, national and supranational dimensions of identity construction must be included in an application of symbolic ethnicity if the model is going to continue making a contribution to ethnic theory. Extending the analysis of the model to include broader dimensions will also contribute

to our understanding of ethnic identity negotiation in capitalist as well as post-socialist societies.

I argue, employing ethnographic and historic analyses, that the imposition of an essentialist view of Jewish identity by national and supranational constituencies may ultimately have adverse effects on cultural groups such as the Croatian Jews who have embraced humanist and idiosyncratic versions of Jewish identity since the mid-nineteenth century (Goldstein 1988). Ethnographic data reveals that despite a lack of strong religious commitments and highly idiosyncratic expressions of cultural identity, Croatian Jews are not on the road to amalgamation. I suggest that the disappearance thesis, put forward by the critics of symbolic ethnicity, is contradicted by the experience of Croatian Jews and that Jewish identity negotiation in Croatia reflects national and supranational dimensions of cultural identity formation without dislocating the importance of individual meanings.

Methods

The conceptualization of this paper is based on ethnographic and historic information collected over the course of three visits to Croatia between 1997 and 2000. Library research and participant observation methods in the Jewish Community Center Zagreb (ZOZ) were used. Jewish community life in Croatia was examined prior to World War II and compared to contemporary expressions of Jewish identity. During

my research in Croatia I kept abreast of local political events, conducted research at the libraries of the Ethnographic Institute in Zagreb and the community ZOZ center. I participated in many organized social activities including religious services, Torah study groups, seminars on Jewish education and meetings with seniors, women and youth. I also spent a good deal of time in the company of friends discussing politics and the changing meaning of Jewish identity over coffee in the recently *kosherished* café of the ZOZ.

Throughout my research I worked closely with two key consultants, an observant member who introduced me to the spiritual world in the ZOZ and his antagonist a consultant who defined herself as a secular Jew. Both were invaluable resources. They respected the neutrality of my position in the community as well as my social engagement in both religious and cultural activities though neither participated in both these spheres of activity. I took their views to be representative of the religious minority and the majority of Croatian Jews who define themselves as secular Jews. While my key consultants viewed one another as antagonists they unknowingly shared many views pertaining to Croatian politics.

Analytic Context

Herbert Gans uses the related concepts of symbolic ethnicity (1979) and symbolic religiosity (1994) to refer to a range of strategies associated with ethnic and religious identity negotiation in contemporary societies. Symbolic ethnicity helps to mitigate the social and psychological upheaval experienced by cultural groups as they adapt to a (post)modern world in which interaction

associated with monolocality is disappearing. Gans argues that this explains why ethnic cultures do not experience the straight-line assimilation patterns that melting-pot theorists have proposed, but instead respond to social pressures with patterns of behavior in which ethnic and religious identities are maintained on an idiosyncratic basis. While Gans applies his model specifically to ethnics in the United States, he clearly intends the model to have wider applications (Baldassar 1999, Björklund 1987, Buckser 1999, Levine 1993, Sprott 1994).

Gans's model of symbolic ethnicity appropriately describes the importance of nostalgia and sentiments to identity negotiation. Gans argues that many ethnic cultures in the United States employ symbolic ethnicity rather than formal rites and religious-based cultural practices and values. A concern with Jewish identity rooted in nostalgia and sentiment (“cultural Judaism”) as opposed to rigorous adherence to Judaic practices and traditions, are paradigmatic examples of symbolic ethnicity.

While nostalgia and sentiments are deemed relevant to the invention of tradition, his critics have viewed Gans's model as a precursor to the disappearance of ethnics. In response, Gans has insisted that nothing in his model implies that groups employing symbolic ethnicity will dissolve within a fixed period of time. Symbolic ethnicity is more accurately regarded as a social identity strategy that helps maintain individual allegiances to cultural (ethnoreligious) heritage. Gans further claims that ethnicity is not "doomed to fade away before the irresistible forces of assimilation," but could instead "become a permanent source of identity" (Gans 1992: 44-45).

Gans's is not the only model that interprets the "post-traditional" terms in which contemporary identities are understood. Alba (1990) and Waters (1990, 1999) have proposed models which complement symbolic ethnicity. These scholars seem to share the view that ethnic identity negotiation in many post-industrial societies greatly relies on individual expressions of identity. Gans's critics, however, assume that symbolic ethnicity is a misreading of the communitarian basis of cultural identities (Bershtel and Graubard 1992, Conzen et al. 1992, Kivisto and Nefzger 1993).

Like the critics of Gans's model, a number of scholars writing on Jewish identity construction have asserted that Jews engaged in idiosyncratic expressions of Jewish identity will ultimately disappear as a group. Predictions that Jewish identity will disappear are typically based on sociocultural processes such as the near absence of religious inclinations prevalent in many socialist societies. The view that a decline in Jewish religiosity eventually results in a weaker sense of Jewish identity or disintegration has been put forward by a number of scholars who have studied Jewish identity maintenance in the United States (Amyot and Singelman 1996, Bakalian 1993, Cohen 1983). A similar view has been advanced by scholars studying Jewish identity maintenance in Europe (DellaPergola 1994, Keller 1966, Schweid 1994) and is epitomized by Harriet Pass Friedenreich's remark that: "[The] vibrant Jewish communities of interwar Yugoslavia, well adapted to survival in a multinational state, live on today as memories, not as realities" (Pass Friedenreich 1984:210).

The linkage between the disintegration of Jewish identities with a decline in religious observance is not universally accepted. Bershtel and Graubard (1992) have disputed the thesis that non-religious behavior among Jews will result in cultural assimilation. Jonathan Webber (1997) points out that an image of all Jews identifying as members of an ethnoreligious group is no longer applicable since sociopolitical processes have impacted European Jews in their respective countries differently. Similar, Chervyakov, Gitelman and Shapiro (1997) argue that Jewish identity in Russia has become fused with national identities to the extent that its no longer possible to divorce Jewish identity negotiation from citizenship and the national political economy.

Building upon the views of these scholars, my analysis of the identity strategies employed by Croatian Jews expands the model of symbolic ethnicity to include historic and contemporary images, collective and individual meanings, local and global influences, and national politics as important variables in the process of cultural identity negotiation. I argue that the locus of an idiosyncratic or individual basis of identity construction must, ultimately, reside within larger-than-individual cultural forces.

Background

Most early Jewish settlers in Croatia were merchants from regions within the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Speaking either Hungarian or German as their mother tongue, they measured their success in terms of social acceptance in Croatian society (Svob 1997). The lack of a culturally unifying language reflects, as elsewhere within the Empire, a natural

desire to establish socioeconomic stability. The ambition to integrate into non-Jewish society by marrying non-Jews was an important by-product of achieving socioeconomic success. The eighteenth-century *haskalah* (Jewish form of European enlightenment) helps explain why more devout forms of Judaism, such as those practiced in other parts of Europe (e.g. orthodox communities prevalent in Russia and Poland), never took hold among Croatian Jews (Johnson 1988). In response, the nineteenth-century *Neologe* movement, which was concerned with the modernization of Judaism, did manage to attract some participants. But even with the reform-minded character of the movement, there was only one *Neologe* synagogue (seating up to 300 people) in operation in the largest (11,000 members) Jewish community in Croatia (Goldstein 1998).

The reason that Croatian Jews managed to retain their identity, given their lack of a culturally unifying language, non-committal religious participation and growing rates of exogamy is because the laws within the Empire were such that Jewish participation in gentile social and political life remained limited. Except for brief periods of time when rulers who advanced Jewish emancipation rose to power, e.g. Joseph II (1780-90) and Frans Joseph (1847-1897) Jews were forced to live in separate social worlds. Jewish societies, which developed in response to *de jure* emancipation, can be organized into four overlapping categories: humanitarian, intellectual, political, and recreational. The common thread among the societies was that each provided a vehicle for members to become active in the Jewish world and devote themselves to Jewish social

advancement, politics and culture without a commitment to Jewish religious laws.

Parallel to the development of modern Croatian society and the relative integration of Jews in the mid-nineteenth century was the emergence of Croatian national consciousness. The Croatian language provided a focal point for national identity and thus a means for nationalist-minded Croats to question their loyalty to the Empire (Buntak 1996:386). The nationalist movement in Croatia developed largely in response to the rising tendency towards Germanization within the Empire and the fact that both the French and the Hungarians had already begun to assert their national identities. The Jewish response to Croatian nationalism was threefold: Croatian Jews either exhibited compliance with Croatian national ideals, a fierce alliance to Zionist ideals, or a combination of these ideological positions.

The first response, compliance with Croatian national ideals, relates back to the willingness of Croatian Jews to participate in civil society and improve their social standing -- a strategy that may be traced back to emancipation trends among European Jews in the early nineteenth-century. An example of this is the use of Croatian as the language of instruction in Jewish schools and synagogues.

The second response, a fierce alliance to Zionist ideals, provided Croatian Jews with an alternative expression to Jewish religious identity. By emphasizing the need to establish a Jewish nation-state, Zionism allowed for non-religious Jews to affirm their identity as Jews by supporting political or cultural aims. The Zionists were

organized through a number of societies such as the *Bar Giora* association of Jewish students, *Young Guard*, a socialist youth organization, and societies that prepared Jews for immigration to Palestine in the early twentieth century. *B'nai B'rith*, an international organization that attracted people interested in the advancement of Jewish cultural, educational and political life, gained popularity during that time as well. These trends, which continued throughout the twentieth-century and have been reinvigorated in the last decade, were never regarded by the ruling powers as inconsistent with Croatian nationalism.

The third response, a combination of these ideological positions, was the most remarkable. Croatian Jews remained loyal to Croatian national ideals whether or not they identified as Zionists. This can be explained by noting that nineteenth-century nationalism presupposed, and even encouraged ethnic consciousness and (certain forms of) sectarian patriotism so long as such sentiments did not threaten Croatian nationalist efforts. In the twentieth-century Croatian Jews continued to embrace a worldview that is rooted in non-religious commitments that emphasized humanistic values. These sentiments would in time resemble *Brotherhood and Unity*, a slogan that came to symbolize the political ideology of President Tito's Yugoslavia (who held office between 1945-1980). However, the newer meaning of "unity" that emerged after Croatia's separation from Yugoslavia would have very different consequences for Croatian Jews.

High rates of exogamy are a continued reality. In modern times, exogamy patterns may be explained as a

response to the diminished pool of Jewish marriage partners after 1945. While the rates have remained stable in the last fifty years, since the 1990s the growing number of individuals who identify as Jews has been on the rise, a statistic that reflects the desire of intermarried Croatian Jews to raise their children with a Jewish consciousness.

Another important social aspect of Jewish Croatian social identity is cosmopolitanism. Early on Croatian Jews began to regard themselves as cosmopolitans. This response that can be traced to the ideological principles of equality and openness associated with cosmopolitanism as well as the standing tradition of Croatian Jews to blend into gentile society. The construction of a cosmopolitan identity was related to trends in urbanization that swept Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, and secular ideologies prevalent among the emancipated Jews of central Europe. The promise of social advancement, opportunity and equality lies at the heart of the liberalism that produced intellectuals such as Theodor Herzl, one of the fathers of the Zionist movement and Sigmund Freud. Arising in opposition to cosmopolitanism were various definitions of nationhood and myths related to ethnic purity that prevail to the present.

Local Meanings

The use of cultural symbols is an important element of symbolic ethnicity. Croatian Jews use symbols such as ethnoreligious artifacts, foods, festivals and other social activities to express cultural identity. The importance of these symbols is reflected in the recent popularization of Star of David pendants, menorahs (a seven branch lamp used in religious services) and

other Judaica either worn or exhibited at home.¹ Further evidence of the emergence of cultural symbols in Croatia can be seen in the popularization of Jewish cookbooks written by Croatian Jews, as well as the proliferation of various books, newspapers, lectures and radio programs addressing Jewish themes. In addition to these, Croatian Jews can join a Jewish folklore dance group, ceramics class, soccer team and, with a little luck, participate in the *Makabiada* (Jewish Olympic games). They can choose to study Hebrew, Jewish music, Jewish history or Torah in Jewish community centers. All these pursuits (including Torah reading) are regarded as leisure social activities and are not for the sake of practicing religiosity or living a "traditional" Jewish life according to Jewish law. Rather they are an expression of "cultural Judaism" or interest in Jewish cultural history. Since many of these activities are organized by Jewish community centers, the basis of these types of identity enactment requires social interaction among group members.

Although an exact number was difficult to obtain, about 3000 individuals who identify as Jewish reside in present day Croatia. The largest and most vibrant Jewish community is in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. The ZOZ community center has about fifteen hundred members and has experienced a marked (14%) increase in its membership since the 1990s (Sprajc, personal communication 1997). Jewish community centers in Croatia and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe experienced revival during the late 1980s and early 1990s as Jewish educators were brought in from abroad to teach Hebrew, Jewish culture and

history. A cultural society that hosted lectures and events like Jewish music and exhibits of Jewish Croatian artists was formed during that time, now referred to as "Jewish community revival." While the society published a monthly paper covering events pertinent to the Jewish world, the events themselves did more than educate the public about Jewish life. Partaking in activities hosted by the cultural society were seen as an important way of "being Jewish" or "getting in touch with one's roots." Participation in community events was considered central to the process of Jewish identity maintenance in Croatia. It is through participation in various social groups that Croatian Jews made sense of their world and made choices about all aspects of their cultural identities. Community members did so at their leisure. They were less concerned with enacting culture through obligations as with living culture on individual terms. On the whole, community members seemed to be more concerned with day-to-day social affairs and a rise in xenophobia than with Jewish religious laws or the high exogamy rates that continued to dilute the community. One consultant made the following comment when I asked how he understood the continuation of Jewish community life in Croatia:

I don't think our community will die because we are intermarrying or not praying on Friday night. In the end a community dies when people stop visiting the community.

It is clear that the people here are coming to the community center for something. The center does not exist by itself.

When asked directly, community members associated religiosity with doctrine, nationalism and non-cosmopolitanism. Indeed, many people I spoke with did not regard religious practice as an important part of their Jewish identity. Friday night services were practically empty while social events organized by the cultural society were well attended. As one consultant remarked:

I believe that Judaism gives us the freedom and the opportunity to choose how to express ourselves as Jews. I have chosen the way I wish to be Jewish. I have met people who have chosen to keep kosher. A kosher couple visited me recently. I did not insult or asked them why they kept kosher. I don't keep kosher but I always make sure I have paper plates, plastic knives and forks at home in case they visit.

The emphasis in these anecdotes was on individual and humanistic expressions of Jewish identity. Consultants believed that Judaism or Jewish cultural heritage gave them the “freedom and opportunity to choose” how they would want to express identity. The increased focus on choice and individualism may be read as endemic of post-socialism.

Other examples of identity negotiation were found in the continued allegiance to Zionism. For many Croatian Jews, support for the State of Israel is a significant expression of Jewish identity. Although active membership in various Zionist organizations was the primary outlet for expressing allegiance to the movement, at the time of my research different means for supporting Israel existed such

as specialized seminars on topics related to Jewish cultural history, "working vacations," private visits and study abroad programs, and the kibbutz experience. Allegiance to Zionism, which for economic reasons was strongly supported by the Croatian government, continues to serve as one of the most important aspects of Jewish identity in Croatia.ⁱⁱ

Croatian Nationalist Politics and Jewish identity

Life in a society undergoing social upheaval encourages feelings of pride and belonging to one's ethnic group, particularly if the nationalism practiced in that society is exclusivist (Verdey 1996). In this connection, Anthony Smith (1986) has argued persuasively for the view that nostalgia plays an important role in the construction of common goals and a sense of belonging to something larger than oneself. The Croatian nationalist movement of the 1990s, which promoted Croatian ethnicity largely by constructing non-ethnic Croatians as outsiders and emphasizing ethnicity, has in some ways reinforced Jewish identities. Contemporary Jewish identity negotiation in Croatia reflects ways of coping with a *de facto* outsider status that has informed Jewish identities in Europe for centuries.

Although my consultants identified with national politics and the idea of building a democratic nation-state, they did not identify with the xenophobic regime that followed Croatia's secession from Yugoslavia. As the Croatian right developed a voice, Jews began turning to the Jewish community for an alternative voice. Indeed, involvement in Jewish communal life in the recent past has

provided a reasonable alternative to the changing meaning of Croatianess. A renewed connection with the Jewish community served the function of ideologically forestalling social isolation from Croatian society. Membership in the Jewish community had other advantages as well. For example, during the war in Croatia (1991-1995) community members were able to send their children to stay with families in the United States and Israel. These temporary immigrations were sponsored by international Jewish organizations and organized through Jewish communities in Croatia.

As the right grew louder (although not larger), xenophobia began to be seen as a real threat to Jews. The fear was further reinforced by the Croatian government's attempt to repress memories associated with the notorious Ustashas, a fascist party which was supported by the Nazis and held power between 1941-1945. This was accomplished by downplaying atrocities the Ustashas committed against the Serbs, Gypsies, communists, non-compliant Croats and Jews during World War II and constructing Croatian World War II criminals as the victims of the National Liberation Army revolt led by Tito's army. An important response to these threats was the development of solidarity among Croatian minorities who continue to gather and mark events such as Anti-Fascism Day and Holocaust Memorial Day.

An area of contention has been the number of victims who perished in Jasenovac, a Croatian concentration camp established during the Ustasha regime. Some have claimed that the number of lives lost in Jasenovac is as low as 40,000 while others estimate the death toll around 700,000. In 1997, the

late President Tudjman proposed erecting a memorial for both victims and murderers at the site. The proposal was met with outrage and caused large numbers of people to gather on Holocaust Memorial Day in April 1998 to protest. Among those who protested Tudjman's proposal were individuals who identified as Serbs, anti-fascist and former communists. Speakers called for justice, the restoration of Jasenovac and respect for the memory of the victims. They warned that the numbers of victims should neither be belittled nor buried along with the remains of their executioners. Minority group members have been gathering to protest the renaming of the Victims of Fascism Square in Zagreb. As one consultant put it: "Changing the name of the square [back to its original name] is an opportunity for Croatia to begin the process of de-Ustashazation."

Contested Meanings

The disassociation of Croatia from the Balkans, communism and southeastern Europe more generally, along with her desire to be included among Europe's "chosen nations," is well served by promoting non-threatening minorities such as Croatian Jews. During my research in Croatia, Jews, who are the smallest minority group in Croatia, were given far more media attention than other Croatian minorities. The promotion of Croatian Jews not only served to obscure Croatia's role in the Holocaust, an issue that has recently received critical attention from the international media and from human rights organizations, but has also emphasized Jews as "others."

While the motives of the Croatian government and the

international Jewish community differ substantially, both have attempted to impose a view of Jewish identity that is at odds with the self-images of the Croatian Jews themselves. The view promoted by the Croatian government through the recent implementation of cultural diversity programs, derives in part from Croatia's desire to eventually join the European Union and to stabilize the nation's economic crisis. The view promoted by the international Jewish community reflects a commitment to secure the future of Central and East European Jews. The efforts of both groups embody the assumption that Jewish identity revolves around an orthodox religious core or a notion of Jews as separate from other Croatian citizens. This view of Jewish identity is in conflict with the multiple meanings of Jewish identity and the humanistic and idiosyncratic terms in which Croatian Jews identify as Jews.

The aforementioned constituencies regard cultural identity as essentialist or traditionalist. Essentialist views of identity incorporate meanings associated with consanguinial ties and a sense of innate one-ness among group members. Such views have the effect of strongly juxtaposing selves from others. For essentialists, identity construction is understood through presumed social characteristics defined through immutable customs and values. Alternatively, in humanist terms identity construction is based on values of tolerance and liberal democracy. More importantly, humanists view identity as contingent on individual choice rather than rooted in blood-ties.

The cultural diversity programs sponsored by the Croatian Ministry of Culture are premised on the view that Jews must be submerged in tradition and

religion. These cultural diversity programs that advance Jewish religious culture clearly exist not for their own sake or the promotion of an inclusive multicultural society. These programs have particular agendas that seek to promote Croatian Jews as exotic, religious and different from ethnic Croatians. Jewish religious practices, which are often misunderstood and regarded as curious by non-Jewish Croatians, have received an abundance of media attention. Local journalists have interviewed the chief rabbi of Croatia several times since his inauguration in 1998. The topics of these interviews have ranged from Jewish religious practices to the future of the Jewish community in Croatia. Television programs about Jewish religious laws and practices as well as foreign documentaries, which depict the lives of ultra-orthodox Jews, have been aired. Other public displays of interest in Jews and their religion include a course on Judaism at Zagreb University, a permanent installation of Judaica in one of Zagreb's main museums, sponsorship of public art shows on Jewish religious themes and radio programs featuring interviews with prominent members of the Croatian Jewish community. Additionally, the Ministry of Culture has provided funds for Jewish education centered on Jewish religious and cultural themes and invited the rabbi to the Croatian parliament on several occasions.

The view that Croatian Jews are essentially different from non-Jewish Croatians is supported through the cultural diversity programs. To discern these, however, it is important to realize that such campaigns have not focused exclusively on essentializing *Jewish* identities. Indeed, cultural diversity

programs in Croatia originated with *Matica Hrvatska*, an organization which sought to construct Croatian ethnicity and Croatian as a separate language from Serbo-Croatian, the official national language of Former Yugoslavs. Thus the promotion of ethno-religious consciousness among ethnic Croats originally served to justify Croatian nationalism and secession from the Former Yugoslavia. Such programs also helped construct ethnic Croats as categorically different from ethnic minorities living in Croatia. This has contributed to a general atmosphere of xenophobia that has had negative consequences for minority groups such as Serbs and Bosnians (Bosnian Muslims).

The international Jewish community has also been concerned with the promotion of Jewish identity in Croatia. Emphasizing religious and cultural components of Jewish identity, Jewish support organizations have begun "rehabilitating" Jewish community centers throughout Croatia and the Former Yugoslavia by financing a full-time rabbi, the restoration of a small synagogue in Dubrovnik (which has a community of less than 50 Jews) and stressing Jewish religious education. The rabbi of Croatia has found sponsors among orthodox communities outside the country to finance young Croatian Jews religious education abroad. Changes have been implemented in the community centers themselves. The rabbi has *kosherised* community centers and implemented various Jewish laws therein, campaigned for group conversion to counteract high exogamy rates and provided opportunities for those interested in studying and practicing orthodox Judaism. In many ways, the rabbi has revolutionized the

social organization of Jewish communities in Croatia. For the first time in some sixty years Croatian Jews can choose to get married in a Jewish orthodox ceremony. Moreover, they can have a local rabbi perform rites of passage (e.g. circumcision, bar mitzvah, marriage and burial ceremonies) and important Jewish holidays.

Croatia's cultural diversity programs thus share with the international Jewish support organizations the tendency to promote identity maintenance by reifying differences between cultural groups and exaggerating the importance of religious consciousness. Both tendencies conflict with the humanistic and idiosyncratic worldviews of the Croatian Jews themselves. In reality, non-committal religious participation and integration in Croatian society are central aspects of Jewish Croatian identities.

Summary

The interplay between religious behavior and the stability of Jewish identity may be far more complex than the disappearance prognosis implies. Cultural identity, rather than an index of the disappearance of Croatian Jews, has been a relatively permanent feature of Jewish identity negotiation since its inception in the nineteenth-century. Cultural memory and the role of political and socioeconomic reform have been crucial in shaping and transforming cultural groups such as the Croatian Jews. I have argued that one way of understanding the identity strategies of the Croatian Jews is to begin with an account of the historical context and the political culture in which they are situated. Doing so should provide a rich framework for understanding Jewish identities in Croatia as constructed in

response to pressure felt by *all* Croatian citizens to identify as members of an ethnic group. I have also pointed out that the effect of our increasingly interdependent world, in which many different images of cultural identity are projected, needs to be taken into account.

Even though individuals have always been capable of creating and transforming individualized meanings of cultural identity, cultural identity negotiation is never a completely random process that is meaningless to others. Idiosyncratic expressions of cultural identity are at the same time a product of collective imagining, time and space. In light of this, Croatian Jews negotiate their cultural identities primarily through humanistic values and membership in social organizations. The organizations are important precisely because Jewish community life in Croatia was never confined to Jewish neighborhoods or synagogues. Jewish societies and organizations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries flourished in response to Croatian nationalism. The same trend emerged again in the last decade when Croatian Jews were once again cast as outsiders. Croatian nationalism has not only not threatened but also in some ways fortified Jewish consciousness. This fact implies a strong relationship between the construction of ethnic minorities as “others” and Jewish identity negotiation.

We have seen that even though the objectives of Croatian cultural diversity programs and the international Jewish organizations differ substantially, both aim to cultivate Jewish religiosity by promoting an essentialist view of Jewish identity. The former can be traced to ideas about ethnicity that serve to justify Croatia's political agenda; the

latter is a response to what is perceived as a modern world crisis in Jewish identity maintenance. The emphasis on the religious aspects of Jewish identity has had a polarizing effect both within Jewish communities in Croatia and between Croatian Jews and non-Jews. Contrary to the traditionalist views of Jewish identity, Jewish identity can never be understood as stable or incontestable. Instead, its meaning is continually revised by individuals. The real crisis for Croatian Jews has been the fact that these outside institutions have ignored the multiple versions of Jewish Croatian identity that have coexisted for decades. Despite this, Jewish Croatian identity continues to embody a commitment to humanistic ideals of tolerance, experimentation and contingency. The situation for Croatian Jews might improve if Jewish communities in Croatia were respected and allowed to flourish on their own terms.

Towards a Refined Symbolic Ethnicity

Symbolic ethnicity is useful to the extent that it helps to interpret the social mechanisms through which individualized meanings of identity are negotiated in the contemporary world. Factors that indicate the applicability of symbolic ethnicity to Croatian Jews include the consumption of cultural symbols and various social activities that enact these symbols. Additional factors that are characteristic of Jewish identity negotiation in Croatia include high endogamy patterns, non-committal religious practices and the abiding absence of unifying cultural language. It is clear from the foregoing discussion that involvement in Zionist movements, humanitarian or recreational societies in

Jewish community centers enables Croatian Jews to interpret culture and negotiate identity in terms of a variety of different meanings. The fact that these factors continue to play an important role in Jewish identity negotiation suggests that Jewish identities in Croatia are far from disappearing.

Symbolic ethnicity falls short of describing the case of the Croatian Jews because it does not account for the multiple social and political contexts in which groups are situated. It also falls short of describing ethnic identity negotiation characterized by our globalization. Scholars who have employed the symbolic ethnicity model have not given enough weight to the role of history and national and supranational politics in their analysis of particular groups. As I have argued, Jewish identity construction in Zagreb is rooted in an historical trajectory and relies on the manipulation of cultural symbols, humanistic and idiosyncratic interpretations of Jewishness. To better understand identity negotiation strategies among Croatian Jews, one must begin with a careful analysis of Jewish Croatian history, Croatia's troubled political culture, which presently seeks to construct non-ethnic Croatians as outsiders, and the influence of Jewish supranationals on the meaning of Jewish identity.

The deterministic claim put forward by scholars who assert that the decline in religious behavior of Jews inevitably signals their eventual dissolution fails to acknowledge the contingency and cultural complexity of Jewish (or any other) identity negotiation strategies. The idea that Jewish identity is somehow divorced from national politics, or that it unfolds along a predetermined trajectory, is, as I

have shown, simply inconsistent with the history and narratives of the Croatian Jews. Failure to acknowledge the dynamic and contingent character of ethnoreligious identity negotiation is often due to plain inattention to the historical, political and international dimensions of identity construction. If we look carefully at the historical record, we can see the thoroughly contextual nature of Jewish identity construction in Croatia as well as its complex relation to the surrounding political and global environment. In pointing this out, I do not mean to advance an inversion of the straight-line assimilation theory, in terms of which the future of the Croatian Jews as safely insulated from the threat of being swallowed up by the larger community. In other words, I want to challenge this view without making the parallel mistake of supposing that the future of the Croatian Jewish community is secured. Rather than prognosticating about the future of Jewish identities (a temptation which the Croatian Jews themselves resist) we are better off trying to incorporate a view of Jewish identity into Gans's model that ultimately leads to a better understanding of the cultural factors underlying identity negotiation.

A more thorough look at the historical and political context of identity negotiation among contemporary ethnics provides support for the extension of the model beyond core societies. Symbolic ethnicity helps interpret individual and collective identity negotiation strategies among Jews living in post-socialist societies irrespective of Gans's original intentions. To sum up, many aspects of symbolic ethnicity can help to account for the identity strategies by clarifying the ways in which subjective meanings inform the

nature of identity negotiation. A revised model for understanding the nature of identity negotiation in the modern world must relocate cultural trends in time and space and consider the role of national politics in shaping and transforming ethnoreligious cultures. Such a model will enable us to regard symbolic ethnicity as strongly associated with the manipulation of sentiments and nostalgia, national and supranational politics, historical memories and other highly symbolic expressions of collective identity.

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Notes

ⁱ I am using Samuel Heilman's definition of Judaica which has a number of meanings related to objects associated with Jewish cultural and religious life (Heilman 1988:268).

ⁱⁱ In contrast to former Yugoslav politics, Croatia has recently (1998) established diplomatic ties with Israel. Yugoslavia's official policy was pro-Arab and anti-Zionist. Even though Yugoslavia was among the first nations to recognize the state of Israel in 1948, its official policy supported the Palestinian national cause (Pass-Freidenreich 1984:208). During the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 and six years after the country's diplomatic break with Israel in 1967, Yugoslavia aligned herself with the Arab world while publicly equating Zionism with racism. Despite Yugoslav foreign politics, the Jewish Croatian communities continued to nourish its ties with Israel. The recently established diplomatic ties between Israel and Croatia are viewed as desirable for several reasons. Diplomacy is thought to improve trade relations, the tourist industry and perhaps to mitigate Croatia's infamous role during World War II.