Philosemitism as Resolution of Cognitive Dissonance?
The case of post-Communist Hungary[1]

"Philosemites are antisemites who like Jews," said the German philosopher Ernst Bloch, thereby aphoristically expressing the suspicion which usually arises almost whenever philosemitism is present.[2] Examining the three well-known forms (or versions) of philosemitism, we have to conclude that the suspicion is not groundless. The most prevalent form of religious-based philosemitism is found today among the evangelical Protestant denominations. The conception of Jews held by such denominations – which are combatively pro-Israel and hostile towards antisemites – not only expresses their high regard for the people of the Bible, but also attributes a role to the Jews in the realisation of Christ's thousand-year reign: the millennial kingdom can only be accomplished when the Jews have return to the land of Israel, re-establish their own state, and subsequently convert to Christ. But another well-known version of Christian philosemitism also regards Jews from the perspective of conversion. The source of the high regard felt for Jews is that God chose to make a covenant with them and that his son, Jesus Christ, was also born a Jew – the idea of the renewal of the covenant also conceals within itself the potential for conversion. "Jews live according to the wise laws concerning which the Lord Jesus Christ himself said: I have come not to abolish but to fulfil them," wrote the Hungarian Reformed (Calvinist) bishop Dr. Dezső Balthazár in 1913.[3]

The other well-known historical form (or version) of philosemitism, liberal secular philosemitism, developed at the time of the debates concerning the acceptance of Jews into the community of citizens. The enlightened supporters of emancipation argued vigorously against the widespread prejudice concerning the moral inferiority of the Jews. Emphasising the idea of equal human dignity, they supported equality and regarded anti-Jewish beliefs as medieval superstition. "If someone calls into question their morality, they should proudly express their noble indignation – which gravely repudiates the slander, because their ethical teachings are just as pure as those of anyone else" wrote Lajos Kossuth at the time of the press debate on emancipation.[4] Almost the same argument was voiced by Géza Pap when submitting a bill on the reception of the Jewish religion to the Hungarian Parliament in 1894: "The Jewish religion has a past in Hungary stretching back 900 years, and I certify that this religion has never proclaimed anything for which it should be ashamed."[5] Even so, the supporters of emancipation considered Judaism to be the most obvious example of medieval religious superstition; indeed, they saw in the "theocratic" Jewish community the counterpoint of the modern secular state. In his cited article, Kossuth – like many of his liberal contemporaries – proposed that emancipation should be made subject to assimilation, to the abandonment or radical reform of Jewish religion, and to the elimination of any features of the Jewish community that were not strictly religious. "Without such changes" he wrote, "the Jews will never be socially emancipated even if they are emancipated politically a hundred times." Enlightened – and subsequent – hostility towards antisemitism, which is often classed as a philosemitic phenomenon, does not usually express a liking for Jews, but the (variously motivated) rejection and dismissal of antisemitism.

Finally, however, a third form of philosemitism comprises the well-known stereotypes concerning the special business and financial abilities of Jews, their industriousness, cultivation, and other talents. Although these are, generally speaking, positive attributes, nevertheless their philosemitic nature is doubtful when they are the characteristics of an alien and perhaps rival group, and if they are used as arguments for the development of a temporary alliance, a relationship that promises positive benefits.[6]

Thus, all three typical manifestations of philosemitism are ambiguous phenomena. Analysing this ambiguity, Zygmund Baumann speaks of allosemitism. Essentially, Baumann places in this category any instance where the Jews appear "as the significant other," that is, when there is "the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all the others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them and special treatment in all or most social intercourse" *(Bauman 143).* Allosemitism does not mean hatred of Jews or a special liking for Jews. "'Allosemitism' […] contains the seeds of both [hatred and love for Jews], and assures that whichever of the two appears, is intense and extreme" [7] (143) For this reason, an allotic relationship towards Jews can easily change its form, with philosemitism turning into antisemitism or the reverse.

After World War II, in those countries with direct responsibility for the persecution of the Jews – above all Germany, but also Hungary – the previous hostility towards the Jews seemed to undergo a transformation – at least in public communication. The term *allotism* is extremely useful for interpreting this change, and it can be used to create a scale of philosemitism, ranging from sincere and profound catharsis to qualms of conscience (displaced remorse). Frank Stern's research on (West) German philosemitism demonstrated how, during the post-war decades, philosemitism – and the relationship towards Jews as the significant other – contributed greatly to the creation of an identity for the new, democratic Germany.[8]

In Hungary, however, events took a different turn. Although the first two post-war years saw several symbolic gestures where responsibility for the persecution of the Jews was admitted (for instance, several Protestant church leaders publicly acknowledged their collective responsibility, and statements admitting responsibility were also made in the Hungarian Parliament on the repeal of the anti-Jewish laws), nevertheless in general the public debate was dominated by attempts to pass the buck and – after 1946 – by the tension caused by re-emerging antisemitism. In his classic study, István Bibó characterised public declarations on the "Jewish question" as follows: "Official, semi-official, voluntary and ethical bodies made various statements on this issue, the content of which had two basic elements: first, an expression of the disdain felt by the majority of Hungarians for the awful deeds carried out by the Germans and their henchmen and how the best of Hungarians had down their utmost to prevent these deeds; second, criticism of the re-emerging antisemitism and a reminder that it should be opposed by all means."[9] In Bibó's view, both elements served to evade the issue of responsibility, but in doing so, they were also suitable for preventing the appearance of philosemitism, whether motivated by catharsis or displacement. In post-war Hungary, philosemitic statements tended to be made in the context of foreign policy: firstly, as part of a strategy at the peace negotiations to attain the most favourable conditions; secondly, in connection with Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state – not unrelated to the Soviet Union's position at the time and linked with efforts to secure the rights of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries. After the communist take-over (1949), however, such voices became silent, and the issue was removed from the public agenda until the collapse of communism in 1989, suddenly re-emerging after 1990 in almost the same form as in post-war Germany.

In the post-transition years, well-known philosemitic topoi could be heard in many places and debates: above all, the contribution made by Jews to the modernisation of the country, the assimilation efforts and patriotism of Jews, the Hungarian Jewish Noble Prize holders who brought credit to the country, the contribution of Jewish patrons to Hungarian cultural life, the role of Jewish intellectuals in the 1956 revolution, and – in a far less articulate fashion – the contribution of Jews living in the country (through their business acumen and contacts) to the economic development of the country and its efforts to catch up with the West. The question arises: to what extent are these publicly expressed opinions known and accepted outside

intellectual circles? Is an allotic relationship towards the Jews manifest in such statements? What is the connection between philosemitic stereotypes and the simultaneous appearance of antisemitism? Obviously, if philosemitism and antisemitic prejudice are exhibited by the same person or social group, this indicates the existence of an allotic relationship towards Jews. But there were no empirical data that might have verified this supposition. For this reason, when, during a survey in the summer of 2006, we had the opportunity to question respondents about anti-Jewish prejudice and historical memory, I included on the questionnaire several questions aimed at revealing philosemitic opinions and attitudes.[10]

Philosemitic attitudes were measured using three questions. Two of the questions were designed to reveal the opinions of respondents, while the third measured their emotional detachment from Jews. As Table 1 shows, 16-42 per cent of respondents gave philosemitic responses to the first two questions. Meanwhile, 32 per cent of respondents liked Jews while 29 per cent disliked them (see Figure 1).

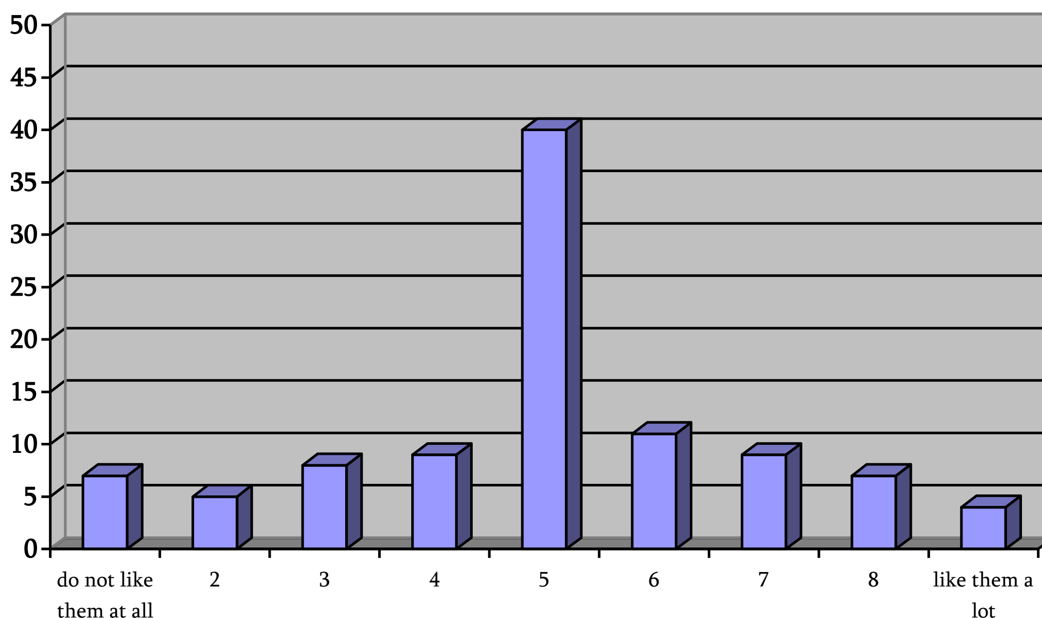
Table 1.
Philosemitic attitudes
(percentage of respondents; N = 1009)

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Both agree and disagree	Agree	Completely agree
Hungarian Jews have greatly contributed to the country's success	7	11	40	30	12
A country can only benefit from having a large Jewish population	17	20	49	10	4

Figure 1.

Like/dislike Jews

("Do you like Jews?" 1 = do not like them at all - 9 = like them a lot; as percentage; average: 5.02)



As the next step in the analysis, we established a unitary philosemitism factor from the three questions indicating philosemitism.[11] In what follows, philosemites comprise the 40 per cent of respondents who achieved the highest score on this scale (N = 380).

First of all, we examined which groups were overrepresented among supporters of philosemitic opinions. As far as the demographic and social indicators were concerned, it seemed such groups were women, university graduates, and people with higher social status. People aged 60 or over were overrepresented in the group, while people aged 18-29 were underrepresented. All this shows that philosemitic attitudes are characteristic of older and higher social status groups. These were people who had grown up and attended school under the communist regime and whose attitudes towards Jews and opinions about them had thus been influenced by the mood of an era that was close to the era of Jewish persecution but which had considered discussion of Jewish issues and antisemitism as neither important nor desirable.

Our attempt to draw up a political and attitude profile for the group had an interesting result: it showed that a significant part of the group belonged to a part of society that had accommodated the communist regime while maintaining a certain detachment. Former members of the HSWP (the Communist Party) and current left-wing and liberal voters were overrepresented among the philosemites, as were also religious people. The non-religious tended to be found among the non-philosemites. Xenophobes were underrepresented among the group, as were also people with strong national sentiment. As previous research had identified these two attitudes as the most important reason for hostility towards Jews,[12] this correlation seemed logical when examining the underlying causes of philosemitism. In view of this, we were surprised to find that 8 per cent of the members of the philosemitic group (31 respondents) agreed with at least four of the seven statements used in the survey to measure

antisemitism.[13] If, however, instead of examining the ratio of respondents agreeing with *all* the antisemitic statements, we look at how many agreed with statements of *various* antisemitic content – those expressing political antisemitism, discriminative antisemitism, religious anti-Judaism, and the so-called new antisemitism – then we find both higher proportions and an extremely interesting distribution.

In the questionnaire, we measured political, discriminative and religious antisemitism by using two questions for each. Very few "philosemitic" respondents accepted statements expressing discriminative antisemitism and religious anti-Judaism (31 and 50 respondents), while a somewhat greater number agreed with statements expressing the "new antisemitism" (65 respondents). A surprisingly large proportion (110 respondents), however, supported statements expressing political antisemitism.[14] This figure differed significantly from that for the population as a whole: thus, political antisemites were three times more numerous than discriminative antisemites among the philosemites, whereas they were about twice as common among the population as a whole. It seems that a significant proportion of those who support philosemitic opinions are not averse to simultaneously professing antisemitic views – at least at the political level.

On average, the philosemitic group has a high social status; it is a socially integrated group in which men are over-represented. Members of the group tend to have high incomes and live in well-appointed homes. They have an above-average interest in politics, and left-wing voters are overrepresented in the group. The group has characteristics that were generally exhibited by the antisemites' group in the sample: mistrust of social norms and political distrust – that is, anomie. The group's outlook on life is moderately conservative, but it is not characterised by nationalism and xenophobia.

Members of the group – most of them at any rate – have a rather odd relationship towards Jews. As we have noted, they were placed among the philosemites because they think that any country – including Hungary – will benefit from having Jewish citizens. Personal feelings about Jews are also positive. A greater than average proportion of members of the group think that the memory of the Holocaust should be preserved. They do not think that Jews are disloyal to the country in which they live: they tend to reject rather than accept that "Jews living here are more loyal to Israel than to this country." On the other hand, members of the group consider Jews to be a powerful and cohesive group: many of them agree that Jews control the economy, politics, the media and cultural life – and even US politics. A surprisingly large number accept anti-Judaistic statements (e.g. 27 percent agree that "the suffering of the Jews was divine punishment"), even though they are not particularly religious. As far as the Middle Eastern conflict is concerned, they tend to sympathise with Israel, which they consider to be a "more progressive" country than the Arab states. At the same time, however, many of them think that the Jewish state acts against the Palestinians in the same manner as the Nazis acted against the Jews. Responding to questions concerning responsibility for the persecution of the Jews and the crimes of communism, members of the group tended to acknowledge rather than dispute the responsibility of Hungarian institutions and citizens. Strikingly, however, they were more likely than other respondents in the sample to regard external factors such as the Soviet Union, the United States, and – in the case of communism – the Jews themselves as responsible for the deeds of the two dictatorships.

These data assist in elaborating the internal structure of the philosemitic group. Indeed, two subgroups can be distinguished. The first subgroup (71%) typically comprises over 50 year-olds with higher social status and exhibiting left-wing and liberal attitudes and political views; their attitudes towards Jews and their opinions are overwhelmingly positive. Within this subgroup, age seems to have contributed to the development of philosemitic attitudes – younger age groups of similar composition and type (highly qualified, high social status, left-wing and liberal) are typically non-antisemitic; nor, however, are they

characterised by strident philosemitism. The higher age could mean that in this subgroup the historical memory of the persecution of the Jews is stronger and that there is a greater awareness of the failure to address historical issues. A tendency to stereotype – which is clearly present – orients the group's philosophical and political orientation towards philosemitism: as far as the "Jewish question" is concerned and positions concerning Jews in general, the choice between the left-wing and liberal political camp and the national-conservative camp still bears symbolic significance in Hungary.

Whereas the first subgroup of philosemites evidently does not support antisemitic views, in the second subgroup – as we have seen –philosemitic and antisemitic views co-exist. Such an apparent contradiction is not an unknown phenomenon. In post-war West Germany, surveys identified a group of respondents – between 6 and 10 percent of the survey sample – that were characterised by philosemitic attitudes.[15] Nevertheless, in the course of research carried out in Frankfurt by Friedrich Pollock, researchers placed philosemitic respondents in the group between the non-antisemites and antisemites on the scale, because they concluded, on the basis of the interviews, that philosemitic responses connate compensation for antisemitic stereotypes.[16] In his writings on post-war antisemitism and philosemitism in Germany, Frank Stern revealed how philosemitism had several functions in German society at the time: first, it offered a psychological escape route to those seeking to compensate for their antisemitic prejudices (which they had openly professed during the Nazi era); second, it expressed an intention to detach oneself from the past, to accommodate the new circumstances and to join the new moral order of the post-war era. To declare that one was not antisemitic, amounted to giving one's support to the new Germany. By expressing support for the victims, people hoped to enjoy the benefits which, so they believed, the former victims would enjoy under the new system. Those arguing that the Jews were people like anyone else, sought to camouflage themselves in the cloak of humanism. As time passed, such philosemitism became a "language" or a habit, which served to express the relationship between the old and new Germany, but had little to do with real sentiments and attitudes towards Jews.[17]

The same mechanisms clearly operated in Hungary too, albeit differently. Under the communist regime, philosemitism could not perform the symbolic function in expressing the relationship between the old and the new regime, as it had done in West Germany. Even so, our survey showed that support for philosemitic statements was greater on the left of the political spectrum, which indicated that a positive position on the "Jewish question" was a habitual element among left-wing/liberal voters. Where, however, philosemitic stereotypes and antisemitic prejudice co-exist, one may assume the operation of similar mechanisms to those in Germany. "The economic anti-Jewish stereotype was transformed into a somewhat peculiar hope: namely that Jews in particular, on the basis of their special economic gifts or their access to 'international Jewish capital' might make a contribution to German economic recovery and thus help to spur German reconstruction over the longer term."[18] The old stereotype about the cosmopolitan and international networks of Jews functioned in the same way: after the war, many hoped that those who resettled in Germany and returning survivors would mediate the interests of the country to the occupying powers. It is correct to suppose that in cases where philosemitic statements were coupled with antisemitic prejudice, similar associations were operating in the minds of respondents, since the two philosemitic statements on the questionnaire (*"Hungarian Jews have greatly contributed to Hungary's achievements"; "A country can only benefit from having a large Jewish population"*) were perfectly suited to expressing affirmatively these well-established stereotypes. At the same time, it turned out that these philosemites regard the Jews as a powerful and cohesive group that pursues its interests forcefully and sometimes ruthlessly – but with potential benefits for the country in which they live. Concerning this combination of attitudes, the conclusion will

be similar to what one expert has said about philosemitism in post-war Germany: “Covert antisemitism and overt philosemitism were often two sides of a single coin.”[19]

Philosemitism in modern Hungary thus has two typical manifestations or versions. In the first version, an inclination to stereotype and – evidently in the higher status social groups which are overrepresented in the philosemitic group – to perceive “Jews” as a rival social group are placed within a framework by the (unprocessed) memory of the persecution of Jews, a left-wing/liberal worldview, and – given that it is a group that is aware of and adheres to norms – an acceptance of the philosemitic (or at least non-antisemitic) consensus of norms in the public realm. In such a context, the expression of attitudes relating to Jews is well served by the clichés which arose during the era of assimilation and are still fostered by both Jews and non-Jews concerning the beneficial role of Jews and their contribution to the country.

The other group of philosemites, however, is clearly characterised by allotic attitudes. This form of philosemitism is extremely fragile: the opinions and attitudes expressed by such philosemitism can be accommodated – sometimes without any modification or contradiction – in the context of political antisemitism.

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[2] Cited in Alan T. Levenson. Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism: Defense of Jews and Judaism in Germany, 1871-1932. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004, p. 147.
[3] Cited in Lajos Szabolcsi: Két emberöltő. Az Egyenlőség évtizedei. [Two Generations. The Decades of Equality.] Budapest, 1993, p. 154.
[4] Pesti Hírlap [Pest Newspaper], 5 May 1844.
[5] Cited in Lajos Szabolcsi: op. cit. p. 75.
[6] For a description of the various forms of philosemitism, see Jacques Berlinerblau: On Philosemitism. Occasional papers on Jewish Civilization, Jewish Thought and Philosophy. Georgetown University, Programm on Jewish Civilization. Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.
http://pdfdownload.bofd.net/pdf2html.php?url=http://pjc.georgetown.edu/docs/philo_semitic.pdf
[7] See Zygmund Baumann: Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern," in Modernity, Culture and `the Jew'. Ed. B. Cheyette and L. Marcus, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 143.
[8] Frank Stern: The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge. Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany. Pergamon Press, Oxford, New York, Seoul, Tokyo, 1992; Frank Stern: Entstehung, Bedeutung und Funktion des Philosemitismus in Westdeutschland nach 1945. In: Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb (Hrsg.): Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur nach 1945. Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, 1990.
[9] István Bibó: Zsidókérdés Magyarországon 1944 után [The Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944] in István Bibó: Válogatott tanulmányok, vol 2, Magvető Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1986, p. 623.
[10] The survey was carried out under the auspices of the Holocaust Programme of the Faculty of Psychology and Education of ELTE University, Budapest. The research was assisted by a grant from the National Research and Development Programme. The survey was conducted by the Median Public Opinion and Market Research Institute based on a sample of 1200 respondents, which was representative of the Hungarian adult population in terms of sex, age, place of residence and education. I wish to express my gratitude to Endre Hann and Timea Venczel for their assistance during the research. Szilvia Balassa helped to process the data.
[11] The factor was established as a principal component. The principal component explains 49.9% of the full variance. Eigenvalue: 1.497; The loading coefficients of the various items were: like/dislike measure (feeling thermometer): .546; the role of Jews in Hungary: .749; Jewish beneficial effects: .798.
[12] See András Kovács: A kéznél lévő idegen. Antiszemita előítéletek a mai Magyarországon. [The tangible Other. Antisemtic Prejudices in Contemporary Hungary.] PolgArt Kiadó, Budapest, 2005, p. 166-168.
[13] We measured antisemitic prejudice by means of the following statements:
Political antisemitism: “Intellectuals of Jewish descent control the media and culture”; “Jews cooperate secretly to control politics and economics”; *Discriminative antisemitism*: “It would be best if the Jews would emigrate from the country”; “The number of Jews should be restricted in certain professional fields”;
Religious antisemitism: “The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the unforgivable sin of the Jews”; “The suffering of the Jews was divine punishment”;
In addition, the scale included the following statement: “Jews are more inclined than others to use dishonest means to achieve their goals”.
We measured “*new antisemitism*” using the following statements:
“Jews living here are more loyal to Israel than to this country”; “Israel’s political system is more progressive than that of the Arab states which are hostile to Israel”; “Israel is fighting a just war of self-defence against hostile attackers”; “What Israel is doing to the Palestinians is the same as what the Nazis did to the Jews”; “Influential Jews run American politics”.
[14] We placed in this group those philosemites that agreed with both statements measuring political antisemitism, as well as those that agreed with only one of the statements but who were placed in the upper 20 percentile on the factor measuring philosemitism, i.e. those who were the most philosemitic.
[15] Research carried out by the Allensbach Institute in August 1949 and December 1952 identified 6 % and 7 % of respondents in the samples as philosemitic. (See E. Noelle – E.P. Neumann (Hrsg.): Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947-1955. Allensbach, 1956, p. 1128; cited in Frank Stern: The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge. Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany. Pergamon Press, Oxford, New York, Seoul, Tokyo, 1992, p. 257; Research carried out in 1950 by the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt (which was under the direction of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno) produced 121 deep interviews, identifying 10 % of respondents as “Judeophiles” (see Friedrich Pollock: Gruppenexperiment. Ein Studienbericht, Frankfurt 1955. Cited in Frank Stern: op. cit., p. 257-258).

[16] See Pollock: op. cit.; cited by Stern: op. cit.
[17] For more information on this topic, see Frank Stern: Entstehung, Bedeutung und Funktion des Philosemitismus in Westdeutschland nach 1945 in Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb (Hrsg.): Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur nach 1945. Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, 1990, p. 191.
[18] Frank Stern: The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge. Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany: op. cit., p. 396.
[19] Frank Stern: op. cit., p. 429.