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Discontinuity, Tradition, and Innovation: Anthropological Reflections on Jewish Identity in Contemporary Hungary

Since the end of Communist rule Hungary has been re-examining its own national identity and so too have its Jewish citizens. The renegotiation and reconstruction of Jewish identity is characterized by the ability of individuals and groups to choose from a variety of identities. Choices, pace Giddens, are not made by some decontextualized individual in a quest for self-identity but rather in the context of social networks and resources. The choices are taken within a framework embracing the state, a mode of production and within the Jewish group which latter is not homogeneous. The author shows how internal and external links are mobilized and how cultural brokers act as agents in the development of new forms of Jewish identity.

Depuis la fin du communisme, la Hongrie a été confrontée à la question de son identité nationale ainsi qu'à celle de ses citoyens juifs. La renégociation et la reconstruction de l'identité juive est caractérisée par la capacité des individus et des groupes à choisir parmi une variété d'identités. Les choix, n'en déplaise à Giddens, ne sont pas opérés par quelque individu décontextualisé en quête d'une identité propre mais sont au contraire situés au sein même de réseaux sociaux et de ressources. Les choix sont faits dans le cadre d'une structure englobant l'Etat, d'un mode de production ainsi qu'au sein du groupe juif qui est loin d'être homogène. L'auteur montre comment les liens internes et externes sont mobilisés et comment les éléments culturels agissent comme des agents dans le développement de nouvelles formes d'identité juive.

Since the end of Communist rule Hungary has been re-examining its own national identity and so too have its Jewish citizens. As Kovacs notes, "Not only is the Jewish identity problematic but so too is the non-Jewish one" (1985: 227). The renegotiation and reconstruction of both Hungarian and Jewish identity is occurring in the wake of massive social, economic and political changes characterized by the ability of individuals and groups to *choose* from a variety of identities. Hitherto freedom of choice, for all citizens, was restricted by the Communist regime. Choices, *pace* Giddens (1991), are not made by some decontextualized individual in a quest for self-identity but rather in the context of social networks and resources. These choices are taken within a framework embracing the State, a mode of production and within the Jewish group itself which latter is not homoge-

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neous since it contains diverse subgroups with divergent views and values, sometimes opposed to each other. The question I pose is how does a group, in this case Hungarian Jews, recover and refashion its identity when the chain of tradition has been broken, when parents are ignorant of their religious and cultural heritage and when the grandparents have chosen to forget? What are the identity options open to Jewish individuals and groups in Hungary today? How do persons exercise these options? How do they mobilize themselves as groups and how are they assisted by outside cultural and religious brokers and institutions to develop new forms of Jewish identity, some neo-traditional, others innovative and radical?

Before tackling these contemporary questions it is necessary to consider the relations between Hungary and the Jews over the past 130 years or so, with the creation of the Dual Kingdom in 1867 and the emancipation of the Jews in the same year. In fact one should begin a little earlier with the common experience of Jews and Hungarians in the 1848 Revolution. Jews, especially the Jews of Pest, identified with, and also fought alongside, their fellow Hungarians against the Hapsburgs. Indeed, for their efforts they were subject to a massive financial penalty which was later used to fund the establishment of the Pest Rabbinical Seminary.

I schematize the historical period between 1867 and 1996 in four phases. I am aware that these four time zones are crude and are capable of a more refined subdivision by historians but they serve my current purpose.

In 1867 Jews were offered what Victor Karady termed "a social contract" (1993: 242) by which they would receive civil rights in exchange for accepting cultural magyarization. For Jews this involved the acquisition of the Hungarian language, the acceptance of Hungarian names, and their self- and other recognition as Hungarian citizens of the Jewish or Israelite religion. They were not to be regarded as an ethnic group or as a nationality such as the other national minorities, e.g. the Slovaks, the Romanians or the Serbs. This social contract was of benefit to the Hungarian political elite since the Jewish population amounted to 5 percent of the kingdom, which figure combined with the ethnic Magyars totalled approximately 50 percent. The other 50 percent comprised the national minorities of the multi-ethnic Hungarian kingdom. As a result of this contract Jews were included in and identified, or even over-identified with, the Hungarian nation-state.

The period 1920–1945 brought a very different scenario. After the treaty of Trianon Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and half of its population and became ethnically homogeneous. Jews were now seen as aliens; their presence was no longer required to boost Magyar numbers. They were regarded as Jews (*Zsidok*) and not as Hungarians of the Jewish religion (*Iszraelita*). Far from being included in the body politic they were now excluded first by legislation and then by liquidation in the Nazi death camps.

The Jewish postwar experience in the Communist era was mixed. For Jews, the new Communist regime offered a radical solution to "the Jewish problem". Since the 1920s Jewishness and Judaism had been handicaps which some were prepared to jettison in order to create a new social system of a universalist kind, in which particularism, whether ethnic, local, or religious, would become irrelevant. A new form of assimilation became available and was attractive to some. Those Jews who accepted the offer found new careers in the political system, state administration and the army, positions hitherto denied them. Jews active in the elite of the Communist party became, in Karady's words, "Dejudaiized apparatchiks" (1993: 250). However those Jews who embraced the Communist Party's cause and who assumed new careers in the postwar political regime were very much a minority. Most Jews experienced the loss of their livelihoods as a result of nationalization, as did non-Jews, and in so far as they were members of the bourgeois class they faced discrimination. All Jews in Hungary were cut off from contact with the Jewish past; with Israel and from the outside world. Specific Jewish experience, especially of the Shoah, was denied or ignored and subsumed under the general rubric of "victims of fascism".

One of the most penetrating accounts of the Jewish predicament in postwar Hungary was that of the historian Istvan Bibo published in 1948. Unfortunately the debate he initiated was stifled until his essay was republished in 1985. His argument was both rational and passionate and sought to explain, and not explain away, Hungarian responsibility for the massive and ruthless destruction of the country's Jewish citizens in 1944–1945. He probes the relationship between Jews and non-Jews in the post-emancipation period (1867). In his opinion assimilation was based on false promises at the time since it involved only *linguistic* magyarization.

> Assimilation in Hungary meant nothing more than for the assimilant to learn the Hungarian language, or not even that, but for him to declare himself to be a Hungarian at census-taking time. (1991: 267)

After 1920 in the truncated Hungary which was ethnically more homogeneous, Bibo points out that state policy was concerned to restrict Jewish participation in politics, but to maintain Jewish economic opportunities. However, subsequent attempts to eliminate Jewish economic power became " the country's primary social issue" (Bibo, 1991: 157).

For Bibo, then, Jewish assimilation into Hungarian society was partial and incomplete. In the period 1867–1919 Jews had embarked on the process of assimilation but in the period 1919–1945 that process had been put into reverse. After the 1939–1945 War Jews were in a limbo—neither Hungarian nor Jewish,

> . . . the assimilated, the semi-assimilated and even the dissimilated have got just as much, or more, difficulty getting back to the Jewish community as they do continuing and completing, the process of assimilation, or initiating an assimilation in a different direction. (Bibo, 1991: 254)

The Hungarian historian Peter Kende, who was writing at the end of Communist rule, points out that precisely since Jews in Hungary are not designated as a national or religious grouping, as was the case in the USSR and Romania, it is difficult to comment on their sociographic characteristics; furthermore he correctly indicates that this very absence of Jews from the census data itself illustrates the great difficulty of separating them out from the general Hungarian population (1989: 170). In a chapter entitled, “Are there Jews in Hungary today?”, he describes the Jews’ own sense of their identity as confused and ambiguous, observing that they educate their children as Hungarian but insist they marry only Jews; that they are non-religious but go to synagogue on high holidays. Kende notes that non-Jews have a distorted image of Jews whom they perceive as more numerous and better organized than is the case (1989: 180). This confused knowledge of Jews about themselves, and of non-Jewish ignorance about their Jewish compatriots, is made possible by the silence of and about Jewish life and culture. Kende argues that for the sake of both Jews and non-Jews it is time to discuss openly and honestly recent Hungarian Jewish history and encounters between the country’s Jews and non-Jews (1989: 214).

I now address the identity options open to post-Communist, Hungarian Jewry and I describe three choices that they exercise—the religious, the ethnic and the socio-cultural.

The Religious Option

As a result of the *Shoah* most of the Jews in provincial Hungary were murdered—those who survived either emigrated, or if they remained, rejected their religious heritage. The majority of *Shoah* survivors were the more socially and culturally integrated Jews in the capital, Budapest—who were for the most part Neolog or Reform, i.e. Hungarians of the Jewish religion, or “Israelites”. The Communist regime generally suppressed expressions of religiosity or controlled religious groups through the Office of Religious Affairs. The Communist Party equated religion with places of worship, either churches or synagogues. Thus it became impossible to hold a *Seder* (Passover Meal or Service) in which the extended family and friends could participate—such a large collection of people in one place was defined by the authorities as a political gathering. If a *Seder* were to be held then it constituted a religious event and had to take place in the synagogue. The Communist Party also forcibly integrated the Orthodox, Neolog and Status Quo Jewish groups into a single organization in order to control it more easily. The Jews as a religious group shared similar experiences with fellow Hungarians of the Catholic, Calvinist and Lutheran faiths. However, the Hungarian Jewish situation in the postwar Communist era differed significantly from that of their fellow Jews in other Warsaw Pact countries; for example, the Hungarian identity card did not describe them as “Jews” as was the case in the USSR and in Romania. Furthermore the only rabbinical seminary in the whole of communist east and central Europe was in Budapest where it trained rabbis for other parts of the Soviet empire.

Since 1990 there has been a trend towards increasing diversity among Jewish religious groupings. In the first instance, at an institutional level, the shotgun marriage between the Orthodox and the Neolog communities has ended in divorce and two organizations now exist, though the Orthodox is far smaller in size. If we briefly examine the Orthodox sector what do we find? We see that in addition to the old Orthodox organization there are some developments, to mention but two.

The Lubavitch Hasidim. This group is still very small, but dynamic under the leadership of an American rabbi of Hungarian extraction, an example of a cultural broker who uses his Israeli and American networks to promote Judaism in Hungary. The response of local Jewry to his mission can be seen in the growth of his congregation and his recruitment of young people. In the recruitment of assimilated Jews, Lubavitch's achievement in Budapest is similar to that in Paris, London and Manchester. Even more successful have been the Lubavitch publication of religious texts, especially the Shmuel Jewish Prayer Book, embraced by the Neolog movement, and the reprinting of the Hertz Biblia (the Pentateuch and commentary by Israel Hertz, former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the British Empire—himself of Hungarian origin).

The Kollel. Another manifestation of Orthodoxy is the Kollel, a study group that meets in the evenings in the Orthodox headquarters to study Talmud. Again, numbers are small and again, its leader is an American of Hungarian origin.

Szim shalom. At the other end of the religious spectrum is a group of Reform Jews called Szim shalom who first came together 10 years ago as an informal group of people, particularly women from an assimilated background, who wished to discover their Jewish heritage. Several of them were similar to those researched by Eros et al. in their article (1985) "Comment j'en suis arrivé à apprendre que j'étais juif". Outsiders identified them as Jewish after their parents, survivors of the *Shoah*, had concealed their Jewish ancestry. Seeking to give some content to their newfound Jewish identity they began to study together. One of their members is now in the penultimate year of her training to be a rabbi at the Leo Baeck College in London. She intends to establish a formal religious congregation from this informal set of people. Again it is a small group—at its communal *Seder* in April 1996 over 70 persons attended, double the number of three years previously. As with the Orthodox groups the small size is not the issue; rather, what is relevant is the range of choices available to those seeking to express their Jewishness in a religious context. Once again we see the importance of outside links. This time it is the British connection reinforced by visitors who come from abroad to offer their expertise and advice, and to maintain members' morale in the difficult task of establishing and maintaining a voluntary association. This difficulty is exacerbated by the lack of support from existing Jewish religious and communal organizations and even obstruction, unlike the reception extended to Lubavitch, allocated one of Budapest's vacant synagogues by the Jewish community, whereas Szim shalom was refused one. This differential treatment suggests that a new brand of Judaism (new in the context of post-communist Hungary) can expect to encounter greater opposition within the established Jewish community than the return of a movement that had existed before the war.

Neolog. The Neolog movement is still the dominant form of Jewish religious organization. It is simultaneously Hungarian and Jewish—the symbiosis of the two identities is exemplified in and on the gravestone of Scheiber Sandor, the former head of the Rabbinical Seminary, who died in 1985 and whose funeral was attended by dignitaries both Jewish and non-Jewish from many walks of life. His bilingual tombstone bears a quotation in Hungarian from the poet Arany Janos on one side and brief details of his life in Hebrew on the other side. Most Neolog Jews wear their Judaism lightly. They attend synagogue infrequently for most of the year but fill the synagogues at New Year and on the Day of Atonement. In this way they resemble most of the Christian population. In short, religious observance has a low priority manifest in the small number of circumcision ceremonies conducted here compared with western Europe where even the most assimilated and secular Jews have their sons circumcised.

The Ethnic Option

Just as there is caution in expressing the religious dimension of Jewish identity (though as I have indicated there are small developments in this area), so too the political ethnic option has generally been rejected. Zionism has never been strong as a movement in Hungary (despite it being the birthplace of Theodore Herzl); the overwhelming majority embraced the social contract of assimilation, hence the trauma of the Horthy period and of the *Shoah* when Jews who identified with the country were first denied their civil liberties and then later denied the right to live. It was during this period that Jews were defined by others, and against their will, not as Hungarian citizens of the Jewish faith, but as *Zsidok*, Jews as a people, an ethnic group, and moreover one that was alien and incompatible with the Hungarian nation and people. Indeed, as the Nuremberg definition of a Jew was applied, so persons of the Christian religion with Jewish ancestors fell into this category. In short, it was the State that determined the identity of a Jew irrespective of the latter's self-definition and irrespective of his or her consciousness. It is important to note here that the term "Jew" was revived in the census of 1941; before this, the term "Iszraelita" had been in force since 1880, having replaced the earlier "Zsido". One important area of my research is to investigate the semantics of the terms "Iszraelita" and "Zsido". It is apparent that more and more of Budapest's Jews and Jewish organizations are reclaiming the term "Zsido". They are stripping it of its pejorative meaning and embracing it with pride. It is in the context of the *Shoah* and of the classification of Jews as a nationality—an ethnic minority—that we can comprehend why Hungary's Jews rejected the opportunity to be designated as a nationality for the purpose of the Law *On the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities*. This option was resisted despite the fact that Jews qualified for such recognition under the act, namely, residence in Hungary for at least 100 years; Hungarian citizens with a language, culture or tradition and consciousness as a group (Law No.27, 1993, cf. Kovacs, 1994b). Moreover this law offered support and protection against anti-Semitism. Why then was it rejected? Why did not even 1000 Jews sign a petition which would have entitled the Hungarian parliament to consider an application to be included in the list of recognized national minorities?

The answer to this question is to be found in the historical past of Hungary's Jews. Despite the brutal shock that the supporters of assimilation experienced between 1920 and 1944, the majority of contemporary Hungarian Jews subscribe to the assimilation model, albeit with reservations. This caution is manifest in their low profile—a sort of public invisibility marked literally by the absence of circumcision. Registering as a minority would have been an overt, public manifestation of the social difference of a separate corporate identity.

Moreover, though the Jewish community might have been prepared to accept the bona fides of the government of the day in seeking to protect all of its minorities, the Jewish collective memory is suspicious of the intentions of the State, even when those intentions appear benign and for their benefit. It is aware that registration under the law could serve as a pretext for discrimination in employment, exclusion from debating national issues, expulsion, and even worse, should a more malign government gain power. Support for these fears was reinforced by the fact that among the most ardent advocates of defining Jews as an official, national minority were nationalist groups with an anti-Semitic agenda (Kovacs, 1994b: 70).

Zionist groups. Though Jews rejected registration as an official ethnic majority, there exists a variety of Zionist organizations associated with Israeli political parties, ranging from the right to the left. There are also Zionist youth groups which recruit their youth leaders from Israel but which too are minute and more in the nature of social clubs than ideological or political organizations. They serve more to bring Jewish youth together than to promote immigration to Israel. It is interesting to note that the religious, Zionist youth movement B'nei Akivah lacks support in Budapest whereas the centre-left Habonim-Dror and the more left Hashomer Hatsair are stronger. Significantly these groups have to accommodate to the Hungarian scene—thus Hashomer Hatsair, which in Israel and elsewhere is stridently secular, even atheist, feels obliged to observe the Friday night ritual of lighting candles at its meeting in order to instil a sense of religious Jewish identity in its members. This small example of the impact of Hungarian Jews on the cultural broker demonstrates that these cultural brokers have to adapt to the specific local circumstances if they are to have any success in their ventures. They must be prepared to modify their own practices and to recognize that their interaction with local Jews involves reciprocal change.

The Social and Cultural Option

A variety of organizations and institutions have come into existence since 1990 with the help of outside bodies, cultural brokers and benefactors. In the Jewish community new schools have been set up to serve different sectors of the Jewish and in some cases non-Jewish population. During the Communist period one Jewish day school, the Anne Frank Gimnazium, existed, though it only served a small section of Budapest's community. In 1976/1977, for example, it had less than 10 pupils and in the 1980s a score (Felkai, 1992: 154). This state school was and still is supported by the Budapest Jewish community. Indeed until 1965 its name was "A Budapesti Zsido Hitkozseg Gimnazium" (The Budapest Jewish Community's High School). The term "Zsido" was then dropped. Today it has 200 pupils and will be moving into new premises in the near future in anticipation of further expansion.

Two new schools—Private Foundation Schools—have emerged since 1990, one serving the more Orthodox or traditional sector of the community, though in fact most of its pupils do not come from an Orthodox background. This school (the American Foundation School also known as Masoret Avot, or the Reichmann School, or most commonly the Wesseleny School after the street on which it is located) is diminishing in size so that from a figure of 500 pupils a few years ago it now has 300, a significant number of whom are immigrants from Israel. It would seem that demand for a more Orthodox religious education is low in Budapest and that the ideals of its benefactors, the Reichmann brothers (Canadians born in Hungary), do not match local conditions. The other foundation school, the Lauder Yavne Jewish Community School and Kindergarten, is a secular, Jewish day school which does not officially record the religious identity of its pupils; indeed, some of its students are not Jewish in terms of self-ascription and others do not meet the identity requirements of the Jewish Religious Law (having a Jewish mother) on which the American Foundation School insists. Recently the Lauder school appointed a local rabbi as head of its Jewish studies programme.

It would seem, then, that the secular school is becoming more religious and that the religious school is becoming more Orthodox. We should be cautious, however, about concluding that there is a religious revival among Jews in the sphere of schooling. Most Jewish parents continue to send their children to secular state schools where the religious affiliation of their children is irrelevant. One tentative conclusion I would put forward is that we might be seeing some form of social and educational stratification based on social class in the Jewish day schools. Thus the new economic elite sends its children to the Lauder School; the middle stratum to the Wesseleny; and the less well off to the Anne Frank Gimnazium.

Associated with the growth of the Jewish day schools is the creation of the Pedagogium—the teacher training centre whose graduates will service the Jewish day schools and also the Jewish welfare organizations. This venture is supported by the Joint and the Jewish Agency.

To sum up, in contemporary Hungary I do not think that we have a religious revival among Jews; nor is there a political, ethnic revival. What we do see is a manifestation of cultural ethnicity: a burgeoning interest in Jewish history, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, an increasing demand to learn modern Hebrew and to a lesser extent Yiddish. This cultural identity is fostered by attendance at conferences, exhibitions, music festivals (in

November 1996 alone there were three conferences in one week, overlapping one another). From an anthropological perspective, like Webber (1994: 81), I see these events as secular rituals in which Jewishness is celebrated by the participants, who come together as Jews to acknowledge one another and their heritage in public. Hungarian Jewish identity like other Jewish diaspora identities is not monolithic—it is not a single, undifferentiated entity. Religion as the sole criterion of Jewish identity has been rejected. So too political ethnicity has been embraced by a mere handful of persons.

In post-1990 Hungary, Jewish cultural, recreational, sporting and private societies are the locus and focus of contemporary Jewish identity. The earliest of such groups is the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association—a grass roots, secular body independent of the communal and religious organization. Its membership has dropped since it was founded in 1988, but it is the parent body of the very successful journal *Szombat* and of the Lauder School. This organization is largely funded by its members and by private, local benefactors. To some extent it has faced competition since 1994 with the opening of the Balint Jewish Community Centre which provides a variety of activities and services—social, cultural, educational and religious. Balint House, as it is known (after the name of a Hungarian born, British Jew) is funded by the "Joint" (Joint Distribution Committee). Well-resourced and equipped, it caters for all members of the Jewish community, irrespective of age or religious affiliation. In a sense Balint House is the modern equivalent of a *beth knesset*, a house of assembly or synagogue. It recruits Jews from diverse backgrounds and different interests, and brings them together in public to express their identity which until recently had been confined to the private sphere. Balint House is an example of cultural innovation—the first Jewish institution of its kind to be established in east and central Europe for almost 60 years. Here we find an external organization, the Joint, which works with local people to resuscitate and develop Jewish culture in all its diversity. Moreover, Jewish culture is made available to the non-Jewish population so that inter-faith communication is promoted.

Significantly, the Joint does not seek permanent responsibility for this project. Rather, it intends gradually to transfer the institution into the hands of the local Jewish community. In this sense the Joint acts as an enabling rather than as an imperial power.

Conclusion

So far I have discussed Jewish identity from a general historical and organizational perspective, but I should like to conclude by referring to two individuals and their personal experiences of identity. These are particular experiences that illustrate and exemplify general trends and that I intend to pursue more fully in the next phase of research. I commence with a remark by the first person, an internationally famous scholar who had recently celebrated his 50th birthday. What he said is the following: "I have given five decades to my Hungarian identity and now I shall give the next decades to my Jewish identity.'' What prompted this statement and what does it signify about Hungarian and Jewish identity?

It is well known that a person's social and personal identity changes over time and is particularly associated with rites of passage or with major events such as the 1956 revolution or the Six Day War of 1967. In this case the scholar had had two experiences in recent years which had caused him to reconsider his identity. The first experience occurred while he was a visiting professor in the USA. On the Day of Atonement he visited a synagogue but was unable to read or follow the prayers; this inadequacy caused him some embarrassment and anxiety. The second experience was the death of his father, who had a Jewish burial. On this occasion he was unable to recite the prayer for the dead, the *Kaddish*. He expressed his frustration to his closest friend, also a Jew, who had attended the funeral, but the latter did not share his concern. One obvious conclusion (and not original) we can draw is that specific critical occasions, such as birthdays, in a person's life and in their relationships with others trigger off these reflections about personal and social identity.

We can draw a further conclusion, namely, that this person, and he is not alone among Jews of the immediate postwar generation, believes that it is difficult to combine the identities of Hungarian and Jew. In the past he opted for the Hungarian; now he will choose to focus on the Jewish. The idea that he could combine the two seemed alien to him at the time. The same person invited me and my wife to his home and honoured us by producing from a cupboard precious family relics, namely a *menorah*, the *chanukah* candelabra and two *shabbat* candlesticks, plus his father's *tallith*, the prayer shawl. Even in his home the candlesticks were concealed from his own private view. In the future, so he told us, these Jewish symbols will come out of the closet.

This existential dilemma of possessing a dual identity as a Jew and as a Hungarian was recently addressed by the Hungarian-Jewish sociologist and novelist, George Konrad, who remarked that it was easier to be a Jew and a Hungarian in Berlin than in Budapest (1997: 8). The same issue was raised by the Hungarian President Arpad Goncz in May 1998, when he addressed a mainly Jewish audience in Budapest to celebrate Israel's 50th anniversary as a state. He reassured his listeners that it was possible to be both Jewish and Hungarian, that is to say, to possess a dual identity in contemporary Hungary. My own research interviews also indicate the problematic nature of this issue for Hungary's Jewish citizens.

The second person is a retired, working-class man, an autodidact, who was born in a provincial town and brought up as an Orthodox Jew. He, his two brothers, three sisters and parents survived the *Shoah*, the only family in that town to survive intact. This very fact gave them an exceptionally strong sense of family solidarity. In 1948 he and his two brothers illegally emigrated to Israel and joined the Israeli army. They hoped that the rest of the family would follow shortly. My interviewee abandoned his religious Orthodoxy on arrival in Israel and in fact never resumed it. Since it proved impossible for his parents and sisters to gain permission to join them, the three brothers collectively took the decision to return to Hungary after five years in Israel.

This man, who had not been a member of a synagogue since his return in 1953 and who had little contact with Jews outside his immediate family, began to write Hebrew poetry two years ago, eight years after the death of his Jewish wife. He also translates Hungarian poetry into Hebrew. More significant however is the fact that last year for the first time he wrote a letter in Hebrew to his younger brother, not in Hungarian or in Yiddish which he learned in his childhood. The main purpose of the letter was to urge his "younger brother and friend" to maintain family contact from which he had recently withdrawn. In the epistle he impressed on his brother the need to remember their own specific experience of the *Shoah* and of Israel.

We have here an example of a man who has consciously chosen to select a secular Jewish identity. Again, both my wife and I had the privilege of viewing "his most valuable possessions": his membership card of the Israeli Trade Union Movement, the *Histadruth*; his Israeli ration card book from 1951; his unemployment record card for that same year; and a photograph of his late wife.

I shall not proceed with further individual examples. I supply them to put a recognisable human touch to an otherwise abstract portrait of Hungarian Jewish experience. Of course it is important to consider the large impersonal forces of urbanization, industrialization, modernization and globalization, but it is essential to see how these forces impinge on the everyday lives of real human beings. Moreover, they impinge in different ways and at different stages of the life cycle. People make choices within these broad parameters based on their social networks, personal resources and individual inclinations. My task as my research continues is to connect these personal experiences to the broader historical, economic, political and social forces that affect both Jews and non-Jews, but have especially influenced the ways in which they perceive each other and the ways in which they relate to each other.

Contemporary Hungarian Jewry, which is predominantly Budapest's Jewish community, is both Hungarian and Jewish. Most of its constituents belong to the Neolog movement, a 19th-century central European type of Reform Judaism, who see themselves as Hungarians of the Jewish religion. There are a smaller number of Orthodox Jews, and a number of new groups from Reform to Lubavitch Hasidim; beyond these groups there is a large pool of Jews with a sense of Jewishness that is not manifest in either the religious or the ethnic sense of Jewish identity. Most of these Jews, irrespective of their affiliations and Jewish identities, are committed to remaining in Hungary. For example, there is very little immigration to Israel, though there is increased contact between Israel and Hungary, and increasing numbers of pupils from the Jewish day schools and other Jews spending some time in Israel are learning both modern Hebrew and Jewish culture.

Finally, we should note the diversity of Jewish responses to the current economic, political and cultural problems that exist in contemporary Hungary. There are those who choose to celebrate their difference as Jews and who create walls around themselves, but these are few in number. There are others who stress their Hungarian identity. Still others are striving to reconcile their Jewish and Hungarian identities. Most Hungarian Jews remain cautious about identifying with the organized Jewish community during their lifetime and hence do not register as members, but do so posthumously when they request a Jewish burial. These are the Jews of silence, the subterranean Jews of Hungary who make research challenging and difficult (why should they make it easy?) for sociologists and social anthropologists.

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