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HUNGARIAN JEWRY: THREE ASPECTS

*By*

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of  
*Master of Letters*  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines several different aspects of Hungarian Jewry. Each aspect should be viewed individually, although connections are referred to where relevant. Aspect one is a historical overview of Hungarian Jewry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second aspect focuses upon the experiences of Hungarian Jewish women. The third aspect is a comparative study of Holocaust exhibitions, primarily from a gender perspective. The thesis is based upon a broad range of secondary source material, but also importantly incorporates several primary sources, including oral testimony and survey data collected by the author.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Molly McPharlin

January 2003

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is the culmination of research conducted between 1995 and 2002. Initially, its purpose was to examine the state of the Hungarian Jewish community in the post-communist era. As the research progressed, it became apparent that an overview of Hungarian Jewish history throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also needed in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the country's contemporary Jewish life. It was also discovered that because of the size and intricacy of the Jewish community, the paths the research took became increasingly diverse and varied. Therefore, it was decided that the dissertation should be a work in three distinct parts, sharing some historical aspects, background information and sources, but essentially planned as three independent studies on different aspects of Hungarian Jewry.

Because many areas within Hungary's modern Jewish communities have yet to be examined in both Hungarian and English academia, much of this research required the author to act as a participant-observer within Hungarian Jewish society. Over a period of three years, this meant actually living with Jewish people in several parts of the country, getting to know their families and lives on a personal level. Some of these people became close friends. They provided a singular look at the experience of establishing one's identity and finding one's place within a complex network of varying ideas and opinions. During this time, interviews and oral history also played an important role in documenting and beginning to understand the histories and contemporary lives of Jews throughout the country. This included some individuals who had never spoken to researchers outside of Hungary and a few who had never told their stories before.



These experiences further shaped the direction of the dissertation. With insight into the complexities of Jewish life both within and outside Budapest, new questions and interests arose. How did the history of regional Jewry differ from its urban counterpart? What was the relationship between regional communities and the main community in Budapest? What was the position of women within the community structure? How did cultural institutions such as Budapest's Jewish Museum contribute to the country's understanding of the history of the Holocaust, Jewish life and the promotion and integration of the community within its surrounding society?

Having recognised several areas on which to focus, the outline of the dissertation was decided upon. To begin with, though, it should be understood that the author does believe Hungarian Jewry is a community. Throughout each chapter, Hungarian Jews are often referred to as a community and described in such terms. However, the ideas and perspectives of those who do not think it constitutes one are also analysed and included.

Chapter one offers the reader a general overview of the Hungarian Jewish community throughout the modern era. Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the chapter provides an examination of Hungarian Jewry, its struggle to define itself throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a study of the complex structure of the community itself. It looks at the intricate relationship existing between urban and regional Jewry and how on-going anti-Semitism within Hungary shaped decisions made within the community and the way Jews personally chose to live their lives and publicly represent themselves. Primarily, chapter one should be seen as providing the reader with a beginning taste of Hungarian Jewish society.

Chapter two takes a more focused approach. Examining the position of women within Hungarian Jewish life, this chapter begins with a look at

how women's histories and experiences have been both marginalised and ignored within Jewish studies. It demonstrates how Jewish women's unique histories and identities may have impacted the fate of women during the Holocaust. It concentrates exclusively on examining these histories and experiences within a Hungarian context. The chapter assesses how Jewish women's contributions to the Hungarian women's movement during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and problems balancing their feminist and Jewish identities later affected the choices they made during the Second World War. Finally, the chapter explores the role of women within the contemporary Jewish community. It questions how the community could become more inclusive and open by recognising the female voice within its organisational structure.

Chapter three continues the theme of women's and gender studies within Jewish history. Using the Budapest Jewish Museum and the Imperial War Museum in London as case studies, this chapter examines the representation of gender and women within Holocaust exhibitions. It assesses the primary factors influencing a museum's decision to include gendered analysis of the Holocaust and compares the opinions of museum leadership and curators, the pressure of external social influences and the attitudes of museum audiences concerning the representation of women at both museums. Finally, it assesses how both exhibitions could become stronger, more honest accounts of history by including gendered analysis and women's histories within their representations.

Ultimately, these three, distinct chapters should be read as separate studies. Researched over a period of years, they reflect changes in the author's level of knowledge, interests and experiences. Though the chapters may build upon and at times refer back to each other, they remain independent. Though some of the same sources or interviews might be referred to and used within different chapters, it should be assumed that

different aspects or perspectives coming from the same source are being used. And though the main purpose of this dissertation is not to find linking, concluding ties that bring all these chapters together in the end, a brief conclusion offering some connecting ideas or thoughts at the end of the dissertation is offered. However, the main conclusions come at the end of each separate chapter.

Hopefully, the reader will finish this dissertation more knowledgeable of the complex nature of both Hungary's historical and contemporary Jewish communities. They should have a better understanding of some of the issues affecting Jewish life in Hungary. And they should hold a more insightful appreciation for the importance of gendered analysis within Jewish studies as well as for the diverse experiences of Hungarian Jewish women. If nothing else, this dissertation may answer a few questions not approached before in other studies on Hungarian Jewry. It will hopefully spark the reader's interest to learn more about their fascinating history.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Hungarian Jewry in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

For the first time since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hungarian Jews today have the possibility of enjoying great potential and opportunity. As the historian Randolph Braham writes, the restructuring of political life in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980's brought about a resurgence in Jewish life. Many Jews enthusiastically embraced and reasserted Jewish cultural and religious traditions.<sup>1</sup> Jews in Hungary have dynamic cultural centres, places of worship that still receive regular attendance for religious holidays and weekly services and the support of an international network of agencies and funding bodies. They even enjoy a growing population, as people who once emigrated from the country return and others who have not identified themselves as Jews for decades renew a relationship with their ancestral past. Most importantly, they have the freedom and choice to live their lives, to openly think and express themselves, as Jews. Unlike any other Jewish population in Eastern Europe today, they are a large, active group, a community.

At the same time, several historic problems and more recent conflicts hinder this period of growth and possibility, this new 'golden era' for Hungary's Jews.<sup>2</sup> They threaten to upset the balance Jews are beginning to establish and enjoy between their Jewish lives and their Hungarian ones. As the country's economic and political prospects remain unstable, the threat of social and political anti-Semitism, both underlying and overt, continues to loom. Hungary's continuing inability to openly come to terms with its participation in the persecution of Jews and other ethnic minorities during the Second World War also hinders the reconciliation process

between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians. As Braham contends, post-Communist Hungary has failed so far to make a national, collective commitment to confront the Holocaust honestly and truthfully.<sup>3</sup> And the constantly changing, complex identities of Jews themselves upset the internal relationships within Hungarian Jewish society at local and national levels, within urban, regional and provincial circles. Ultimately, in their quest to establish identities within the new cultural, political and economic landscape of Hungary, Jews must once again confront the question that has nagged them since they first received emancipation in 1867 – are they Hungarian Jews or are they Jewish Hungarians? Is it possible to be both? And if it is, can their multitude of identities truly work together as a community?

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the history of Hungarian Jewry, their position within the country as they move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to analyse some of the challenges facing them as they re-organise and rebuild today. Though Hungary's situation is no longer new, having initially moved towards becoming a democratic state in the late 1980's, its continuing political, economic and social changes bring further challenges to its Jewish population with each passing year. For example, the level of anti-Semitism and nationalist sentiment deemed acceptable within the country fluctuated throughout the 1990's and made some people frightened of participating in the new Jewish revival and publicly declaring themselves Jews. Uncertainty over continued financial support from both the Hungarian government and foreign aid agencies in the late 1990's strained relationships within Hungary's Jewish centres. Both these factors made it difficult to trust surrounding forces and made planning the future for Hungary's Jewish population more complicated. Several themes within Hungarian Jewish life have been targeted within this chapter in order to demonstrate the intricate process of identity forming and

community building against a constantly varying social background. The first section of the chapter looks at the history of Hungarian Jews since their emancipation and their relationship to assimilation and integration within Hungarian society.<sup>4</sup> What has assimilation meant in maintaining their independent identities as religious and cultural Jews? Section two examines the history and role of the 'Jewish question', the debate over the role of Jews within Hungarian society, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Section three assesses the variety of identities making up contemporary Hungarian Jewry. Can Hungarian Jews truly be defined as a community? Section four looks at an example of one of the many complicated relationships existing for Jews throughout the country, the testy relations between urban and regional Jewry. And, finally, section five examines the impact both potential and concrete anti-Semitism may have on the choices Hungarian Jews make and the way they live their lives.

Understanding the ways Jews live and interact within Eastern Europe today is fundamental if one hopes to move beyond the notion that Jewish life, culture and religion in this region ended after 1945. This is simply not the case. Within many areas of Central and Eastern Europe, Jewish communities are re-organising and reclaiming their voice. Ultimately, this chapter hopes to present the reader with an initial understanding of Hungary's Jews as a vibrant, complex population. It hopes to illustrate some of the unique events, opportunities and difficulties that have played a role in the formation of the Jewish experience within modern Hungarian history and Hungarian society.

## **In Search of a Definition**

In March, 1998, Gabor Szanto, the editor of Hungary's leading Jewish journal *Szombat*, discussed the decision made in 1989 by the Jewish community to reject adopting the official definition of 'ethnic minority'. *Szombat* was founded by a group of young Jews seeking an open, independent forum in which to debate cultural, religious and historical affairs after the political changes in the late 1980's. Szanto examined the reasons the community remained classified solely by its religious status:

The decision was made by the leadership of the Jewish community, many of whom are older and are Holocaust survivors or were born directly after the war. They grew up during a time when it was very unpopular and even dangerous to declare one's religion, much less state what your ethnic or national affiliations were. Many of these people wanted to forget that they had any ties to Judaism because of what had happened to their families during the war. And they also continued to be heavily influenced by the pre-war Jewish community, which always defined its Jewishness by religion only.

For these older people to decide now that this is still the way forward for the community is foolish, I think. There have been too many changes in the 20th century to believe that what was good for the community in the past is still beneficial for it now. There are many younger people who only feel ties to Judaism because of its cultural value in their lives and are interested in exploring what Zionism has to offer them. They were born long after the war and do not remember Communism, or if they do remember it they are young enough to want to try a new way of life. Many have only now discovered that they are Jewish and have no idea what this actually means and how this knowledge will manifest in the future. They are not afraid of anti-Semitism. They do not have the mentality of victims. Many older people are so nervous to say out loud that they are Jewish that they want to have no ties to Judaism on paper that they feel may come back to haunt them later. I understand and respect their reasons for this, but it is unfair of them to inflict their feelings on younger members of the community who don't have the same ties to the past. Officially denying any ties to Judaism as an ethnicity limits the financial benefits the community is entitled to receive from the government. It legitimises the idea that Jews must hide and should only be afraid to be Jewish, which is not a good example to set for younger people growing up in a new kind of society. It is not healthy for the community to continue to define itself in this manner if they want any chance at

a future in this country. And it demonstrates to non-Jewish society and the rest of the world that Hungarian Jewry is a divided group, not a community that can work and co-operate as one with common goals and an identity which can be understood inherently to be that of a Hungarian Jew.<sup>5</sup>

The decision by the Jewish community to reject ethnic minority status, as well as any financial and social benefits that a minority group is entitled to under Hungarian law, and the arguments which arose within Jewish society during the debate over this issue, represent a people divided over their identity and position within Hungarian society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1950, Hungarian Jewry's three distinct communities, the conservative, modern Neolog group, the traditional, East European-influenced Orthodox and the moderate Status Quo Ante were merged into one body, the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK), under the supervision of the Government Office of Church Affairs.<sup>6</sup> This single community organisation was granted recognition only as a religious group, not a cultural or historical community. Though convenient for the government to contain and control all of Hungarian Jewry within one common entity, this new order ignored distinct historical, cultural and religious differences and internal struggles existing between the three communities. It illustrates the dismissive attitude in which the complexities of Jewish life in Hungary have often been dealt with.

The community's decision over its minority status in the post-communist era demonstrates that tensions and misconceptions remain in the ways Jews are perceived within non-Jewish Hungarian society and the ways community members live and view themselves as Jews.<sup>7</sup> Much of this is due to the treatment of Jews in the post-war era as well as to the ways Jews themselves dealt with this treatment. Under communism, in order to avoid accusations of nationalism and being labelled a Zionist, Jewish community leaders and educators adhered to the government's ruling of religious, but not cultural, freedom of expression for Jews.<sup>8</sup> All activities,



such as the teaching of Jewish history, cultural heritage and customs were erased from the community's public programmes. Some Hungarian Jews felt that even an officially acceptable relationship with the Jewish religion would prejudice non-Jewish society towards them and might possibly be seen as deviant behaviour by the authorities. As a result, many Jews stopped openly following religious traditions as well, such as attending synagogue, and cut ties with the community at all levels.<sup>9</sup> A divide arose between the ways many Jews publicly and personally identified themselves. Many children were not told of their Jewish ancestry. A generation of Jewish children grew up in the post-war era in Hungary with no knowledge of their cultural heritage and with substantial parts of their history missing.<sup>10</sup>

The divide which exists today reveals that many Hungarian Jews continue to remain wary over openly being identified as Jews or being seen participating in Jewish activities by non-Jewish Hungarians. Even though many Jews in Hungary are knowledgeable in Jewish history and culture, speak Hebrew and enjoy strong links with international Jewish movements and Israel, few can agree on whether they should become politically defined as an ethnic minority living in Hungary and risk 'outing' their identity to the rest of the country.<sup>11</sup> This disagreement has as much to do with the community's turbulent connections with non-Jewish Hungarians as it does with its own internal historical struggle over whether to assimilate within Hungarian society. Debate over assimilation dates back to the late-19th century. Brought to attention again in the mid-1980's by the so-called 'Jewish Renaissance', the term used by most Hungarian Jews active within the community today to describe the re-evaluation and revival of Jewish cultural and historical traditions in Hungary, today's debate over assimilation is ultimately linked to the position Hungarian Jewry found itself in at the end of the Second World War.

After being granted first political and civil emancipation and later religious freedom in 1867 and 1895 by the ruling Magyar elite in Hungary, most Jews followed a strict pattern of assimilation with non-Jewish society and strongly supported the Magyar-led government.<sup>12</sup> Assimilation served two specific needs. For the Magyars, who were themselves a minority ruling over other minority groups living in the often turbulent, uneasy ethnic arena which made up turn-of-the-century Hungary and which was rife with the growing struggles of national groups during the 1890's, Jewish assimilation, as well as their political and financial backing, was seen as key to gaining majority rule within the country. The combined numbers of Magyars and Jews made them the largest, most powerful national group. Because of this, assimilation became an unwritten rule, an underlying clause which Jews were expected to fulfil in order to receive this freedom and maintain their economic success in the rapidly industrialising and modernising Hungarian economy.<sup>13</sup>

For Hungarian Jewry, assimilation was the natural step forward, proof that they had progressed into a position of equality and acceptance parallel to other non-Jewish citizens living in the country. The historian Nathaniel Katzburg writes that religious equality, especially, was instrumental in fostering this sense of shared identity for Jews. This alliance eliminated what Jews saw as the last vestige of political discrimination existing against them.<sup>14</sup> They adopted Magyar names. They used the terms 'Magyars of the Jewish faith' or 'Magyars of the Israelite faith' to describe themselves.<sup>15</sup> Linguistically, as most assimilated Hungarian Jews could not speak Yiddish or Hebrew, they spoke Hungarian as their native language. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even the strict Orthodox communities of the eastern parts of the country used Hungarian as their primary language and had adopted other aspects of Magyarisation, though they continued to condemn cultural assimilation.<sup>16</sup>

Both Zionism and Marxism were unpopular with most assimilated Hungarian Jews before the Second World War, who perceived themselves to be strong patriots and loyal to the country. Assimilation at this time, therefore, was seen as both a national duty and a privilege and was readily adopted by much of Hungarian Jewry. For many Jews, their identities as Magyars became equally important to them as their identities as Jews.<sup>17</sup> There was no reason to label themselves an ethnic minority when they felt a part of the ruling ethnicity.

In 1945, Hungarian Jews found themselves at a defining moment in their relationship with Hungary and non-Jewish society. On one hand, the country had acted as a protector and haven to many Jews throughout Central and Eastern Europe during the 1930's and through the War until 1944<sup>18</sup>. On the other, Jews were now living in a country which had chosen to ally itself with the Nazi regime and, by either directly collaborating or turning a blind eye and doing nothing, had assisted in the deportation and murder of almost 600,000 members of the country's war-time Jewish population from March to October, 1944.<sup>19</sup>

By the time the Russian army liberated Hungary in February, 1945, only a quarter of Hungary's wartime Jewish population remained, or approximately 260,000 people.<sup>20</sup> Many of the deportations occurred within the Jewish communities of the towns and villages of the Hungarian countryside where most strictly religious, Orthodox Jews had lived. Therefore, post-war survivors were generally conservative, but modern Jews who had resided in Budapest, were of the professional and middle or upper-classes, and had previously adhered to a pattern of assimilation with non-Jewish society. Many survivors were actually only of partial-Jewish origin or had previously converted to Christianity to escape persecution.<sup>21</sup>

Jewish reaction to the Holocaust and the involvement of Hungary in the destruction of its Jewish population varied. For many survivors,

Hungary's anti-Semitism and actions during the war were proof that it was no longer possible for Hungarian Jews to assimilate and live peacefully with non-Jewish society, that, in fact, Jewish assimilation from the very beginning had failed. New identities needed to be pursued. A surge of popularity for the Zionist movement in Hungary occurred at this point. New Zionist organisations emerged and a quarter of Jewish survivors emigrated to Israel until the movement was disbanded and made illegal by the government in March, 1949.<sup>22</sup> For much of the older, more religious generation that remained, the community continued to maintain the institutions and religious facilities which it was allowed, but shunned any further ties to Jewish identity and culture. Other survivors, traumatised by the past and fearful of a resurgence of anti-Semitism within the country, rejected all ties to Judaism and retreated into anonymity.<sup>23</sup>

Many other Jews remained wary of the political parties emerging in the immediate post-war era with their relatively mild denunciation of the conservative, politically anti-Semitic regime led by Admiral Miklos Horthy that had ruled Hungary from 1919 until the take-over by the Nazis in 1944. Instead, these Jews threw their support behind the Communist party and the idea of a future socialist or internationalist society. Communist policy, they felt, was free of prejudice against ethnic minorities and the bond between religion and politics that had formerly dominated the Hungarian political scene, especially during the inter-war period.<sup>24</sup> Many Jews, as well, viewed the Soviet Union as a liberating force after Soviet troops freed the country from Nazi control.<sup>25</sup> Because of their support, a new push for Jewish assimilation, using the social and political structures of communist society as a model, began. This new move, however, was not towards the same, pre-war assimilation that had always advocated cultural and ethnic integration and a separate, independent religious identity. Now, the move was for total integration and assimilation.<sup>26</sup> This did not only effect Jews in

the higher echelons of the Party where requirements of membership included devotion to the party and the rejection of any kind of religious affiliation. Many non-political, 'average' Jews, as well, believed that Communist control and the creation of a socialist state were the only ways in which to prevent anti-Semitic and fascist movements coming to power again in the future. Therefore, they too attempted to adopt a new identity completely free of Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

The removal of a strong, collective Jewish identity left the remaining survivors of Hungarian Jewry divided and voiceless after the war. Essentially, for many Jews during this period, assimilation became a form of hiding. Memories of wartime experiences were not openly dealt with, not even within the confines of the Jewish community. Non-Jewish Hungarians, in turn, found it easier to ignore guilty feelings over their actions and attitude towards Jews during the war rather than acknowledge their responsibility and come to terms with the past. Neither the political parties which appeared after the war nor the leaders of the Jewish community itself encouraged an honest and unrestricted forum in which both Jews and non-Jews could deal with past issues and problems such as Jewish victimisation, anti-Semitism and collaboration.<sup>28</sup> For Jews, the events of the war kept many aspects of Judaism and Jewish identity firmly shrouded in fear and negativity. Jews could not escape their victimisation, and instead rejected any connection to their previous Jewish identities in order to create a positive, active role for themselves within Hungarian society again.<sup>29</sup> This, perhaps, explains why many survivors hid the truth of their Jewish identities and their experiences within the camps and forced labour battalions from generations born in the post-war era.<sup>30</sup>

For many non-Jewish Hungarians, evading the truth meant they could place all fault for the destruction of Hungarian Jewry and the anti-Semitism that pervaded the country on both the Germans and those

Hungarians who had openly collaborated with them, while they themselves remained blameless. In such an environment, hidden resentment and anti-Semitic feelings were again able to surface and, strengthened by the severe economic hardship Hungary experienced in the years after the war, allowed several violent, anti-Jewish pogroms to occur within the country by 1946, first in the town of Kunmadaras and later in the second biggest city in Hungary, Miskolc.<sup>31</sup>

The denial of the past continued after the Communist party took complete control of Hungary in 1949. For the Communists, recognition of a separate Jewish problem or question would have meant accepting that differences within Hungarian society existed beyond class lines. This was unacceptable for several reasons. First, the party did not want to stray from its belief that recognised social problems to be the result of class separation and economic difference. Through the policies underlying their new form of government, they believed that this issue would be solved. Secondly, many members believed that suppression of Jewish issues or of open confrontation with the country's past would restrain future fascist uprisings and anti-Semitic attacks. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the party itself had found support at the end of the war not only within parts of the remaining Jewish population, but also with the working and lower-middle classes, once both strong factions of support for the Arrow Cross, the former Hungarian fascist movement.<sup>32</sup> Two groups now ran the leading divisions of the communist party. The first was a coalition of Jews who no longer considered themselves members of the Jewish community and who wanted nothing to do with Jewish problems or their past Jewish identities. The second were former fascists who were not interested in assisting the remaining Jewish population. As a result, a new, nationalist version of Hungarian history and the Jewish problem evolved. As the writer Gyorgy Szaraz described in his controversial 1976 book *Egy Eloitelet Nyomaban*,

the post-war era did not only mark a new phase in Hungarian history, but attempted to mark the beginning of history itself.<sup>33</sup> 'Bad' history was thrown out or rewritten. A modified, cleaner interpretation remained. It therefore became irrelevant to continue any further discussions concerning the past.

Through this denial of history, the government promoted the idea that no Jewish or anti-Semitic problem existed within Hungary, and that though Jews had suffered at the hands of the Nazis, all Hungarians had suffered during the war and were then liberated by the conquerors of fascism, the Soviet Union. Thus, no special privileges were to be given to any group and everyone was to contribute equally in the rebuilding of the country. This concept was strongly encouraged by the occupying Soviet forces as early as March, 1945, and was also supported by other Soviet satellite states in the post-war era.<sup>34</sup> Apart from a few attempts to re-address the issues, mainly within the confines of non-Jewish Hungarian literature which tended to over-intellectualise problems and underestimate their emotional impact on the Jewish community, the 'Magyar Zsidó kérdés', or 'Jewish question' as it was popularly known, disappeared from public discussions. It was not confronted again until the late 1960's with the appearance of a loosening within the Party's control of Hungarian society. However, whether or not the government recognised its existence, the Jewish question in Hungary had been a source of great debate in the country since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and continued to smoulder throughout the post-war era, no matter what political policies were adopted.

## **History and the Hungarian Jewish Question**

The Hungarian political scientist, Istvan Bibo, published an article in 1948 entitled, 'The Jewish question in Hungary After 1944'. In it, Bibo attempted to open a discourse between Jews and non-Jews. He addressed two main issues. The first was the need for non-Jewish Hungarians to take responsibility for their participation in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry during the Second World War and for the anti-Semitism still existing within the country. Secondly, he called for all Hungarians to examine tensions regarding the historic Jewish question that had been an inherent part of society since emancipation was granted to Hungarian Jewry.<sup>35</sup>

The Jewish question has historically been connected with anti-Jewish sentiment and even overt, physical anti-Semitic backlash. However, the Jewish question and anti-Semitism are often dealt with as separate issues. For some Hungarians, blatant anti-Semitism may not be seen as acceptable, but an on-going, even intellectualised Jewish question can be understood to play an unavoidable role within modern-day society.<sup>36</sup> For others, denial of both issues at an official level can promote the belief that anti-Semitism and the Jewish question no longer exist. In Hungary during the Communist era, for example, with the absence of honest, open discussions regarding Jews and their position within the country after the war, no decision was made regarding anti-Semitism and the continued difficulties for Hungary's Jewish population. Even though the government publicly condemned anti-Semitism and all other forms of racism, no decisions were reached to find a solution to less obvious forms of anti-Semitism and the issue of the Jewish question. Anti-Jewish acts or decrees were often labelled "anti-Zionist" or "anti-nationalist" and could therefore be interpreted as just. However, they



were not declared racist. As one participant of a radio program on Jewish issues stated on April 27, 1969,

The Hungarian Constitution and the Hungarian Criminal Code specifically has measures punishing people for any expression of anti-Semitism or any racialism and this is true also of means of public expression, literature, newspapers, so that anti-Semitism itself is punishable by law... However, that in itself does not wipe out anti-Semitism, as we well know.<sup>37</sup>

The end of the Second World War did not mark the beginning of Hungary's Jewish question. The Jewish question had arisen at various points throughout the country's history. After a compromise was reached between the Austrian ruling powers and the liberal nationalist Magyar leaders with the creation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867 and the subsequent granting of Jewish emancipation, political, economic and social dissatisfaction combined to create new hostilities towards Jews. This pushed the Hungarian Jewish question into public discussion. Resentment towards Jews was felt not only within the country's ethnic minorities, but by the ruling Magyars as well, the group benefiting most from Jewish assimilation. The Jewish question even infiltrated the Jewish community itself. As Jews fled the pogroms of Russia in the 1880's and flooded the rural regions of Eastern Hungary, distinct differences between Yiddish-speaking orthodox Jewry from the East and the urban, middle-class, emancipated Jewish communities of Western Hungary and Budapest created an internal struggle within Hungarian Jewry. Urban Jews, especially, were concerned that the new arrivals would upset Jewish and non-Jewish relations and disrupt their new position of freedom and equality within Hungarian society.<sup>38</sup>

The Magyar government's disregard for ethnic minority concerns and the enforced policy of 'Magyarisation' which swept through Hungary after 1867 created acute ethnic tensions.<sup>39</sup> Jewish support for the

government, the enthusiastic attitude of mainly progressive, urban Jewry towards Magyarisation and their social alliance with the Magyars enraged many ethnic groups. Many Hungarian Jews also believed that within Hungary there lived 'historic people', such as the Magyars and the Germans, and 'unhistoric people', such as the Slovaks and the Romanians. This added to the hostility Hungary's minorities felt for the Jews. It did not matter that some of the most vocal members of the opposition to the government and the Jewish assimilationist establishment were Jews themselves. Until the beginning of the fascist era, much of mainstream Jewish opinion felt obliged to support governmental policies in Hungary, whatever the policies were.<sup>40</sup> As a result, Hungary's Jews were seen as both benefiting from and supporting Magyar superiority, Magyarisation and domination over Hungary's other ethnic groups.<sup>41</sup>

For Magyars, Jewish success within the rapidly modernising, newly industrial society was looked upon with suspicion. Though many Jews were simply filling the only roles open to them within the largely agrarian and class-based society, that of the professional class, their financial success and close allegiance with the liberal, reforming nobility was distrusted by the rural, lower classes. Jews were seen to be exploiting and dominating the opportunities open to the middle-class, monopolising the economy and disrupting traditional relations within Hungary.<sup>42</sup>

The rise of resentment against Jews culminated in a trial of alleged ritual murder, which accused members of the Jewish community in the village of Tiszaeszlar of murdering a young girl in the local synagogue and collecting her blood to use for religious ceremonies. The trial occurred in 1882 and led to the rise of the first anti-Semitic political party, the National Anti-Semitic Party, founded by Gyozo Istoczy in October, 1883. Though blatant anti-Semitic rhetoric and physical attacks against Jews arose in the country at the end of the trial, Istoczy's party was condemned by the

Hungarian government for its attempt to undermine social order.

Nevertheless, the anti-Semitic party found enough support to win 13 seats in the Hungarian parliament in the elections of 1883.<sup>43</sup>

In May, 1917, Hungary's leading news journal *Huszadik Szazad* questioned over 50 intellectuals on the existence of a Jewish question within the country. It is interesting to note that this article was published at a time when society had been largely dominated by liberal politics. From the late 1890's, the period was regarded by many as the 'golden years' for Hungarian Jewry, in which the country's Jewish population rose to almost one million by 1910. During the First World War, Hungary had also experienced a distinct lull in discussions regarding the Jewish question. Despite this, the Jewish question was still viewed as significant enough by the most popular social science journal of its time to devote a large article to its examination.<sup>44</sup>

It was not until the break-up of Hungary under the Treaty of Trianon and the revolution of 1918-1919 that the Jewish question became a main source of debate in Hungary again. The trauma Hungary felt over their treatment at the Paris Peace Treaties was strong and the demand for revision of Trianon so great that a scapegoat was inevitably created in which the country could place all its resentment and anger upon. People truly responsible for Hungary's break-up, as well, attempted to divert attention away from their own guilt.<sup>45</sup> The large number of Jews involved in the revolution led by Bela Kun, also of Jewish origin, was exploited by those Hungarians hoping to provide a sense of national absolution for the country's participation in the war and a diversion from social upheaval. The counterrevolutionaries created the myth of a Jewish plot to destroy the nation. It did not matter that many Jews had proven their patriotism by fighting bravely for Hungary during the war, or that most Hungarian Jews were opposed to the uprising, or even that the revolutionaries no longer

considered themselves Jewish. Following the collapse of the 1918-19 take-over, pogroms and anti-Jewish riots swept the country. The 'White Terror', as the attacks were called, included acts of violent anti-Semitism, many endorsed by Admiral Miklos Horthy, the head of the army and future leader of Hungary. Around 3,000 Jews were killed during the backlash.<sup>46</sup> Though the violence was eventually restrained, the rise of political anti-Semitism and debate over the Jewish question continued throughout the inter-war era. Hungarian society was cut off from its historic, liberal roots and the prevalence of a racist, nationalist ideology within the country increased.<sup>47</sup>

From the 1920's onwards, a state-supported backlash against former assimilationist policies began. Jewish mobility and economic progress was also blocked in order to create a new 'Christian middle class.'<sup>48</sup> Long before the anti-Jewish laws enacted in the late 1930's and during the Second World War, the Hungarian government put into place the Numerus Clausus in the 1920's. This law was the first of its kind segregating Hungary's educational network by preventing the vast majority of Jewish students from being accepted into higher education within their own country.<sup>49</sup>

The animosity many non-Jewish Hungarians felt towards Jews during the inter-war period is demonstrated in a letter the former Hungarian Prime Minister Paul Teleki wrote to the British Foreign Office in February, 1939. In it, Teleki blames the large number of eastern Jewish refugees in Hungary, the attempted take-over of by 'Jewish propagandists' in 1918 and the success of Jews both in finance and in professional employment for the country's anti-Semitism. Teleki also states that the Jewish question and the enacting of anti-Jewish laws by the government during the 1920's and 30's, including the Numerus Clausus Law, were the direct result of a Jewish monopoly of power in Hungary.<sup>50</sup>

In reality, this extreme stereotyping of Hungarian Jews was unjustified. Though a certain faction of Hungarian Jewry stood out within society, their levels of education, urbanisation and assimilation higher than other groups, their career aspirations, cultural values and lifestyles those of the upper-middle class, this group did not represent all Jews. Many Jews in Hungary lived mainly in rural areas rather than cosmopolitan cities and etched out a living running provincial stores and inns or working as money-lenders to local peasants and farmers in towns and villages. However, the urban elite overshadowed the number of working class Jews in the minds of non-Jewish Hungarians.<sup>51</sup> During the inter-war era, Hungary's Jews became second-class citizens and cheap targets for harassment and discrimination.<sup>52</sup> Politically supported anti-Semitism enabled non-Jewish society to combine their jealousy of Jewish wealth and wariness of their perceived dominance within Hungarian society into a spreading, prevailing social anti-Semitism. The officially condoned backlash against Jews led to demand for an ultimate solution to the Jewish question.

The rise of fascist rule and the outbreak of war in the late 1930's and early 1940's found the Hungarian government forming an alliance with Germany in 1941. Further legislation discriminating against Jews was enacted in the hope of fulfilling the country's dream of the revision of Trianon and the re-gaining of land lost after World War One upon the establishment of German rule in Europe.<sup>53</sup> Formerly possible strategies for assimilation and integration became obsolete. For example, the Magyarisation of Jewish names became increasingly blocked. In 1941, mixed marriages and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews were made illegal.<sup>54</sup> And a system of forced labour service for Jews of military age was established.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, Jews throughout the country, including the leadership of the Jewish community in Budapest, believed that accepting Hungary's anti-Jewish laws and maintaining their faith and

belief in Magyarisation would offer them a chance to prove their alliance with Hungary and protect them from further abuse.<sup>56</sup> Essentially, without the perception and understanding of hindsight, they ultimately helped to enable their own persecution. However, for many Jews there seemed to be few other choices open to them at this point. Constrained by finances, family loyalties, hope that the war would soon end and memory of a once just and relatively egalitarian Hungary, many felt that going along with the government's restrictions was their best chance of survival. For many Jews living throughout Central and Eastern Europe during the war, Hungary was also considered to be a safe-haven compared to the persecutions experienced in neighbouring countries. Many Jews in Hungary were aware of the tragedies occurring around them and felt lucky to be where they were. Despite this sense of relative safety, state-supported anti-Semitic legislation further strengthened the far right in Hungary by providing it with a legal forum to base their attacks of Jews upon. As a result, this situation culminated in the deportations and death of over half of Hungarian Jewry in 1944.<sup>57</sup>

The anti-Semitism and Jewish question found in post-World War Two Hungary were very different versions of the kinds that had existed before the war. The public now understood what extreme measures anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish fervour could lead to. Uninformed ignorance was no longer an option open to anyone. As Gyorgy Szaraz assesses, there could be no belief in the nation's greatness at the end of the Second World War as there had been at the end of the First World War.<sup>58</sup>

For the first time, anti-Semitism was officially made illegal within the country. At the same time, any talk of Jewish persecution during the war, Hungarian involvement with the Nazis and Jewish problems within Hungarian society was also banned from public discussion. Despite Bibó's call for open discussions in his 1948 article, Jewish and non-Jewish

dialogue and any kind of national self-examination ceased after 1949. However, an unofficial anti-Semitism and Jewish question remained in the background and the government continued to practice its own forms of anti-Semitism. This included the anti-Zionist show trials of the early 1950's, the forced expulsion of an estimated 20,000 urban Jews to the provinces in 1951, and the severe restriction of contact between Hungarian and World Jewry. This aspect of oppression against Jews existed well into the 1980's and was only officially broken in May, 1987 when the World Jewish Conference was held in Budapest with the agreement of the Hungarian government.<sup>59</sup>

Though sporadic literature in the form of memoirs and first-hand narratives of Jewish wartime experiences surfaced in Hungary before 1949, accounts which included details of Hungarian anti-Semitism and the non-Jewish population's support for German policies and for Hungary's own fascist party were generally ignored until the 1970's and 80's. For example, the writer Erno Szep's vivid memoir of life in the Budapest ghettos and his experiences in a Jewish forced labour battalion was first published briefly in 1945, ten months after the events it describes took place. However, it was soon pulled from publication and did not surface again until 1984.<sup>60</sup>

After 1948, a conscious avoidance of Jewish themes was characteristic of Jewish writers. Even after a thaw began in Hungary over discussions of anti-Semitism and the Jewish question, Jewish issues were at first only openly dealt with by non-Jewish writers.<sup>61</sup> In 1976, the non-Jewish writer Gyorgy Szaraz's book, *Tracing a Prejudice*, was the first clear assessment of Hungarian anti-Semitism since Bibo's article of 1948.<sup>62</sup> An honest appraisal of anti-Semitism and the Hungarian Jewish question, Szaraz's work sparked an active debate on these topics within the press, new literature and political and social science journals for the first time since the end of the war.<sup>63</sup>

By the 1970's, other forms of literary expression besides traditional, academic ones began to concern themselves with Hungarian Jewish issues. Often, novels and other forms of creative literature were able to delve deeper into more sensitive areas than the work of social historians and political scientists.<sup>64</sup> Professor Sandor Scheiber, the director of the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary and a leading Hungarian scholar of Jewish folklore published the first annual *Yearbook of Hungarian Jewry* in 1971. The *Yearbook* was a revival of the Hungarian Jewish Literary Society Annual. Founded in 1894, this was a yearly volume of Jewish studies published until 1942, containing short stories, poetry and Jewish history.<sup>65</sup> Following the policy adopted by the post-war Hungarian Jewish community to move towards a more politically neutral position, the *Yearbook* dealt mainly with Jewish literature and the history of the pre-war Jewish community. It avoided articles on the present condition of Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarian relations, the state of the Jewish community and its institutions and Hungary's relationship with Israel. As Elizabeth Eppler observed in her review of the 1975-76 *Yearbook*, the recent, post-war Jewish past was a subject shunned by many of the *Yearbook's* contributors.<sup>66</sup>

Choosing to examine 19th and early 20th century Jewish history rather than deal with contemporary Jewish issues and the underlying Jewish question was a decision made by many writers in the early stages of the revival of the Hungarian Jewish experience within literature and the media. The writer Ivan Saunders suggests that writers focused on historic Jewish themes because of the nostalgic attitude that dominated much of contemporary Hungarian culture and the popular demand for books that offered nationalistic, romanticised stories of turn-of-the-century Hungary. For readers interested in Jewish history, Saunders states that this included a fascination with the Golden Age of pre-1914 Hungarian Jewry.<sup>67</sup> Though



Saunders is accurate in describing post-war Hungarian culture as one captivated by its own turbulent past, he overlooks more complicated reasons for the dominance of pre-war history within Jewish themes. Many times, in an era where the Jewish question was still a taboo subject, despite the tentative new openness within society in the 1970's and 80's, writers found it easier to say more about the current state of Jewish affairs and the condition of Jewish and non-Jewish relations under the guise of history and fiction. Jewish folklore was often used to soften the discussion of sensitive religious and political issues.<sup>68</sup>

Focusing on a more traditionally Jewish, sentimental past, using examples such as shtetl communities, the Yiddish language and Orthodox religious observances was an easier way of introducing Jewish issues within other areas of artistic expression in Hungary as well. However, these representations of Jewish life did not demonstrate the reality of Jewish history and the Jewish experience in Hungary. The staging of the musical 'Fiddler On The Roof', which opened to audiences in June, 1973 and an exhibition of photographs portraying Jewish religious observance and ritual at Budapest's Ethnographic Museum in 1983 are both examples of artists using 'safe' versions of Jewish life and history in which to openly explore and present Hungarian Jewry to the public without being condemned by the government in the 1970's and early 1980's.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, studies like Andras Kovacs' 'The Jewish question in Contemporary Hungarian Society' or Stephen Roths' 'Is There a 'Jewish question in Present Day Hungary?', with their reliance on unofficial statistics, oral history interviews and emphasis on the connections between politics and modern Hungarian anti-Semitism, could not be published in Hungary during this time because they dealt too openly and honestly with the Jewish question.<sup>70</sup>

Within both the national and international press, as well, Jewish writers and those who wrote about the Hungarian Jewish community found

it easier to focus on the past than on Jewish life in post-war Hungary. It was simpler for them to recount relatively desensitised past atrocities and demonstrate how life was comparatively normal in contemporary Hungary rather than discuss lingering anti-Semitism and hostilities. In some cases, it was the intellectualisation of the Jewish question and anti-Semitism demonstrated by Jews themselves that was most striking. This was specifically apparent during Hungarian radio programmes addressing the Jewish question in the late 1960's and mid-1980's and within articles appearing in such prominent newspapers as *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Jerusalem Post* and *The London Jewish Chronicle* in the 1970's. These included articles with such titles as such as 'Life is Good These Days for Hungary's Jews', 'Hungarian Jews Relatively Free' and 'Hungary's Jews No Longer Ashamed'. In 1967, radio programmes discussing the relative freedom of Jewish life and the denial of both anti-Semitism and the Jewish question by leading Hungarian intellectuals, gloss over the existence of contemporary problems as well as the ambiguities and difficulties surrounding the modern Jewish experience in Hungary.<sup>71</sup>

One reason for the lack of honest discussion which existed within the press until the political changes of the late 1980's may have been the lack of any kind of forum in which ordinary Hungarian Jews could express themselves without the threat of denunciation and reprisal. Until 1989, the only official Jewish journal within Hungary was the state-controlled, biweekly newspaper, *Uj Elet*, which was not receptive to open debates taking place. By the mid-1980's, however, independent, samizdat literature and an underground Jewish periodical confronting the Jewish question and questioning the leadership of the state-directed, Jewish community began to appear. Much of this originated from the Hungarian Jewish peace movement, *Shalom*.<sup>72</sup> Though provocative and instigating much debate within society, these pieces of literature were not recognised by the

government and were considered illegal. The newly created Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association, formed just before the political changes of 1989 did not launch the first legal, independent monthly Jewish journal, *Szombat*, until November, 1989.<sup>73</sup>

Even with the emerging free press and the drastic social and political changes which have taken place throughout the 1990's, many Jews today still feel too threatened to speak out. New forms of anti-Semitism are growing within society. Several prominent political parties have adopted increasingly nationalist, anti-Jewish language.<sup>74</sup> The internal bickering between various Jewish groups within the community itself also hinders real confrontation of the Jewish question and limits chances for Jews and non-Jews to finally come to terms with past problems. As one successful Hungarian Jewish businessman ironically observed in 1998,

So, everyone admits today that there have been problems in the past for the Jews in this country. Everyone likes to analyse the very puzzling 'Jewish question', people feel they are being very brave in speaking about it, and are happy that conditions in Hungary are so free now that we can speak about it. And yet, in working environments there is still a great divide between Jewish employees and non-Jewish employees. Within universities, students are still labelled 'Jews' and 'non-Jews'. The political party SZDSZ (Free Democrats) are accused of acting 'too Jewish'. It is as if the Jewish question of the past has been discussed and eliminated, but the Jewish question of today is allowed to grow, unquestioned and unhindered.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Problems of Community and Identity**

Today, Hungarian Jews remain haunted by the memory of what the community was before the war and what it should be now. They constantly question their actions. Should they continue to follow a pattern of assimilation similar to the one of the pre-war Jewish community? With more Hungarian Jews adopting a Jewish cultural identity rather than a religious one, should being Jewish be seen as part of one's ethnic make-up, a unique identity embracing both Hungarian and Jewish traditions? How

should the community officially represent their collective identity to non-Jewish society? Is there room enough in the same community for the middle-aged official who is the child of two Holocaust survivors who still feels Jewish because of their religious ties but remains a patriotic Hungarian, as well as the Jewish student with only a Jewish father born after the war who is interested in learning Hebrew and Horah dancing but not interested in going to synagogue?<sup>76</sup> Should the Jewish question be dealt with more openly and honestly? Should the internal battles between Hungary's Jews be addressed and come to some kind of conclusion?

As Jews debate how to come to grips with the past and move forward, other conflicts contribute to the hostilities found within the Hungarian Jewish community and the difficulty in finding an identity that embraces every kind of Jew. These conflicts question the fundamental characteristics that make Jews feel Jewish. They include the significance and role of the organised community, the commitment to maintaining both religion and culture, the historical divide between neolog and orthodox Jews, the acceptance of Jews from mixed-marriages into the community, the changing roles of Jewish women, the need for understanding between varying socio-economic Jewish groups and between generations, the threat of present and future political and social anti-Semitism. For Hungarian Jewry, the influence these conflicts have upon their communities and the constantly changing worlds of Jewish and non-Jewish Hungary make their future choices all the more important.

To understand the complex bonds and structural make-up of Hungarian Jewry, one must realise the contentious nature of Hungarian Jews' relationship with the definition of the word 'community'. Undoubtedly, within Hungary, there exists the framework a community needs to survive and even flourish. There is Balint Haz, a bustling cultural community centre open since 1993; three Jewish high schools in Budapest;

an annual Jewish cultural festival; a renowned Jewish history and art museum; and numerous 'neighbourhood' communities located throughout the country, which generally incorporate a synagogue and local community centre.<sup>77</sup> All these institutions point to a Jewish population enjoying an active cultural and religious life. And while it may be possible to see this as a community like any other, some feel that this 'community' is simply a 'common-interest group', composed of individuals sharing a similar background who work together and argue frequently.<sup>78</sup> Others claim that the so-called 'Jewish renaissance' which Hungarian Jewry experienced in the 1980's and 1990's has nothing to do with religious renewal or re-enforcing positive, healthy Jewish identities for all Jews, but simply benefits those who are involved in the new cultural life.<sup>79</sup>

Balint Haz itself has become an object of contention for the various factions of Hungarian Jewry. It successfully attracts visitors from a broad section of the Jewish community: young and old, religious and secular. However, what the centre has to offer is used by only a small percentage of the entire Hungarian Jewish population. Mainly urban Jews living within the centre of Budapest dominate its affairs. Many of those who frequent Balint Haz have no ties to a synagogue or specific religious community. They use the centre, nevertheless, as a base to fulfil both their religious and cultural needs.<sup>80</sup> As a result, many other Jews feel that the Centre's activities and philosophy are geared more towards the Neolog and Reform Jewish communities, alienating those belonging to the Orthodox.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Balint Haz, initially created to resist religious divisions between neolog and orthodox Jews and to act as a neutral meeting place welcoming all denominations, has become another contested space.

Since the 19th century, Hungarian Jewry has been divided along religious and class lines. From the late -19th century, the neolog community has been comprised mainly of middle and upper-middle class

urban Jews who, following their German and Austrian counterparts, adopted a western European lifestyle and learned German and French as second languages. After Jews received political and cultural emancipation, these Jews harboured resentment against the devoutly religious orthodox and Hasidic communities, made up primarily of Jews from the lower-middle and working classes who had rejected many of the moves towards assimilation and modernisation. Any anti-Semitism found within the country or the government, assimilated Jews believed, was a direct result of the decision of religious Jews to separate themselves from the rest of society.<sup>82</sup>

Though these divisions do still exist, since the end of the Second World War, Orthodox Jewry has been depleted to a small, insular community residing mainly in Budapest. For a Jewish population numbering 80-130,000 people, the orthodox community has approximately 5,000 members.<sup>83</sup> Now, much of the bitterness existing within Hungarian Jewry is found between those Jews who wish to pursue an open Jewish identity and lifestyle and those who wish to continue to spurn Judaism, as they have since the war.

Andras Kovacs does not believe that Hungarian Jewry can be classified as an official, unified community. He points to the huge gap between the number of Jews who participate within the daily functions of communal life and who actively consider themselves Jewish, and the number who might admit their familial ties to Judaism but who have no desire to become a member of any communal organisation or to attend any religious or cultural Jewish event:

How can a community be a community when most Jews reject all ties to Judaism except historical ones, when its members cannot agree on a single decision or way to go about doing things? Do Hungarian Jews support each

other, do the Jews in Budapest look after the interests of the countryside communities? This is not a community, this is a common-interest group.<sup>84</sup>

The two groups Kovacs identifies may be classified as 'active' Jews and 'passive' Jews, or those who admit their ancestral background but who choose to have no connection with Hungarian Jewry. These classifications, however, overlook yet another component of Jewish society.

There are numerous Jews who remain 'hidden' within Hungary. They are comprised mainly of elderly and middle-aged people, who have become so frightened, paranoid or disillusioned as result of the Holocaust and the post-war era that they deny any ties to Judaism to their friends, family and even to themselves. Some of these people come from families who originally converted before the Holocaust or who denied all ties to being Jewish after the war.<sup>85</sup> They pretend not to be Jews or even attempt to be seen as non-Jewish Hungarians who hold anti-Semitic views and who openly criticise Hungarian Jewry. These Jews are at times the most vocal of anti-Semites.<sup>86</sup>

The divisions between active Jews and passive Jews are complicated ones. It is estimated that almost 70% of Hungarian Jewry have no involvement with any religious or cultural organisation and do not display their Jewish identity in any open manner. When asked, they will admit to 'Jewish roots', but many feel that their connection to Judaism goes only this far, a memory from the past.<sup>87</sup> As a result, community institutions and religious organisations are used by only 30% of the entire population of Hungarian Jewry.<sup>88</sup>

Often, a passive Jew's rejection of an active Jewish life stems from resentment towards those who have decided to adopt an open and positive Jewish identity. Many times this resentment began with the way they were introduced or re-introduced to Jewish life and thought after the political

changes of 1989. Zsuzsa Szilagyi, an archivist at the Central European University, remembered her first encounter with Judaism at the beginning of the Jewish Renaissance in the late 1980's. This encounter reinforced her decision not to actively take part in Hungarian Jewish life.

Though we never had any connections to the Jewish community, my parents never denied our background or our Jewish ancestors. When friends of mine became involved in a Jewish social group in 1989, I went along to learn more about what it means to be Jewish and to find out if I might want to have more of a Jewish identity. The group would meet in a hotel in the centre of Budapest. I went a few times but what I saw there really irritated me. The members of the group would talk about how wonderful it was to be Jewish and how Jewish they felt and it all seemed fake to me, as if they were pretending to be something they weren't. None of us had grown up in Jewish households and then, all of a sudden, there they were, as if they had been this way all their lives. I felt incredibly separated from what they were speaking about and, after a few times, never went back.<sup>89</sup>

Stella Banki, an Auschwitz survivor who grew up in a religiously Jewish family in a Hungarian village in Transylvania and who now lives in Budapest, does not involve herself with the Jewish community for different reasons. Though she privately accepts her ties to Judaism, she does not publicly demonstrate them:

After the war, I never denied that I was Jewish. My husband and I did not tell our children what their background was from the beginning, but when they had questions about their history or about the Holocaust, we were open and honest with them and did not try to hide what we were. But the community today upsets me for several reasons. First, I feel that many of the people who visit Balint Haz, especially the older people, only go for social reasons and not because of their ties to Judaism. Secondly, their extreme openness will only lead to anger from the rest of Hungarians and perhaps more anti-Semitism. They seem to only create problems for Jews all over Hungary, even the ones who are not involved with them, because non-Jews can only see us as a whole group. They do not see our differences, they only see us as Jews.<sup>90</sup>

Much of this resentment may be linked to the way in which many Jews and the national Jewish community embraced Judaism in 1989.



Zsuzsa Fritz, an educator and Hebrew teacher at the Balint Haz, feels the fervour with which many Jewish leaders and young people at first adopted Zionism, as well as Jewish religious traditions, alienated many Jews who were confused about which aspects of a Jewish identity to adopt:

Jews are not united because they are not clear yet what to unite for. In the beginning of the Renaissance, the Zionism of the national community and many Jewish leaders confused people who were brought up to believe that Zionism and all forms of nationalism were enemies of the people and of Communism. Many felt partly religious and partly secular and did not know which path to follow. Nobody knew what they wanted. People began to look for any identity that fit them. For some, Israel was the point of identification. Some made Aliyah, though this was not popular, and many younger people went to study in Israel, though later returned to Hungary. Some people went to extremes for awhile, and though things are much more moderate now, their extremism offended many Jews who felt lost in the shuffle, as if there was no place for them within the Jewish community because of their uncertainty. Many of these people may have really wanted to participate in the community at first and express their Jewishness but felt abandoned because they did not feel comfortable and were perhaps even frightened by the hard-line stance the national Jewish community and other Jews adopted. As a result, they rejected Judaism entirely.<sup>91</sup>

For other Jews, especially those born soon after World War Two, the chance to now explore positive aspects of Judaism comes as an exciting and interesting challenge. Vera Banki, whose mother, Stella, survived Auschwitz and whose father was sent to a Jewish forced labour battalion in 1944, believes that her first experience with anti-Semitism and the way in which she found out she was Jewish have made her fascinated with her Jewish history and have pushed her to adopt a more confident Jewish identity. Since 1995, she has worked as a music teacher at the Lauder Javne Fuiskola es Gimnazium, the newest Jewish school in Budapest, established in 1993 with the financial support of the Lauder Foundation, an American organisation which assists in the re-building of active Jewish communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe. This is how she describes her awakening Jewish identity:

When I was about seven, a child we played with called my sister a dirty Jew. I had never heard this word "Jew" before. Around the same time, I found a little bag my mother had made when she was a little girl with Hebrew letters sewn on it, and I wanted to use it to carry things to school, but my mother wouldn't let me. I think she was very nervous to tell me what all these things meant, but she did not keep them a secret. My parents never denied the fact that they were Jews, even though my father held a very prominent position in the state television office, but they were never really involved with the community. Those relatives who were actively Jewish left for Israel and Western Europe. I always felt Jewish but I did not actively pursue this feeling until after the political changes in Hungary. Now, I am much more aware of this aspect of myself, I like to go to Horah classes at Balint Haz and I try to go to the synagogue set up at the Lauder High School for the High Holidays. I've been to Israel several times as well. But I am very proud, especially, of my children, because for them, being Jewish has never been a secret or a burden. They never feel as if they have to prove themselves to people who are more religiously Jewish or more involved. They know who they are.<sup>92</sup>

Dora, Vera's daughter, agrees with this.

I know that it makes my grandmother very sad to talk about the past. When I ask her questions about what happened to her she doesn't like to answer them. But when I visited Auschwitz and saw my great-grandmother's name on the list of those who died in the memorial exhibit for the Jews of Hungary, I felt I understood my grandmother better. At the same time, this knowledge does not make me scared to tell people I'm Jewish or to not feel proud that I am. In Budapest, people know that my high school is an 'unofficial' Jewish school because it has so many Jewish students, but I don't feel nervous telling people that I go there. Generally, though, I don't go to the Balint Haz because I don't know very many people there and being Jewish is not my only interest. I didn't grow up in a religious family, but I don't feel as if I have to be really active in the community to be Jewish.<sup>93</sup>

The hesitancy with which many Hungarians approach Judaism and their search for their place within the community may stem from confusion over the intricate makeup of the community itself. Hungarian Jewry is actually made up of several national communities organised by denomination which oversee the functioning of local communities within Budapest and throughout the rest of Hungary. The main umbrella organisation presiding over the country's neolog communities is called MAZSIHISZ, the National Confederation of the Jewish Communities of

Hungary. This organisation is also responsible for all Budapest's 'neighbourhood' neolog communities and their religious and cultural institutions, each comprised of a president, women's organisation and rabbi, when there is the possibility of retaining one. MAZSIHISZ is also partially responsible for two Jewish gymnaziums, the Balint Haz cultural centre and the needs of most of the regional Jewish communities residing outside of Budapest.

MAZSIHISZ, however, should not be confused with MAZSIKE, the orthodox Jewish organisation that represents the small, but vocal, orthodox community still existing within Budapest and parts of the region. Though affiliated with MAZSIHISZ and looked upon as part of the main national Jewish community by the Hungarian government, they control their own gymnazium, synagogues, mikveh, kosher stores and regional orthodox communities.

The American-born Rabbi Baruch Oberlander is head of the Chabad Lubavitch group. This is yet another kind of Jewish community existing within Hungary since the political changes of 1989. It is an offshoot of orthodox and Hasidic Judaism, focusing on the study of the laws and philosophies found at the core of Jewish religious life. Rabbi Oberlander does not find Hungarian Jewish groups to be as distinct from each other as they would perhaps like to be. A child of Hasidic Jews who left Hungary for New York in 1949, Rabbi Oberlander came to Budapest in 1989 and is central to the Lubavitch group, managed out of his home in the sixth district, the former main Jewish ghetto of Budapest. He supervises a Hungarian Jewish Heritage Centre, a monthly journal with a membership of 14-15,000 Jews throughout Central and Eastern Europe, a school for children of pre-school age through second grade, a synagogue and a study group for Jewish men interested in religious texts. He also teaches a class in Jewish Law at the main university in Budapest, Etvos Lorand. For

Rabbi Oberlander, the historic divisions between neolog and orthodox Hungarian Jewry are not justified in modern Hungary because of both groups' lack of a strong religious identity.

Judaism in Hungary is not orthodox and not neolog. The official orthodox community probably has 10 families and the neolog community probably has 35 families. Most of the Jews in Hungary are unaffiliated. There are also those who come to synagogue once in awhile, but who are not committed to anything. They are so far from religion because there has not been religious education for such a long time. For example, before the War there was such a thing as 'Neolog kosher'. It meant, okay I'm not so strict, but I'm kosher. Today, if someone says, 'I'm neolog', it means they do not keep kosher, they do not keep Shabbat, they do not keep anything, and that's not neolog, it means you're nothing. Usually, they say that Neolog in Hungary means a conservative Jew. But being conservative is very religious! You think of conservative and you think of Shabbat, and knowledge of Judaism and keeping kosher to a certain degree. So, I would say that most of the Jews in Hungary cannot be considered orthodox or neolog. In a way, I feel that the rabbis somehow accept this situation. You know, they say, you cannot ask too much of the people, whatever they do they do. I feel this is wrong. To tell them, 'You don't have to keep this, you don't have to keep that', where is the challenge then, where is anything?<sup>94</sup>

Though he feels that younger generations of Hungarian Jews feel much more comfortable to identify as Jews, many can still be classified as 'hidden' Jews. Others, Rabbi Oberlander says, seeking an ideology in which to believe, have turned to other newly introduced religious sects such as the Mormons and the Hari Krishnas:

Some of the younger generation still believe it's good to hide. I still have students at the university who would never tell their professors that they are Jewish. They won't go to class on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, but they'll think of a hundred other excuses for not going other than just telling the truth. I had one student who worked in a bank. I was explaining to him, 'Don't go to work on Yom Kippur!' He said, 'I know I shouldn't go to work, but my boss is going to kill me if I don't show up.' So, we started services at nine o'clock. Nine-fifteen, he walks in. Later, I saw something was up, I said, 'What happened here?' He said, 'The boss wasn't there.' 'Where was he?', I asked. 'He said that he couldn't come in today!' It turns out the boss was Jewish! And he wasn't going to go to work on Yom Kippur! This is the difference. A lot of youngsters feel comfortable saying it outright, but many don't. Me having grown up in New York, the idea of putting down my foot and saying, 'You owe it to me!', is normal. They don't get it yet here, at least not everybody. The other

phenomenon for young Jews in Hungary are all of these religious sects which have opened up shop after 1989 and which are full of Jewish kids. Starting from the leadership, all the way down. They wanted something from life, they wanted an ideology, and they didn't get it until now.<sup>95</sup>

It could be argued that Rabbi Oberlander's view of Hungarian Jewry is the perspective of an outsider observing a complex community structure which is only truly understandable to those who are a part of it and who have lived through its history. However, other Hungarian members of both the neolog and orthodox communities agree that religion does not play a prominent role within Hungarian Jewry and that one of the main problems facing them today is how to draw the majority of Jews back into the communities themselves. Rabbi Schonberger, a Hungarian orthodox rabbi presiding over a neolog regional community, is the only rabbi in Hungary currently residing and working outside of Budapest. His concerns are similar to those of Rabbi Oberlander:

The main problem facing the Budapest community organisations is how to attract the three-fourth's of Hungarian Jewry who are not involved back into an active community. For the regional communities, the main problem is a lack of Jewish children being born because there are no Jewish marriages being made. Yes, there are mixed marriages, but there are no Jewish marriages made where both the man and the woman are Jewish. That's what we need if we are going to continue being Jewish in the countryside.<sup>96</sup>

Often, these traditional approaches regarding what kind of Jew should be involved in the community do not make many Jews who are just beginning to show interest in Judaism feel comfortable or welcome. Those Jews already active in the community who wish to draw new, younger members in also do not agree with them. In regions where there are few Jewish young people residing, calling for more Jewish marriages and Jewish children is unrealistic. For example, in a town in Southern Hungary, only two members of the Jewish community are under twenty, a brother and a sister.<sup>97</sup> Rabbi Schonberger's attitude conflicts with many of those

Jews who regularly attend community events and religious services in his region. Aniko Schmidt, a student at the University of Pecs, spent two years living in Israel in the mid-1990's. Upon her return to Hungary, she became involved with the community that Rabbi Schonberger oversees. However, her only blood link to Judaism is a Jewish grandfather. She has also recently married a man who is not Jewish. Nevertheless, she feels Jewish and resents Rabbi Schonberger's hard-line stance.

If the community wants to increase the number of younger people, like myself, who are involved with their activities and events, they will have to accept people who are from mixed marriages or who do not live in a traditionally Jewish home. It's not possible to find many Jews around this area that do not come from this type of situation. Rabbi Schonberger's thinking is outdated and too conservative and, ultimately, does not benefit the community.<sup>98</sup>

These interviews demonstrate that within Hungary today there are many types of Jews and Jewish identities all trying to assert, or reject, their place within the Jewish community and within Hungarian society as a whole. For some, being Jewish is their most important characteristic. Others accept that they are Jews but want no kind of Jewish identity. Still others deny any connection to a Jewish ancestry and history. How this multitude of opinions and perspectives will reconcile their relationships in order to accept the idea of an organised community and its leadership is one of Hungarian Jewry's most critical questions for the future.

### **Urban and Regional Hungarian Jewry<sup>99</sup>**

One reason for Hungarian Jewry's lack of a single, cohesive community and identity today is the tension that exists between the central Jewish community in Budapest and the smaller regional communities found throughout the rest of the country. Divisions between urban and regional

Jewry are a result of long-established ideological, social, economic and historical differences.

The main historical factor influencing this separation between urban and regional Jewry are the events of 1944, which led to the beginning of the Final Solution in Hungary and the loss of much of the country's provincial Jewish communities.<sup>100</sup> As the Hungarian sociologist Victor Karady writes, before the occupation of Hungary by German forces on 19 March, 1944, most of the territory of Hungary was spared the atrocities that were a part of daily life for Jews in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>101</sup> However, Jews living in the regions of Hungary maintained close ties to those Hungarian Jews residing outside its borders, many of whom were close family members and friends. Because of this, from the beginning of the war the persecution of Jews throughout the region was acutely felt by Jews living within Hungary's borders but outside its major urban centres.<sup>102</sup> When the country's own deportations began, they were mainly comprised of Jews living outside of Budapest. Deportees were sent to concentration camps, mainly Auschwitz in Poland, but some to camps in Germany. Whatever the camp of destination, the majority of Hungarian Jews were immediately exterminated. Others were sent to forced army and labour battalions around the country and on the eastern Front where conditions were extremely poor and survival rates low, but higher than in the camps.<sup>103</sup> The Regent of Hungary, Miklos Horthy, called the deportations to a temporary halt in June, 1944, after receiving tremendous pressure from the allies to intervene on behalf of Hungary's Jewish citizens. However, the deportations resumed in October, 1944, after Horthy's government was removed from leadership by the Germans and replaced by the Hungarian fascist party, the Arrow Cross. Despite this, Budapest Jewry was predominantly saved. The Germans ran out of time to carry out their plans for complete extermination of Hungary's Jews due in

part to the assistance given to Jews by foreign allies in Budapest and the steady advance of the Russian army.<sup>104</sup>

After the war, a crisis of identity further divided these two camps of Hungarian Jewry. Karady states that Jews were forced to redefine their religious and cultural identities and relationship to Judaism, electing, essentially a 'new destiny' for themselves.<sup>105</sup> For some, this meant completely rejecting their former identities through conversion, inter-marriage or by becoming active in the Communist party. Others became active in the growing Zionist movement and eventually made aliyah, the process of emigrating to Israel. Others still rejected all open forms of identity change and retreated into anonymity. For those survivors remaining in the country's regions, it was more difficult to adopt or reject new characteristics and identities than their city counter-parts. The obscurity and secrecy often available to those living in large, urban environments were not an option for Jews choosing to remain in provincial, close communities. As a result, a lack of appreciation and understanding for the choices made on each side of Hungarian Jewry set in.<sup>106</sup>

Today, Jews residing in Hungary's regions retain a strong measure of animosity towards Budapest Jewry. Many Jews who live in the countryside are the descendants of those who experienced life in the camps or who perished in them, or who are survivors themselves. For these people, questions regarding why they and their families were the ones to suffer a more tragic fate remain forever in their mind.<sup>107</sup> These feelings combine with a traditional wariness against urban inhabitants and the belief held by many regional Jews that most of Budapest Jewry is rich and lives a pampered lifestyle while Jews in the countryside struggle to survive.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, much of Budapest Jewry finds it difficult to see regional Jewry as anything other than victims.<sup>109</sup> There is a combination of guilt and disdain on the part of the urban community. They recognise the unique



suffering of regional Jewry but at the same time disregard their needs. They view them simply as the last survivors of a tragic fate, communities that will eventually either move to Hungary's capital and integrate with the Jewish majority residing in Budapest or simply die out.<sup>110</sup>

However, though Hungary's regional Jewish communities constitute only 5% of the entire Hungarian Jewish population, it is too soon for Budapest to decide their fate and write them off.<sup>111</sup> In many smaller towns and even villages small, but significant communities exist and began to flourish again within the new political and social atmosphere emerging throughout the country for Jews after 1989. Like the communities in Budapest, they have attracted new members, initiated new religious and cultural programmes, formed strong connections with other communities existing in the countryside and have reached out to the international Jewish network.

Historically, the majority of Orthodox Hungarian Jews lived within the regional communities, especially in the Hungarian Northeast. This area was populated mainly with those Jews coming from the shtetls of Galicia and Eastern Poland in the 19th century. Before the Holocaust, the differences between Budapest and the provincial communities were often found within their attitudes towards religion and assimilation. Though Orthodox communities, like their Neolog counterparts, adopted Hungarian as their primary language, rejected Zionism and even Magyarised their names, much of Hungarian Orthodoxy denounced any other movements towards cultural and religious assimilation with non-Jewish Magyars. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, these ideological differences led to an official split between Hungary's Neolog and Orthodox communities.<sup>112</sup>

Much of Hungary's Orthodox community was lost in 1944, changing the face of Hungarian Jewry forever. Many Orthodox Jews who did survive emigrated to Israel in the years directly following the war.<sup>113</sup> As a result,

those who remained in Hungary generally represented the culturally more assimilated, less ardently religious and socially better integrated sections of the Jewish population, both within the capital and the regions.<sup>114</sup> Today, most of Hungary's regional Jews consider themselves Neolog, similar to the central community in Budapest.<sup>115</sup>

However, despite the present similarities in religious orientation, there is a great difference between being Jewish in Budapest and being a Jew in the rest of the country. Debates exist over whether it is more difficult to lead an active Jewish life in the city or in the countryside and which area has experienced more anti-Semitism in the post-war era. Opinions within the provincial Jewish communities often conclude that it has been much easier to exist as a 'hidden Jew' in the capital. Jews in smaller towns and villages, they feel, have always been easily identified as Jews amongst themselves and by their non-Jewish neighbours.<sup>116</sup> The central community in Budapest thinks differently, believing that during the communist era regional Jews were the ones hidden in society and more threatened by anti-Semitism than Jews residing in the capital.<sup>117</sup> However, Jews in the regions speak of fewer incidents of anti-Semitic backlash and appear to be less worried about anti-Semitism in the future than their urban counterparts, despite possible changes within political, social or economic life. Many regional Jews feel they have more in common with those non-Jews living outside of Budapest than with their cosmopolitan, 'big city' counterparts. The wife of the Jewish community leader in Hodmezovasarhely, a small town located in southern Hungary near the Serbian and Romanian borders, states:

We live as one. All of our neighbours know that we are Jewish, and everyone in the town knows where our community centre, synagogue and cemetery are, but they accept all of our holidays and traditions as natural and part of life. Sometimes, even, some of them come and have a little wine or food with us on Rosh Hashanah.<sup>118</sup> Although this seems to be a unique situation, most regional

communities agree that they are taken for granted by non-Jews or are considered simply another part of life in the town or village they reside in.<sup>119</sup>

Maintaining strong ties to religious traditions seems more important to regional communities than to Budapest Jewry, though there is less money and fewer resources for provincial community centres to provide their constituents with proper religious services and celebrations. The irony is that though Budapest is home to many working synagogues and has the means necessary to run weekly Shabbat services and elaborate holiday events, most of those offered remain only a third full, with the exception of the services held for the high holidays at the Dohany street synagogue, the largest synagogue in Europe.<sup>120</sup> Regional communities, who command very little of the assets of Hungary's Jewish community organisations and who have had to sell many of their synagogues or community buildings to municipal governments because they cannot afford to keep them running, regularly find that what services they do have are regularly attended by the entire community, as well as those surrounding communities who do not have their own centre.<sup>121</sup> The fact that it is much harder and more complicated to live an active Jewish life in the countryside makes what the communities there do have meaningful to them. This devotion to being Jewish does not lessen or trivialise the faith of urban Hungarian Jewry, but it does make the plight of provincial Jews more poignant. While visiting various communities located in towns and villages, one can see how important maintaining Jewish life is to community members by the respect they hold for something as small as a religious object or a pre-war community photograph or document. In Budapest, objects such as these are often taken for granted because of their multitude in the capital. For example, in one village, a teenage girl, one of only two members of her community under the age of 18, treasured a collection of children's stories

written in Hebrew, though she could not read it. She kept them in a special place on her bookshelf with the hope that she might study the language or visit Israel in the future. Due to financial constraints, these hopes often become unobtainable luxuries for regional Jews. However, in Budapest and other larger cities they have become commonplace opportunities.<sup>122</sup>

The main dispute between Budapest and the regional communities is a financial one. Budapest is in control of all national community funds received from the government and much of the money and donations given to Hungarian Jews by foreign agencies and private donors.<sup>123</sup> The leadership decides how much money will be disbursed to each individual community. Realising that their needs are larger than what is currently provided for from funds they receive from Budapest, regional community leaders are becoming increasingly vocal in their criticism of the central community organisation in Budapest and their distribution of finances. Dissatisfied with the image urban Jewry has of them, the leaders of regional Jewry want Budapest to recognise that they are not simply presiding over disintegrating communities.

Generally, the decision over monetary distribution is based on the number of living members of each community and how active a Jewish life each community currently has.<sup>124</sup> In 1998, the Hungarian government agreed to begin to annually repay the central Jewish community organisation for real estate seized from Hungarian Jews both in Budapest and in the regions during the Second World War and in the Communist era.<sup>125</sup> This money is also split between the Budapest communities and the communities in the provinces. Regional Jewry is wary of this arrangement, believing that the money they will see will not equal the value of the land and property stolen from them.<sup>126</sup> But Budapest views the situation differently, feeling that most of the money should stay within the capital because that is where the majority of Jews now live. Why should a

community, once made up of a thousand people but now comprised of 30 members, receive the same amount of financial compensation as a large organisation in the capital, the leadership in Budapest asks.<sup>127</sup>

In some larger towns, the regional community itself has managed recent sales of their property to their presiding local government. In Szeged, for example, a small city in Southern Hungary, the Jewish community sold one synagogue to the municipal government. With the money made from the building the community has been able to renovate another building, now home to an active Jewish cultural centre. Dr. Andras Ledniczky, one of the leaders of the Szeged Jewish community, believes Szeged's Jews have an advantage over other regional communities because of their population size and because they are still a living, working community. Therefore, they can conduct business deals independent from the central community in Budapest.<sup>128</sup> Other smaller communities, as well, have begun to separate themselves from Budapest by contacting and fostering independent relationships with Jewish organisations in America, Western Europe and Israel. In Hodmezovasarhely, a Hungarian-Israeli Friendship Society has been established which allows the community to receive assistance from the Szoknot, a Zionist organisation promoting relations and inter-cultural dialogue between Israelis and Eastern Europeans. It also encourages Jewish students from Eastern Europe to study in Israel and perhaps eventually emigrate there. Similar societies, which focus on encouraging cultural events and which pride themselves on their apolitical stance, now exist across the country. The 66 members of the Society in Hodmezovasarhely, including a sizeable group of non-Jews, hold an annual fund-raising ball. This is one of the main cultural events in the town and is attended by Jews and non-Jews alike, including the mayor and other local politicians. The community also has working relations with Tamar, its sister city in Israel.<sup>129</sup> In Szeged, the Friendship Society is made

up of 120 members, half of whom are not Jewish. Its purpose, Dr. Ledniczky states, is to assist the main synagogue in the city. The Society holds seven annual musical celebrations in the historic building, providing a new musical and cultural venue for the city and, in the process, raising money for the community.<sup>130</sup> By turning the needs of the Jewish community into a social and cultural event open to the entire public, local Jewish organisations both raise needed funds and provide non-Jewish society with a chance to understand Jewish people and their history in a non-confrontational setting promoting co-operation and tolerant interaction.

The lack of religious leaders within the countryside is also a matter of great contention between regional Jewry and the Budapest community. The small number of rabbis and cantors in Hungary could have detrimental affects on the future of religion for Jews, especially to those living outside of Budapest. In 1998, there were 9 rabbis, 8 who worked exclusively within the capital. The remaining religious leader, an orthodox rabbi with conservative views, was responsible for two large neolog communities in southern Hungary, Szeged and Pecs. Unfortunately, his views did not match those held by the members of his congregations. Religiously, they were reform and liberal Jews, hoping to enlarge their communities and attract younger members back to the synagogue, including many coming from mixed-marriage families. The rabbi did not approve of these types of Jew's involvement in the synagogue or within the religious life of the communities.<sup>131</sup>

Jewish religious traditions are essential aspects of communal life for those Jews residing in Hungary's regions. Within rural areas where communities lack a cultural centre, social clubs and the experiences found within urban environments, observing religious customs such as Shabbat and holidays like Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah as a collective group are a primary way of strengthening one's individual Jewish identity and

commitment to being an active part of a cohesive social unit. For those Jews living in very small towns and villages in remote areas who may often feel like outsiders within their own communal sphere, observation of religious and cultural traditions is especially important in helping people feel part of a larger national, and even international, community and network. The scarcity of religious leaders within the countryside is due primarily to a lack of funding as well as the difficulty in convincing young rabbinical students to move to communities outside of Budapest, many of which no longer even have a working synagogue. The Yeshiva in Budapest, the only rabbinical college left in Eastern Europe, has begun again to attract more young people who want to learn to become religious thinkers and leaders. Recently, it began to modernise its policies by accepting female students and students coming from mixed backgrounds.<sup>132</sup> However, though Budapest promised both Szeged and Pecs that young rabbinical students would be coming to work within their communities, community leaders remained uncertain whether these students would not choose to remain in Budapest in the end. Although Jewish leaders in Budapest are not responsible for the low numbers of rabbinical students studying at the Yeshiva, regional Jewry's worry over the state of their future religious lives leads them to hold Budapest accountable. This worry increases their resentment over the easy life they perceive Budapest Jewry to be enjoying compared with their own daily struggle to survive as Jews.

Despite their doubt in the future of regional Jewry, most leaders in Budapest cannot imagine what would happen to the community as a whole if regional Jewry was no longer a part of it. Growing dissatisfaction with the leadership in Budapest has led to a debate within regional Jewish communities over whether or not to completely pull away from the jurisdiction of Budapest and form a coalition of their own. The rumour that the offices in Budapest of the Joint Distribution Committee may be closing

strengthened the determination of those who wish to secede from Budapest's control. The Joint, an international Jewish organisation which provided monetary and social assistance to communities throughout Hungary and the rest of Central and Eastern Europe for decades, largely supported the elderly and Holocaust survivors in the regions of Hungary. Provincial communities feel that without the Joint, Budapest has nothing left to offer them and they will be better off asking for international aid directly. They believe the needs of regional Jewry are completely different from communities in Budapest. They feel that their voices will continue to be overlooked within the bureaucracy of the national community structure.<sup>133</sup>

If the Joint closed in Hungary, the dissolution of a common community comprised of both urban and rural Jewry would potentially make both groups more vulnerable to political and social anti-Semitism. A split between the two camps and public evidence of a dispute may also indicate to outside funding agencies that their continued assistance may be wasted, and international agencies may decide to cut off further financial support for a divided Jewish population. Organising and obtaining funding from the national government for two separate communities may also prove more difficult. Peter Feldmayer, the president of MAZSIHISZ, recognises the threat separation will bring to Jews within the entire country. As a Jew brought up within the thriving regional community of Nagykoros but who now resides in Budapest, Feldmayer hopes to bridge the gap between urban and regional Jewry which their historical differences have created.

In its present configuration, the Hungarian Jewish community is big enough to have 'movement', to act independently and to be alive. It is the only Jewish community of this kind left within Eastern Europe. If urban and rural Jewry separate, there would be profound losses on both sides. It is not only that I feel rural Jewry would find it difficult to continue as a living community in the



future, Budapest Jews would also lose their last ties to their history and to their roots, the origins from which Jewry first developed within this country. To survive successfully, we need each other. If we cannot support ourselves, how can we legitimately ask for support from the government and from the international Jewish community?<sup>134</sup>

Some working within the regional community organisations disregard Feldmayer as simply another bureaucrat by stating that what he believes and what he says about regional Jewry is lost when he is working in Budapest and pandering to the wishes of Budapest's Jews. At the same time, many members of provincial communities trust Feldmayer and, as they perceive him to be one who knows firsthand what it means to live as a Jew outside the capital, believe he is a leader they can look towards for guidance.<sup>135</sup> It is interesting to note that regional Jewry is itself divided in its perceptions of urban Jewry, the leadership in Budapest and their ideas for their own agendas for the future. Above everything else, this is perhaps the most ironic legacy of the Holocaust for Hungarian Jews, both urban and regional. It is what Karady calls the reality of creating independent identities and following individual destinies.<sup>136</sup> Although they remain smaller than the pre-war community, Hungarian Jewry today has become more diverse, opinionated and less cohesive than ever before. It will be interesting to observe whether both urban and regional Jewry can begin to accept their differences and varying dynamics as they progress through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Anti-Semitism in the Post-war Era**

The Hungarian journalist Imre Kertész writes about pre and post-war Jewish society, 'Theirs was the age of anti-Semitism. Ours is the age of Auschwitz.'<sup>137</sup> The memory of the Holocaust and the apprehension that it could happen again are perhaps more real than anti-Semitism itself is

today. No Jewish person can contemplate his or her own identity as a Jew without considering what happened during the war. It strengthens the determination of some to live a more Jewish lifestyle, and it confirms the decision of others to bury their Jewish identity in the past.

Whether future political and social changes will bring about a definitive anti-Semitic backlash is uncertain in Hungary. However, the continued fear of anti-Semitism plays a significant role in the way Hungary's Jewish community chooses to conduct and represent itself in non-Jewish society. This is not surprising considering that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century since the end of the First World War many Hungarians have either openly participated in or turned a blind eye to both societal and political anti-Semitism.

The years following the Second World War saw a re-emergence of anti-Semitism within the region.<sup>138</sup> Randolph Braham writes that this anti-Semitism mixed traditional components with new ideological-political strains. Post-war anti-Semitism, he states, focused on several factors. These included anti-Zionism, opposition to the State of Israel and the undermining and distortion of the events that took place during the Holocaust.<sup>139</sup> In Hungary, this new kind of anti-Semitism can be attributed to several reasons. The inability of both Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians to openly come to terms with what had happened during the Holocaust, as well as Jewish anger and confusion over Hungary's inability to take responsibility for their actions in the war, especially during the events of 1944, created a pervasive sense of suspicion and distrust throughout the country. Non-Jewish indignation over the Jewish community's refusal to 'forgive and forget' and their anger over the extensive measure of support given to the government by the post-war Jewish population further destabilised relations between Jews and non-Jews. With the new government run by formerly open anti-Semites and Jews who wanted no ties with the

Jewish community, all these factors contributed to the re-establishment of anti-Semitism and the Jewish question.<sup>140</sup>

Among historians, opinions vary as to how much real anti-Semitism was displayed during this time and how much was actually perceived by Jews as a result of their past tragedy. What may be deduced from the literature is that though the right-wing stereotype considers the years following the war up to 1956 to be a period of Jewish rule, Jews fared no better than anyone else. As the historian Andras Kovacs writes, Jews were not exempt from any of the 'disadvantages' placed upon Hungarian society.<sup>141</sup> Jews lost their livelihoods just as non-Jews did, their children were deprived of the opportunity of higher education similar to other ethnic groups within the country. Approximately 30% of all Hungarian deportees during the post-war period of Stalin's rule of the Soviet Union, or 20,000 people, were Jewish. At that time, this number represented about 10% of Hungarian Jewry.<sup>142</sup> This type of persecution, however, cannot be classified as anti-Semitic because it was not directed specifically towards Jews, but against every religious, ethnic and, primarily, middle-class group.

It was true that Hungary's post-war communist party was unique in Central and Eastern Europe for being largely run by leaders of Jewish origin. Fearful of being labelled 'Jewish sympathisers' and potentially calling attention to their own Jewish ancestry, especially during the late 1940's and early 1950's, they did not classify Jews as victims of the Holocaust. Instead, they became 'martyrs for the international cause of socialism' (if they were communists), or simply 'victims of fascism'.<sup>143</sup> The government largely ignored their needs and warned Jews throughout the country not to 'capitalise' on their wartime sufferings.<sup>144</sup> These policies matched those in Moscow in their attempt to underestimate the specific suffering of Jews during the war.

However, the writer George Garai also states that at the same time, under Matyas Rakosi, the leader of the Hungarian Communist Party at the time, the government was also unwilling to promote a specifically anti-Zionist agenda, especially during the show trials leading up to the notorious 'Doctor's Plot' of 1953. They were wary of becoming too involved in Stalin's crusade and inadvertently initiating an internal backlash from Moscow on themselves. Instead, Rakosi concentrated on leading the anti-Tito campaign that emerged in early 1949 by putting in place a series of trials after the Yugoslavian leader broke with the Soviet leadership. Thus, Hungarian Communists remained faithful to some aspects of Soviet policies and ideology while they avoided becoming immersed in Stalin's emerging anti-Zionist campaign.<sup>145</sup>

The level of anti-Semitism displayed during the revolution of 1956 is also a matter of debate. Within Jewish circles and Jewish literature, unverifiable stories of anti-Semitic attacks, beatings and actions flourish. But whether these reports actually happened or are the result of fear that they might potentially have happened is uncertain. Andras Kovacs writes that within aspiring political groups of the time there were no anti-Semitic attitudes, not even within the most conservative groups, and only 21 official accounts of anti-Semitic attacks were reported.<sup>146</sup> Though many Jews prepared for the worst, he states, it is important to remember that this anticipation was not justified in the end.<sup>147</sup> The historian Stephen Roth also agrees with Kovacs' statement that, though 10% of the people who fled Hungary in 1956 were of Jewish origin, 'it was the fear of anti-Semitic attack, not the reality of it' that made them leave.<sup>148</sup>

Whether or not anti-Semitism played a prominent role during the 1956 uprising is not necessarily the issue. However, the re-interpretation of history based on the strength of Jewish fear over the potential of Hungarian anti-Semitism, of the certainty that such events would occur is. It is this

fear which shaped much of Jewish identity for those Jews who did not leave Hungary after the war until the events of 1989 brought about new possibilities for re-creating or re-examining one's individual identity. It is also this fear that resulted in many Holocaust survivors and children of survivors keeping Jewish origins and family stories of what happened during the war hidden from the outside world. As examined previously, many Hungarian Jews discovered they were Jewish only through their peers in school who would tease them about their 'Jewish features'. Others did not learn they were Jewish until after 1989 when parents and grandparents felt safer to express themselves and began displaying religious objects again, observing holidays and relating their ancestry to their children.<sup>149</sup> Certain forms of humour and joke telling have even become established in Hungarian as a result of this phenomenon. A Jewish man living in Budapest relayed one such type of joke.

A man lives in a village somewhere in the countryside. A journalist comes to visit him to ask him about his experiences living as a Jew in Eastern Europe. He asks a neighbour where he can find the man and explains why he wants to find him. The neighbour replies, 'Yes, he lives here, but you can't ask him these questions because no one has told him that he is Jewish yet'.<sup>150</sup>

This exaggerates the problem perhaps, but demonstrates that the trend of covering up one's Jewish background was so significant it actually inspired humour.

The ways in which anti-Semitism will manifest itself in the future remains uncertain at this point. In May, 1989, the president of the Hungarian Parliament made a speech condemning all forms of prejudice and openly paid respect to Hungarian Jews and Roma who were deported from the country during the war. However, he still found it necessary to generalise the Holocaust, equating the suffering and loss of victims of racial persecution to that endured by the Hungarian military.<sup>151</sup> And in July,

1990, at the inauguration of a monument dedicated to Hungarian Holocaust victims, both the President and Prime Minister denounced anti-Semitism and publicly affirmed their commitment to the welfare of Hungary's Jews. Though they commemorated Jewish victims in a way never before done by Hungarian political leaders, they still did not apologise for the position Hungary took during the war.<sup>152</sup> At the beginning of the 1990's, these open acknowledgements of the past were important moves in the process of reconciliation for both Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians, yet they still demonstrated the difficulty Hungary had in fully accepting their responsibility in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. These types of moves early on in the process of democratisation also did not necessarily lead to future governments adopting similar positions of remorse.

The fear of a future backlash in Hungary is still great enough to stop some Jews from ever publicly admitting their ancestral origins. Some refrain from answering any kind of census or questionnaire. They remain wary of officially stating their religious affiliation. One survivor stated,

My upstairs neighbour refuses to answer the door every time the census takers come around. He is certain that if they discover he is Jewish they will persecute him.<sup>153</sup>

From 1950 to the early 1990's, questions regarding an individual's religion were omitted from the national census.<sup>154</sup> Now, with questions concerning religious status a part of official questionnaires, people still remain frightened of openly declaring their religious persuasion to a governmental organisation. As a result, even the central Jewish community is uncertain how many Jewish Hungarians reside in Hungary today. The number fluctuates between 80,000 to 130,000 people.<sup>155</sup>

Is the contemporary fear of anti-Semitism demonstrated by Hungarian Jewry justified? According to a poll conducted in 1998, though

the majority of Hungarians believe that Jews suffered during the war and have been the targets of attack throughout history, over half of those polled think that Jewish suffering was no worse than what non-Jewish Hungarians went through in the war and under communism. They also stated that numbers of Jewish deaths during the Holocaust have been exaggerated and that Jews should not be granted reparations for their losses by the Hungarian government. From his findings, Kovacs concluded that though the majority of people polled are not openly anti-Semitic, a sizeable number indulge in petty anti-Semitic opinions, often expressed in the nationalist ideas and behaviour that has become both popular and acceptable since 1989.<sup>156</sup> These findings also corroborate a series of interviews conducted outside the Budapest Jewish Museum in August, 2001 regarding exhibitions in the museum and the Holocaust in Hungary. Of the twenty-eight interviews undertaken, only five Hungarians agreed to be interviewed. From these, two discussed their belief that non-Jewish Hungarian suffering during the Holocaust had been underestimated and overlooked.<sup>157</sup>

This new version of nationalist sentiment is not only found at a social level. In the elections held in May, 1998, Fidesz, the conservative-leaning 'Young Democrats' party joined forces with the populist, agrarian Smallholders party, KisGazda. They united the fragmented right in Hungary and were able to seize political control from the Socialist party who had been in power since 1994. Though Fidesz themselves are not anti-Semitic, their outspoken nationalist views and their coalition formed with the anti-foreigner, anti-cosmopolitan Smallholders party made Hungarian Jews wary about what the future may bring.<sup>158</sup> Jews were also shocked by the success of Istvan Csurka and his 'Truth and Life' party, the far right, anti-Semitic political organisation which went from a sudden growth of 2% in support in 1994 to 5.5% in 1998, gaining 14 seats in parliament and the

chance to express its extremist ideas within a legitimate framework. Csurka also offers the public a weekly tirade of anti-Semitic propaganda in his own newspaper, *Magyar Forum*.<sup>159</sup> The victory of the right in 1998 demonstrated a society becoming aggressively nationalist and increasingly disappointed in the slow growth of the economy since 1989. This return to officially acceptable forms of anti-Semitism has found popularity not only within working-class society but within the educated middle-class as well. Though the government changed hands again in 2002 with the social democratic party gaining control of parliament, this too may cause concern for Hungary's Jews. The new government has been labelled 'The Jewish government' because of the open support they give to the country's minorities.<sup>160</sup>

Since 1998, several Hungarian newspapers have reported that anti-Semitic attacks are on the rise. In July, 1998 the national newspaper, *Magyar Hirlap*, stated that an orthodox man and his two children were verbally attacked and had bottles thrown at them in the 13th district of Budapest, an area known now as 'little Tel Aviv' because of its large, mainly middle-class and professional Jewish population. During the war, this area was the so-called 'international ghetto', the smaller, second Jewish ghetto in Budapest which housed Jews protected by neutral and ally countries.<sup>161</sup> In November, 1998 an article in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, reported that nationalism and anti-Semitism were once again becoming fashionable among the intellectual elite in Western regions such as Switzerland, Germany and Austria, countries which have had to pay out millions to settle claims made by Holocaust survivors or their relatives for their treatment and loss of property during the war. One in three Swiss also believed that Jews were too influential in the world, twice as many as two years before. And in another article in the same issue, Ignatz Bubis, the leader of Germany's Jews, reported that right-wing extremism was on the



rise and, in frustration, he was close to quitting.<sup>162</sup> In the News Review section of the November, 1998 *Sunday Times*, Michael Pinto-Duchinsky asserted that subtle forms of Holocaust revisionism and reinterpretation were becoming popular once again amongst the business world and intellectual elite in Germany and even within some pockets of radical academia in the United States. He wrote about one established American professor, Peter Hayes, who wrote a book entitled *IG Farben and the Nazi Era*. In it, Hayes defended IG Farben, the company responsible for building and running the slave-labour camp attached to Auschwitz. Hayes was also later commissioned by Degussa, another German firm responsible for melting and using the gold extracted from the teeth of victims murdered in the camps, to write an official history of the company. The re-writing of history into accounts made more palatable for conglomerates to represent themselves is becoming an increasingly popular way for companies to detach from past connections to Nazi atrocities. It also assists them in renouncing their responsibilities to victims and their families. Revising history has become a profitable way for academics like Hayes to earn a living and a reputation as extreme and controversial thinkers.<sup>163</sup>

In the summer of 2001, a resurgence of anti-Semitic rhetoric and accusations once again hit Hungary's national newspapers. A ruling by the government on whether a Jewish businessman could buy the national football team, Ferenc Varos, prompted a series of anti-Semitic verbal attacks by leading politicians and the publication of articles concerning Hungary's Jewish question and prevailing anti-Semitism in the country.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, the first Hungarian-produced documentary on the Holocaust in Hungary was aired on television. Using archival footage and interviews with survivors, the film was a moving and uncompromising look at Hungarian Jewry's tragic fate during the war and its effect on their lives in the post-war era. However, because of its late showing in the evening on

a Sunday in August, some Jews felt the documentary would not reach the majority of viewers and its purpose, to prompt an open discussion on the Holocaust within Hungarian society, would be lost.<sup>165</sup>

Though all these events are shocking and make the future uncertain for Hungarian Jewry, they do not necessarily mean that Hungarian society as a whole is a highly anti-Semitic culture in the way the term is understood in western society. Andras Kovacs writes that Eastern European anti-Semitism remains in a class by itself, shaped by the burden of its unique history.<sup>166</sup> What can be seen as acceptable in Eastern Europe would be labelled extremist and intolerable in the West. Subtle forms of anti-Semitism, often more damaging and wider reaching than open anti-Semitic attacks, go unnoticed in Hungary. Aspects of society that may be perceived as highly anti-Semitic by a westerner are a normal part of life for both Jews and non-Jews in the East. One Jewish foreigner living in Budapest said,

If anyone insulted me as a Jew in New York, there would be hell to pay. Here it seems to be part of the landscape. Many times people use derogatory terms without even meaning to be cruel, even people who I would not consider to be anti-Semitic. It has become an aspect of the language that is acceptable.<sup>167</sup>

The judgements of the west on eastern ways of life are not always understood or appreciated by both Jews and non-Jews in the east. There is a struggle against the excessive influence of western customs and values that have pervaded eastern countries since 1989. This is a trend shared by many Eastern Europeans, both Jews and non-Jews. In Hungary, political parties, both right and left wing, are wary of foreign customs and ideals slipping into and taking over Hungarian traditions and the 'Hungarian way of life', viewing them as working against 'real Magyar interests'.<sup>168</sup> However, despite their agreement over the corroding influences of the west, many Hungarian nationalists include Jews in their definition of who is foreign, even for Jewish families who have lived in Hungary for generations. There

is a growing sentiment that real integration is impossible between Jews and Hungarians because Jews, as 'aliens', are unable to adopt the Hungarian national character and 'mentality'.<sup>169</sup>

Whether this rejection of western ideas and traditions includes the way that societies in the west deal with their own Jewish question is unknown at this point.<sup>170</sup> Perhaps a more interesting question to ask is what would happen to the Jewish community and its issues over identity if it were inherently understood by Hungarian Jews that anti-Semitism, political or societal, was now only a matter of the past. Since receiving emancipation in 1867, Hungarian Jewry has defined itself not only by its understanding of Judaism as a religious and cultural concept but also as a reaction or response to the conceptions non-Jewish society held regarding Jews.<sup>171</sup> Anti-Semitism alienated those Jews who were afraid to actively and openly pursue Judaism from their own ancestral backgrounds, but it also acted as a unifying point which allowed Jews to rally together and defy by openly expressing their Jewish identity. In this sense, Jews were as much resisting the stereotypes held by anti-Semites as they were re-affirming anti-Semitic labels by embracing the role of the 'other' and asserting their differences. The atrocities of the 1930's and 40's and the years leading up to them are now regarded as a period of prime importance for Jews who are deciding what their identity will be in the post-Holocaust era. To suddenly erase even the possibility of persecution would create a void within the way Jews regard non-Jewish society. How do you interact with someone once all threat and negativity, concepts existing for centuries, are suddenly taken away? Jews would have to entirely re-think their relationship with the non-Jewish world if anti-Semitism were to disappear forever. In Hungary, for example, reactions towards anti-Semitism help to largely define Jewish identity today. Positive characteristics of Judaism are becoming popular for younger Jews as they

create new identities for themselves in the opening society of post-1989 Hungary. Many others, however, those who are Holocaust survivors or who grew up during the post-war era and felt safer hiding their Jewish origins, would not know how to think about being Jewish if it weren't in terms of being victimised or persecuted. For them, being Jewish holds only negative connotations. In this sense, anti-Semitism, or at least the theory and potential of it, can damage individual identities but is still presently needed by both sections of society. Each side knows and perhaps even feels comfortable with the ways anti-Semitism defines them. For many, the concept creates a forum in which Jews and non-Jews can continue to react, interact and deal with each other and their intertwining histories.

## **Conclusion**

Chronicling her return to Hungary in the early 1990's after her family fled in 1956, Susan Rubin Suleiman observed the impact history has had on Jews living in the country today.

I realised once again, this evening, how close to the horrors of history people are who live today in Budapest. Every Jewish adult living in this city has had at least one family member killed in the war. Some have lost their whole families and been deported themselves...others...were youngsters who escaped but lost a parent or other close relative to deportation...And yet people go about their business. They almost never talk about these things, and they don't go crazy, or not much...How else can one go on living after such devastation?<sup>172</sup>

Despite the burdens of history, memory and conflicts of identity that Suleiman encounters during her time in Budapest, she also recognises the survival instincts of Jews in Hungary. She sees them attempting to create successful lives for themselves and welcoming spaces where future generations can learn and understand Jewish culture and religion, as well as come to terms with the past.<sup>173</sup>

The process of regeneration and renewal is a slow and on-going one. Many obstacles impede the success of the Hungarian Jewish renaissance. This chapter attempted to examine and analyse some of the main issues affecting the modern Jewish experience in Hungary. It also tried to offer the reader an overall insight into the history and contemporary life of Hungary's Jews before subsequent chapters deal with more specific issues.

Section one looked at the history of Hungarian Jewry since their emancipation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and ensuing struggle with assimilation with the rest of Hungarian society. The relationship between Jews and assimilation has been a tenuous one. Ultimately, assimilation calls into question the commitment and responsibility one feels towards both their Jewish identity and their Hungarian one. Assimilation today remains a contentious issue. However, instead of worrying about not appearing Hungarian enough, many Jews now worry about not being perceived to be adequately Jewish. Others continue to use total assimilation with non-Jewish Hungary as way of severing all ties to the past. Still others feel caught between both identities, never feeling comfortably assimilated or connected to one group or the other. As a result, attitudes towards assimilation will remain complicated no matter how successful today's Jewish communities become in the future.

Section two examined the history of the Jewish question in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary. Even though both non-Jewish and Jewish Hungarian societies have in some ways attempted to better understand each other in recent years, the Jewish question remains an underlying issue in many affairs directly or indirectly involving Jews. The behaviour at the top of society, within the government and other principal official sectors, both reflects and influences the attitudes and latent anti-Semitism still found within the rest of the population. The debate over the Jewish question will not begin to be resolved until politicians and community leaders openly

confront their role in the perpetuation of anti-Jewish feeling within the county.

Section three of this chapter analysed the various identities making up Hungarian Jewry and considered whether its population could be classified as a cohesive community. Despite the arguments surrounding this issue, Jews in Hungary can only be classified as a community. As section four attests with its in-depth study of the relationship between urban and regional Hungarian Jewry, Jews more often feel allegiance to a smaller part of a fragmented and often divided national communal body. However, though differences remain between various groups and most people do not officially even belong to any Jewish community or religious organisation, their levels of communication and interaction within many aspects of society and underlying responsibility they feel towards one another ultimately points to a community living and working together. Even with their problems, most understand that they are stronger and more influential whole rather than splintered.

Finally, section five assessed anti-Semitism in Hungary in the post-war era and the level existing within the country today. Of all the problems that anti-Semitism brings to both the Jewish community and the rest of Hungarian society, perhaps the worst is that the longer it pervades, the more difficult it becomes to firmly establish a relationship based on trust and understanding between Jews and non-Jews. Without this, many Jews will continue to feel uncomfortable and wary expressing their identities publicly. Non-Jews will continue to be blamed for any hostilities directed towards Jews, whether they are directly responsible or not. The government must finally come to terms with the past by sponsoring an open and honest debate concerning its participation in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry during the Holocaust. Modern anti-Semitism, both underlying and overt, must be publicly condemned. And anti-Jewish

statements made by politicians and leading members of society must be dealt with severely. Any government that establishes itself through the persecution of its country's minority groups must be seen as illegitimate. In Hungary, history and its continuing effects on the country can no longer be ignored. Without these changes, the Jewish renaissance in Hungary will never truly be able to succeed. As Stephen Smith, the director of the Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial Centre states, the past must now begin to challenge the future.<sup>174</sup>

At the same time, Suleiman warns that addressing the past must also then allow the future to progress unencumbered towards new experiences and realities. She writes,

...remembrance too has its traps. After you remember, and record, it's time to move again – not toward new forgetfulness, but toward new experience.<sup>175</sup>

It will be interesting to see if Hungary and Hungarian Jews will be able to move freely into the future as they challenge and come to terms with the past.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Randolph Braham, 'Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the Politics of East Central Europe', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 8, 2 (1994), 143-163, (p. 148).
- <sup>2</sup> This phrase was used to describe Jewish society in Hungary in the period beginning at the turn of the century until the onset of World War One.
- <sup>3</sup> Randolph Braham, 'The Holocaust in Hungary: A Retrospective Analysis', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 8, 2 (1994), 285-304, (p. 304).
- <sup>4</sup> For Jews, assimilation means the adoption of or integration with non-Jewish lifestyles and aspects of non-Jewish culture and society.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with Gabor Szanto, editor of *Szombat*, Hungarian Jewish journal, Budapest, Hungary, March, 1998.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Steven Roth, 'Jewish Renewal in Europe: Hungary', in *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, ed. by Jonathon Webber (London: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 1994), pp.205-223. The merging of the Jewish communities was first announced by both the Neolog and Orthodox communities in the January, 5, 1950 issue of *Uj Elet*, the state-run journal of the Jewish community, founded in November, 1945.
- <sup>8</sup> This ruling meant that in the post-war era any behaviour that was deemed to be Zionist, or Jewish culturally or nationalistically, was illegal. For example, Jews were allowed to attend religious services for holidays such as Yom Kippur and the Jewish New Year but were not allowed to celebrate them publicly. They were allowed to identify as Jews but not allowed to identify with or support Israel.
- <sup>9</sup> Roth, pp. 207-216.
- <sup>10</sup> Ferenc Eros, 'Hogyan jöttem rá, hogy zsidó vagyok?', *Interjúk Medvertanc*, 2-3, (1985).
- <sup>11</sup> For examples of this debate today, see interviews with Peter Feldmayer and Sandor Feldmayer, Antonia Szenthe Haraszti, Janos Vanderstein, and other community leaders conducted in Hungary, March and April, 1998.
- <sup>12</sup> In order to make a distinction between 'Hungarians', a nationality that includes many minority groups and 'Magyars', the Magyar ethnic group, two different terms in ethnic and class-conscious Hungary in the late 19th-century, both terms have been used here. The emancipation and activities of Hungarian Jews during this time are discussed in such works as Nathaniel Katzburg, 'Hungarian Jewry in Modern Times; Political and Social Aspects', in *Hungarian-Jewish Studies*, ed. by Randolph Braham (New York: World Federation of Hungarian Jews, 1966), pp. 137-169. See also R. Kann, 'Hungarian Jewry During Austria-Hungary's Constitutional Period, (1867-1914)', *Jewish Social Studies*, 7, (1945).
- <sup>13</sup> Albert S. Lindeman, *The Jews Accused; Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank), 1894-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 40-56.
- <sup>14</sup> Katzburg, 'Hungarian Jewry', pp. 144-145.
- <sup>15</sup> Andras Kovacs, 'The Jewish question in Contemporary Hungary', in *The Holocaust in Hungary - Forty Years Later*, ed. by Randolph Braham and Bela Vago (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).



- <sup>16</sup> Katzburg, 'Hungarian Jewry', pp.152-153. This meant that Orthodox communities rejected non-Jewish styles of dress, engaging in non-Jewish forms of entertainment, eating non-Kosher foods and other aspects of Hungarian society and culture that other assimilated Jews accepted and participated in.
- <sup>17</sup> See interviews in Budapest, Szeged, Nagykoros, Hungary, April and May, 1998.
- <sup>18</sup> Livia Rothkirchen, 'Hungary-an Asylum for the Refugees of Europe', *Yad Vashem Studies*, (1968), 127-142.
- <sup>19</sup> Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide; The Holocaust in Hungary, Vol. One* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). Janos Kis gives a figure of almost 700,000 Hungarian Jews dead at the end of the war in, 'A zsidokerdes magyarorszagon', *Beszelo*, 11, (1985).
- <sup>20</sup> John S. Conway, 'The Holocaust in Hungary: Recent Controversies and Reconsiderations', in *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry*, ed. by Randolph Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 1-5. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 8 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1996), p. 1105, gives the figure of 260,000, though the exact number is unknown.
- <sup>21</sup> Roth, 'Jewish Renewal', pp. 205-206.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.215.
- <sup>23</sup> See interviews in Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.
- <sup>24</sup> *Sorsfordulo. Iratok Magyarorszag Felszabadulasanak Tortenetehez. 1944, Szeptember, 1945, Aprilis*, ed. by Elek Karsai and Magda Solymar (1970).
- <sup>25</sup> See interviews with Malka Mittelman Seifert, Holocaust survivor, Skokie, Illinois, September, 1997, and Stella Banki, Holocaust survivor, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.
- <sup>26</sup> Roth, 'Jewish Renewal', p.216. Ultimately, 'total assimilation and integration' meant an abandonment and denial of anything related to Jewish life, whether it was religious, historical and cultural.
- <sup>27</sup> See interviews from Budapest and Hodmezovasarhely, Hungary, March and April, 1998.
- <sup>28</sup> Karsai and Solymar, vol. one.
- <sup>29</sup> See interviews with Stella Banki and Vera Banki, her daughter, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.
- <sup>30</sup> Julia Szilagyi, Istvan Cserne, Katalin Peto, Gyorgy Szokc, 'The Second and Third Generation Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants', in *Studies on the Holocaust in Hungary*, ed. by Randolph Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 238-255.
- <sup>31</sup> Karsai and Solymar, vol. one.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>33</sup> Gyorgy Szaraz, *Egy Eloitelet Nyomaban* (Budapest: Magveto Kiado, 1976).
- <sup>34</sup> For example, see the first issue of the Hungarian Communist Party's daily newspaper, *Szabad Nep*, and literature from the Majdanek Museum and Memorial Site, formerly the Majdanek concentration camp, Lublin, Poland.
- <sup>35</sup> Istvan Bibo, 'Zsidokerdes magyarorszagon 1944 utan', *Valasz*, 8, 10-11 (Oct./Nov. 1948).
- <sup>36</sup> For example, see the translation of the Hungarian radio programme *The Owl*, hosted by the journalist Miklos Gyorffy, in which both Jewish and non-Jewish participants were questioned regarding their opinions on the existence of anti-Semitism and the

Jewish question within Hungarian society in the 1980's. *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 18, 3, (Winter 1988).

<sup>37</sup> 'Official Anti-Semitism has its Limitations', *Radio Budapest*, transcript, April 27, 1969, Unit No. 300/40/7/174, Open Society Archives, Budapest.

<sup>38</sup> Andras Gero, *Modern Hungarian Society in the Making, The Unfinished Experience* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1993), chapter. 10.

<sup>39</sup> *Jews in the Hungarian Economy, 1760-1945*, ed. by Michael Silber (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 151-153.

<sup>41</sup> Lindemann, *The Jews accused*, pp. 40-57.

<sup>42</sup> Hungarian section, *Hostages in Modernisation: Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism, 1870-1933/39*, ed. by Herbert Strauss (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 857-960.

<sup>43</sup> Lindemann, *The Jews Accused*, pp.52-56.

<sup>44</sup> *Huszadik Szazad*, ed. by Oscar Jaszi (May 1917). In 1910, the population of Hungary was

<sup>45</sup> Gyorgy Szaraz, 'The Jewish question in Hungary: A Historical Perspective', in *The Holocaust in Hungary-Forty Years Later*, ed. by Randolph Braham and Bela Vago (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 13-30.

<sup>46</sup> Katzburg, 'Hungarian Jewry', p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp.19-23.

<sup>48</sup> Tibor Hajdu, 'A hagyományos antiszemitizmustól a naci típusú antiszemitizmusig', in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later*, ed. by Randolph Braham and Attila Pok (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 57-70.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>50</sup> Public Records Office, London, F.O. 371/23112. C 2478/166/21.

<sup>51</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, 'Trianon Hungary, Jews and Politics', in *Hostages of Modernization: Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism, 1870-1933/39*, ed. by Herbert A. Strauss (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', p. 155.

<sup>53</sup> Kovacs, 'The Jewish question'.

<sup>54</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', p. 155.

<sup>55</sup> Randolph Braham, 'The Holocaust in Hungary: A Retrospective Analysis' in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later*, ed. by Randolph L. Braham and Attila Pok (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) pp. 285-304, p. 292.

<sup>56</sup> Kovacs, 'The Jewish question'.

<sup>57</sup> Bibo, 'Zsidokerdes'.

<sup>58</sup> Szaraz, *Egy Eloitelet Nyomaban*, p.23.

<sup>59</sup> Discussed in an emailed account of Hungarian Jewry during the Communist era from Dr. Peter Hidas, 22 February, 1999. For details on the expulsion of Jews from urban areas during the 1950's, see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 8. The World Jewish Conference meeting is discussed in 'World Jewish Congress Meeting in Budapest', transcript, 5 May, 1987, unit no. 300/40/7/174, Open Society Archives, Budapest.

<sup>60</sup> Erno Szep, *The Smell of Humans: A Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1994). Szep's memoir was originally published in 1945 in Budapest under the title *Emberszag*.

<sup>61</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 8, pp.1079-1108.

<sup>62</sup> Szaraz, *Egy Eloitelet Nyomaban*.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Roth writes that the freedom which emerged at this time could have been the result of several factors - the result of people's experiences during the events of 1956, the gradual liberalisation of the government's hold on society during the 1960's and the appearance of a new generation of writers. See Roth, 'Jewish Renewal', pp. 210-213.

<sup>64</sup> Ivan Saunders, 'Sequels and Revisions: The Hungarian Jewish Experience in Recent Hungarian Literature', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 14, 1, (1984), 31-45.

<sup>65</sup> *Evkonyv. Kiadja a Magyar Izraelitak Orszagos Kepviselete, 1971-1972*, ed. by Sandor Scheiber (Budapest, 1972).

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Eppler, 'Judaica in Hungary', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 6, 2, (1976), 126-128.

<sup>67</sup> Saunders, 'Sequels and Revisions', pp. 31-45.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>69</sup> 'Fiddler On the Roof Heralds a Hungarian Thaw', *London Jewish Chronicle*, 8 June 1973, Open Society Archives, Budapest, RL/C8/1125/73. *Es Beszeld El Fiadnak...Fener Tamas Fotokiallitasa A Magyarorszagi Zsidok Eleterol*, was exhibited at the Ethnographical Museum of Budapest, 1983.

<sup>70</sup> Kovacs, 'The Jewish question'. Stephen Roth, 'Is There a 'Jewish question' in Present-Day Hungary?', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 18, 3, (Winter 1988).

<sup>71</sup> 'Life is Good These Days For Hungary's Jews', *The Guardian*, 28 October, 1977. 'Hungary's Jews Relatively Free', *The New York Times*, 29 May, 1973. 'Hungary's Jews Are No Longer Ashamed', *The Jerusalem Post*, 15 March, 1973. 'The Jews In Hungary', *Radio Budapest*, 29 January, 1967. 'Official Anti-Semitism Has its Limitations', *Radio Budapest*, April 27, 1967. All found in Unit No. 300/40/7/174, Open Society Archives. For the radio discussion of the Jewish question in Hungary, see the transcription of the radio programme, 'The Owl'.

<sup>72</sup> Roth, 'Jewish Renewal', pp. 218-219. An example of *Shalom's* attitude towards the Jewish community leadership can be found in 'Hungarian Jewish Leaders Rebuked For Signing Anti-American Statement', RAD/Reisch, 19 Jan., 1984, unit no. 300/40/7/174, Open Society Archives, Budapest.

<sup>73</sup> Gabor Szanto interview, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>74</sup> For example, see the articles referred to in Footnote 161.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Janos Banki, businessman, Budapest, August, 1998.

<sup>76</sup> In post-89 Jewish society, learning Hebrew and involving oneself in Jewish traditions, such as Horah dancing, are considered acceptable, even if one has no interest in Jewish religion or going to synagogue. Interviews with both Antonia Szenthe Haraszti of the Hungarian Joint Distribution Committee and Aniko Schmidt, student and member of the Pecs Jewish community, April, 1998.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Dr. Miklos Fischer, Executive Director of the Balint Haz Jewish Community Centre, Budapest, Hungary, March, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Dr. Andras Kovacs, sociologist and expert on Hungarian anti-Semitism at Central European University and Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> Gabor Szanto, 'You Call This A Renaissance?', a lecture given to the American Jewish Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, 6 May, 1997. And Gabor Szanto, 'The Presence of a Many-Faceted Culture: Floodgate or Dead End?', *Human Rights Without Frontiers: European Magazine of Human Rights*, Special Issue, (1997), 37-40.

<sup>80</sup> Dr. Miklos Fischer interview.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Vera Suranyi Benedikt, Principle of the Orthodox American Endowment Gymnazium, Budapest, Hungary, May, 1998.

<sup>82</sup> Dr. Andras Kovacs interview.

<sup>83</sup> Vera Suranyi Benedikt interview.

<sup>84</sup> Dr. Andras Kovacs interview.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Peter Feldmayer, President of Neolog Jewish community, Nagykoros, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Zsuzsa Szilagyi, Russian archivist and librarian at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>88</sup> This number changes slightly depending upon who one speaks to. Peter Feldmayer, the President of Neolog Jewry, says the number is higher, while leaders of other local Jewish communities say the number is 30% or slightly lower.

<sup>89</sup> Zsuzsa Szilagyi interview.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Stella Banki, film translator and Holocaust survivor, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Zsuzsa Fritz, Jewish educator and English teacher at Balint Haz Jewish Community Centre, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Vera Banki, music teacher and daughter of Stella Banki, Budapest, Hungary, July 1998.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Dora Kabai, high school student and the daughter of Vera Banki and the granddaughter of Stella Banki, Budapest, Hungary, July, 1998.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Rabbi Baruch Oberlander, leader of the Hungarian Chabad Lubavitch Community, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Rabbi Schonberger, Orthodox Rabbi, Pecs Jewish Community, Pecs, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>97</sup> This is the situation in Hodmezovasarhely.

<sup>98</sup> Aniko Schmidt interview.

<sup>99</sup> I specifically use the terms 'urban' and 'regional' Jewry for several reasons. First, 'urban' is the term Budapest's Jews use when referring to themselves. Secondly, 'regional' is a word that best describes Hungary outside of its capital, a country that is neither completely rural and village-like, because of its numerous smaller cities and centres of culture, or provincial, because many of its inhabitants are sophisticated and move easily and comfortably between city and country life.

<sup>100</sup> For details regarding the planning of the Hungarian Holocaust, see Rudolf Vrba, 'The Preparation for the Holocaust in Hungary: An Eyewitness Account', in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Fifty Years Later*, ed. by Randolph L. Braham and Attila Pok (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 227-283.

<sup>101</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', pp. 156-159.

<sup>102</sup> For example, see interviews with the Vanderstein family, Hodmezovasarhely, Hungary, April, 1998. Janos Vanderstein is president of the Hodmezovasarhely Jewish community.

<sup>103</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', p. 156.

<sup>104</sup> Gyorgy Konrad, 'On Raoul Wallenberg', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 39 (Autumn 1998).

<sup>105</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', p. 163.

<sup>106</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', and Vanderstein and Feldmayer family interviews.

<sup>107</sup> The fate of Hungary's regional communities and the bitter feelings associated with it, especially within the orthodox community remaining in the country, was mentioned

in many of the interviews conducted. For example, see Peter Feldmayer and his brother Sandor Feldmayer, the leader of the Nagykoros Jewish Community, Nagykoros, Hungary, April, 1998, or the Vera Suranyi Benedikt interview.

<sup>108</sup> Again, many Jews living in Hungary's countryside mentioned this stereotype. For example, see the interviews with the Venderstein family, Hodmezovasarhely, Hungary, April, 1998, and Stella Banki, a survivor of Auschwitz who was brought up in a Hungarian community in Transylvania, but is now living in Budapest, April, 1998.

<sup>109</sup> Many interviewees living within Budapest or even in smaller cities across Hungary believed that it was only a matter of time before regional Hungarian Jewry would disappear. Though not happy with this idea, they seem resigned to it. Often, those holding these views were community leaders or employees with international Jewish organisations. See the Antonia Szenthe Haraszti interview and the Peter Feldmayer interview.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> This percentage was estimated by MAZSIHISZ in Budapest in 1997 and agreed upon by the regional communities. The Peter Feldmayer interview.

<sup>112</sup> Rolf Fischer, 'Anti-Semitism in Hungary, 1882-1932', in *Hostages of Modernization; Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism, 1870-1933/39*, ed. by Herbert A. Strauss (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 857-960.

<sup>113</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', pp. 163-170.

<sup>114</sup> Victor Karady, 'Beyond Assimilation: Dilemmas of Jewish identity in Contemporary Hungary', *Discussion Paper Series No. 2* (Budapest: Central European University, Institute for Advanced Study, 28 April, 1993).

<sup>115</sup> For example, see interviews with Peter Feldmayer, Janos Venderstein, Aniko Schmidt, Dr. Miklos Fischer, Zsuzsa Fritz and Rabbi Baruch Oberlander, Hungary, 1998.

<sup>116</sup> This is a belief expressed by many regional Jews. See the interviews with members of the Jewish communities in Hodmezovasarhely, Szeged, Pecs and Nagykoros, 1998.

<sup>117</sup> The Sandor Feldmayer and Peter Feldmayer interviews.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Rozsa Vanderstein, the wife of Janos Vanderstein, Hodmezovasarhely, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>119</sup> This is similar to what is written in the testimonies of Jewish Holocaust survivors who lived in the countryside. See, for example Aranka Siegal, *Upon the Head of a Goat; A Childhood in Hungary* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1982). Judith Magyar Isaacson, *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Miklos Varga, *A Statistical Aberration*, to be published by Leicester University Press.

<sup>120</sup> Mentioned in interviews with Peter Feldmayer, Rabbi Jozsef Schwitzer, the chief rabbi of Hungary, and Antonia Szenthe Haraszti, Nagykoros and Budapest, Hungary, 1998.

<sup>121</sup> Interviews with the Szeged and Pecs Jewish community leaders, April, 1998.

<sup>122</sup> Noemi Vanderstein, the daughter of Janos Vanderstein, Hodmezovasarhely, Hungary, April, 1998.

<sup>123</sup> The money received by Hungarian Jewry from the government is for reparations from property seized during the war and during the communist era and for money to assist victims of the Holocaust and their families. These funds are different from money given by the government to ethnic minority groups establishing themselves the country.

<sup>124</sup> The Peter Feldmayer interview.

- <sup>125</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>126</sup> See interviews with Hodmezovasarhely, Pecs, Szeged, Nagykoros Jewish communities.
- <sup>127</sup> The Peter Feldmayer interview.
- <sup>128</sup> Dr. Andras Ledniczky, President of the Szeged Jewish community, Szeged, Hungary, April, 1998.
- <sup>129</sup> The Janos Vanderstein interview.
- <sup>130</sup> The Dr. Andras Ledniczky interview.
- <sup>131</sup> The Aniko Schmidt interview.
- <sup>132</sup> Interviews with students at the Budapest Yeshiva, Budapest, Hungary, July, 1998.
- <sup>133</sup> Szeged, Hodmezovasarhely, Nagykoros, Pecs community interviews, Spring, 1998.
- <sup>134</sup> The Peter Feldmayer interview.
- <sup>135</sup> Szeged and Hodmezovasarhely community interviews, Hungary, April, 1998.
- <sup>136</sup> Karady, 'Identity Strategies', pp.163-165
- <sup>137</sup> Imre Kertesz, 'I Will Not Let Them Force Me Out', *Magyar Hirlap*, 25 September, 1990.
- <sup>138</sup> Bibo, 'Zsidokerdes'.
- <sup>139</sup> Randolph Braham, 'Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in the Politics of East Central Europe', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 8, 2 (1994), 143-163, (pp. 143-44).
- <sup>140</sup> Andras Kovacs, 'The Holocaust, the Persecution of Jews and Historical Responsibility: Findings of a Survey in Hungary', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 28, 1 (1998).
- <sup>141</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>142</sup> George Garai, 'Rakosi and the 'Anti-Zionist' Campaign of 1952-53', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 12, 2, (1982), 19-36.
- <sup>143</sup> Istvan Deak, 'Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary', in *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. by Randolph Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
- <sup>144</sup> Garai, 'Rakosi'. Deak, 'Anti-Semitism'.
- <sup>145</sup> Garai, 'Rakosi'.
- <sup>146</sup> Kovacs, 'Historical Responsibility'.
- <sup>147</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>148</sup> Roth, 'Jewish Renewal', p. 213.
- <sup>149</sup> Many Jews between the ages of 20 and 50 living in Hungary today report that they did not know they were Jewish growing up or did not understand what being Jewish meant because their families did not explain it to them. Often, people did not find out until after 1989 that they had Jewish relatives, or even that they had Jewish relatives who had been killed in the Holocaust. For example, see the interviews with Aniko Schmidt of Pecs, Zsuzsa Fritz of Balint Haz, Vera Banki of Budapest, Anna Szeszler, the principal of Lauder Javnc Jewish Gymnazium in Budapest and Dr. Miklos Fischer of Balint Haz, Hungary, 1998.
- <sup>150</sup> The Sandor Feldmayer interview.
- <sup>151</sup> Braham, 'Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust', p. 155.
- <sup>152</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>153</sup> Stella Banki interview, Budapest, Hungary, August, 2001.
- <sup>154</sup> Roth, 'Jewish Renewal'.
- <sup>155</sup> The Peter Feldmayer interview. The Antonia Szenthe Haraszti interview.

- <sup>156</sup> Andras Kovacs, 'The Holocaust, the Persecution of Jews and Historical Responsibility: Findings of a Survey in Hungary', *Eastern European Jewish Affairs*, 28, 1, (1998).
- <sup>157</sup> From interviews conducted by the author, August, 2001.
- <sup>158</sup> Miklos Haraszti, 'Young Bloods; Hungary's Election Results Promise a New Taste of Political Salami', *Transitions*, (July 1998), 48-53.
- <sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.
- <sup>160</sup> From a story told by recent visitors to Hungary, January, 2003.
- <sup>161</sup> Op-ed section, *Magyar-Hirlap*, 15 July, 1998. Konrad, 'Raoul Wallenberg', pp. 8-9.
- <sup>162</sup> Ian Traynor, 'Reparation stokes up anti-Semitism', *The Guardian*, 9 November 1998, p. 12.
- <sup>163</sup> Michael Pinto-Duchinsky, 'How My Father Died', *The Sunday Times*, 22 November 1998, p. 8.
- <sup>164</sup> Gusztav Megyesi, 'Sieg Heil!', *Elet es Iradalom*, 3 August 2001, p. 1. Tamas Meszaros, 'Egy no meg a futball', *168 Ora*, 2 August 2001, p. 5. Tamas Kiss, 'MP Slurs Soccer Sale', *The Budapest Sun*, 2-8 August 2001, p. 1.
- <sup>165</sup> Interviews with Vera Banki and Mihaly Varga, architect and the partner of Vera, Budapest, Hungary, August, 2001.
- <sup>166</sup> Kovacs, 'Historical Responsibility'.
- <sup>167</sup> The Rabbi Baruch Oberlander interview.
- <sup>168</sup> Haraszti, 'Young Bloods', p.53.
- <sup>169</sup> Andras Kovacs, 'Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Hungary', in *Anti-Semitism and the Treatment of the Holocaust in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, ed. by Randolph Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.128.
- <sup>170</sup> In the eyes of Western Europe, most Central and East European countries have not adequately dealt with their part in the destruction of Jewish and Roma communities during the Second World War. Hungary is no exception. Under the government of Victor Orban, Jews felt that this denial of the past and resentment towards Jews and the country's ethnic minorities was on the rise. However, with the new government voted into power in 2002, Jews now feel that this situation is beginning to change, especially as the country prepares for acceptance into the European Union in 2004.
- <sup>171</sup> Karady, 'Beyond Assimilation', p.10.
- <sup>172</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Budapest Diary: In Search of the Motherbook* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).
- <sup>173</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>174</sup> From a lecture given by Dr. Stephen Smith, University of Leicester, 14 March, 2002.
- <sup>175</sup> Suleiman, *Budapest Diary*, p. 229.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Women and Hungarian Jewry

The use of gender analysis and the examination of women's experiences within Jewish history is one of the most controversial areas of research to enter the study of Jewish religious, cultural and social life for the past 30 years. As the historians Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum write in the introduction of their book, *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, before the arrival of feminist scholarship, women were generally ignored or even made invisible in all areas of academia, as both researchers and as the subjects of research themselves.<sup>1</sup> Within Jewish studies, women's histories, identities and position within Jewish society were assumed to be so closely linked with the experiences of Jewish men that they were seen as a single entity and, as a result, overlooked. With the steady emergence of feminist and women's studies as both a valid field of research in its own right and as a necessary area of examination within many areas of cultural and ethnic studies, the lack of both female perspectives and experiences has become acutely obvious within Jewish historical research. In no aspect of the study of Jews is it now more important to gain an understanding of gender and sexual differences than within modern Jewish history and contemporary Jewish culture and society.

Though Jewish women continue to remain invisible within many geographical regions and areas of history and life, this chapter focuses on the study of women within the Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe, specifically the experiences of Jewish women within 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary and their contributions to both urban and regional, conservative and orthodox Hungarian Jewry. Section one offers some definitions of the terms sex and gender within historical research, and specifically how they



relate to the study of women within Jewish history. Section two examines whether Jewish scholars and scholarship really are as objective as they claim to be when it comes to the inclusion of women's history and gendered analysis. Sections three and four acknowledge the difficulties faced when trying to incorporate new interpretations of the Holocaust which include gendered analysis into Jewish studies. They also assess some of the real differences sex and gender created within people's experiences in the concentration camps and in ghetto life. Section five focuses on Hungary itself. It presents a short history of the Hungarian women's movement, the contributions of Jewish women to the promotion of equal rights throughout Hungarian society in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the dislocation and anti-Semitic backlash that occurred within the movement during the interwar period. It also assesses how these early experiences contributed in shaping the choices and behaviour of women during the Holocaust. Finally, section six looks at how women contributed to the re-establishment of post-war Jewish life in Hungary and the difficulties they face today in maintaining a voice in the official organisations of the country's Jewish communities. This chapter hopes to provide the reader with an appreciation and understanding of the unique history of women within modern Hungarian Jewish history and the problems faced in legitimising their roles within both the contemporary Jewish life and in non-Jewish society.

### **Defining Sex and Gender within Historical Research**

In her research on the experiences of German Jewish women during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the historian Marion Kaplan points out the distinction between the study of sex and the study of gender when analysing women's history. According to Kaplan, gender differs from the

concept of sex, a biologically defined category, as a division socially imposed upon both men and women. It is a cultural construct that varies according to ethnicity, class, geographical location and even historical period.<sup>2</sup> In her book, *Sex, Gender & Society*, Ann Oakley agrees that, “sex’ is a biological term: ‘gender’ a psychological and cultural one’.<sup>3</sup> And at the same time, in the book, *Becoming Visible – Women in European History*, the editors state in their introduction that a major trend shaping women’s history is the attempt to justify women’s loss of power by simplifying gender differences as inherent, physical divisions owned exclusively by men and women. This system of labels places masculine and feminine traits as opposites with no connections: women, for example, are seen as being ‘naturally’ passive and nurturing, while men are seen as ‘naturally’ active and ambitious.<sup>4</sup>

Kaplan uses her definition of gender when dealing with women’s history within Jewish studies in order to demonstrate that imposed social and cultural restraints have significantly affected the lives and patterns of Jewish women. However, in order to gain a complete understanding of their lives within history and contemporary life, one must view Jewish women not only as cultural constructs but as biological beings as well, especially when analysing the position of women during the Holocaust. Though gender cannot simply be viewed within a physical context, sexual and biological differences must be included when assessing gender differences and their use as a tool of exclusion and division. For example, women were often separated from men within Jewish life strictly because of their sexual and biological differences. Nazi persecution of Jewish women was at times specifically directed towards biology and their position as the perpetrators of what the Nazis termed the ‘Jewish race’. It is for these reasons that both sex and gender need to be important components in an analysis of Jewish women’s contributions to history. The importance

of recognising women's own unique, individual history within Jewish studies, as well, is also better understood. For the purposes of this chapter, therefore, the use of biological difference is included as one aspect of gender difference and it can be assumed that reference to 'gender' or a 'gendered analysis' includes an examination of sex.<sup>5</sup>

### **The 'Objectivity' of Jewish History**

Because traditional divisions within aspects of Jewish life are based upon the separation of the sexes, many of the experiences of Jewish men and women have historically remained separate and distinct. Yet, until recently, most historians focused on the experiences of Jewish men in the construction of Jewish history. Women were seen as the passive dependants of men without a history of their own important enough to devote research and study.<sup>6</sup> Historians based their work exclusively upon Jewish men and would assume that the patterns of men and women's lives were ultimately the same. If women were mentioned, it was because of their recognised achievements within the world of men or as intriguing anomalies. As the historian Paula Hyman notes, the response of the salon Jewess to assimilation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Central Europe or the daughters of important rabbis who were highly educated in Judaism and religious and philosophical theory, an advantage given to only a few women living within the circles of the intellectual elite, were interesting enough occurrences to deem worthy of study by Jewish historians. However, these experiences were not the norm for the majority of Jewish women.<sup>7</sup> The day to day lives of most women living within traditional Jewish communities or in middle-class urban and regional Eastern Europe, their participation within the social movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, their influence on official Jewish community organisations, their experiences

with anti-Semitism and persecution, and their relationship with Judaism itself have too often been overlooked and made insignificant.

That historians within Jewish studies still claim objectivity and the use of universal themes within their versions of history while overlooking Jewish women is ironic. One must question who has defined universality and how they have decided what is or isn't worthy of notice. As Davidman and Tenenbaum warn, claims of objectivity legitimise the failings of mainstream scholarship and provide excuses for an exclusion of the experiences of certain groups, such as Jewish women, who are defined as 'other'.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of an appraisal of the lives of Jewish women affects many of the ways Jewish history is studied and explained to both Jewish studies students and the Jewish and non-Jewish public. When one examines recent forums of Jewish education, such as classes in Jewish studies at the university level, Jewish history exhibitions and Holocaust memorial museums, it is clear that gender analysis within Jewish studies remains a topic that many historians and institutes of historical research are still ignorant of or wish to avoid. For example, during a summer course for post-graduate students at the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary entitled *Jews within Central and Eastern Europe, 1770-1989*, taught by several noted historians of Jewish history visiting from such institutions as New York University, Oxford, and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem whose backgrounds, ages, and research interests all varied widely, two facts remained constant. The first was that all of the historians were men. The second was that no mention of women's experiences or gender divisions within Jewish society was made throughout the course.<sup>9</sup> The lack of a conceptualisation of the history of women in the Holocaust within the permanent exhibition of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC compelled Andrea Dworkin to note in 1994

the museum's overt insensitivity regarding the fate of Jewish women.<sup>10</sup> At a conference held in November, 1999 on the history of Hungarian Jews and the Holocaust at the same museum, no paper or discussion panel was included in the programme on the situation of Hungarian Jewish women, though Hungarian Jewry was the second largest Jewish group existing within Eastern Europe during the war, women made up the majority of Hungarian Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, and Hungarian Jewry is now the largest Jewish group in the region and the fourth largest Jewish community within Europe today.<sup>11</sup> And in an exhibition on the Holocaust opened at the Imperial War Museum in London in June, 2000, little mention of women's unique experiences was made, though room was found for specific exhibits highlighting the stories of homosexuals, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, the mentally and physically handicapped and their specific persecution under the Nazis. Of the 48 survivors interviewed for the exhibition and whose testimonies made-up a substantial part of the material presented, no questions arose pertaining to links between gender differences and the experiences of victims and survivors.<sup>12</sup> A further examination of how this exhibition and its creators felt about the inclusion of gendered analysis within Holocaust history can be viewed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

It is interesting to note that even with the renaissance Jewish history and Holocaust education have experienced as a result of the increasing amount of Jewish topics and exhibits available to students and the public within academia, museums and the media, what we study today and how we study it has not deviated far from the ways in which Judaism, Jewish culture and the Holocaust were examined in the 1970's. Though it is now easier to discuss and gather information on what happened to Jews and why it happened, Jewish studies is still restrained by the traditions found within its own past. It is unfortunate that the study of gender within Jewish history

is seen as a 'woman's' subject and, therefore, marginal or too 'cutting edge' for mainstream scholarship.<sup>13</sup> Though many fine Jewish studies scholars focus on women's history within Judaism and Jewish culture, the fact that most of them are women points to a divide within the ways in which male and female scholars perceive what is important and worthy of notice within Jewish history and Holocaust education. Ironically, this dilemma is similar to what occurs within Jewish studies itself. Because it is often viewed by non-Jewish academics as an area of research by and for Jews, scholars of Jewish studies are often Jewish themselves, partly because of personal interest but also because of the idea maintained by mainstream, non-Jewish academia that they cannot or should not 'get involved'. Female scholars of Jewish studies are further stigmatised by other Jewish scholars because they are often labelled 'feminists' following 'feminist research', making their work seem even more marginalised and alienated from that of traditional Jewish historians.<sup>14</sup> Even the ways in which students learn about Jewish history suffer from these stereotypes. As Hyman notes, Jewish studies graduate students are often encouraged not to explore gender issues until their academic reputation has been established.<sup>15</sup> For example, if one tries to research an aspect of the lives of Jewish women, the lack of material on the subject can become overwhelming, especially if one considers that we are in an age when women's studies has become an increasingly popular area of study. When comparing this with the amount of literature published on such topics as the final solution, the concentration camps and other versions of Nazi genocide, the division becomes staggering. It seems as if modern historians are more concerned with the ways in which Jews died rather than the ways in which they lived, especially the ways in which Jewish women lived.

## The Holocaust As Obstacle

Why are many historians hesitant to use an analysis of sex and gender within the study of Jewish history? Recently, several books have pointed to reasons for academic resistance to incorporating research on women within Jewish studies and acknowledging men and women's distinct and separate experiences, especially when dealing with the history of the Holocaust.

The Holocaust, the definitive era of modern 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish history, has shaped the way academic research approached Jewish studies since the end of the Second World War. Many historians feel they must tread carefully and not branch away from traditional methods used when analysing Jewish history and cultural studies or abandon the notion of a collective history and collective fate in order to maintain sensitivity and respect the memory of those who died. Others are reluctant to recognise any differences between the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust themselves, viewing them less as human beings with real lives and feelings and more as martyrs suffering from the atrocities carried out under Nazi policy. Still others view the experiences of Jewish men during the Holocaust as characteristic of all Jews and have ignored making distinctions between male and female survivors and victims. But as Raoul Hilberg wrote in 1992,

The victims (of the Holocaust) as a whole, however, have remained an amorphous mass. Millions of them suffered a common fate in front of pre-dug graves or in the darkness of hermetically sealed gas chambers. The death of these Jews has become their most important attribute. They are remembered mainly for what happened to them all, and for this reason there has been some inhibition about segmenting them systematically into component categories. Yet the impact of destruction was not simultaneously the same for everyone.<sup>16</sup>

The deaths of these people, therefore, have overshadowed our memories of them and separated us from viewing victims and survivors as individuals to respect, analyse and learn from.

However, as the writers Lenore Weitzman and Daila Ofer contend in their book, *Women in the Holocaust*, studying victims and survivors as real people, including a gendered analysis of their experiences, allows the historian to gain a richer and more complex understanding of the Holocaust itself. By not removing the pain of seeing victims as human beings we more deeply understand how they lived as well as how they died. This means seeing them as men and women, middle class and working class, religious and those who never considered their Jewish background, with hopes, dreams and problems like our own, who dealt with what they faced based upon who they were and what they had learned in their lives before going to the camps, who did suffer from an equal, cataclysmic horror, but whose experiences were singular and individual as well as universal.<sup>17</sup> If myths can be broken down and real objectivity achieved, we will not only gain more personal, effective memories of those who died, but will also allow for modern, critical analysis, including the study of Jewish women, to become included in mainstream scholarship of other aspects of Jewish studies, now, for the most part, existing unnoticed within the shadow of the Holocaust. The fact, for example, that many people within academia and in the non-academic public believe that Jewish life and activity ended in Central and Eastern Europe after the Holocaust needs attention and correction. People need to become aware that Jewish society and culture and even Judaism itself still exists in these regions and, in some areas, is thriving. Jewish historians must not let the Holocaust - in the classroom, in museums, in scholarship - become the end of Jewish history in Europe.



## Women and the Holocaust

As a collection of oral testimonies given by Jewish female survivors of the Holocaust indicates, often the experiences of women and men in the concentration camps, ghettos, in hiding, in 'passing' as Aryans, within partisan movements, and in dealing with day-to-day life situations during the war were dramatically different. *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women who survived the Holocaust* demonstrates that women's roles as wives, mothers, homemakers, and nurturers not only shaped the situations they found themselves in and the ways in which others reacted to and interacted with them, but also their coping skills, the way they dealt with their environments, and their survival skills. For example, several of the interviewees speak about the ways in which their skills in sewing and cooking could work to their advantage. Women would keep their clothes mended in order to stay as warm as possible. Many traded recipes and stories of food they had made in their previous lives in order to stave off hunger and starvation. A strong sense of self-worth and extensive past experience taking care of and cleaning for their families forced them to stay as hygienic as they could, thereby fighting off disease for as long as possible. A sense of vanity allowed them to use their imagination in creating 'cosmetics' out of available materials to provide those living in more secure work camps with the chance to enjoy 'dressing up' for small parties or evenings of entertainment planned within barracks, providing women with a respite from their precarious daily situations. A commitment to family and the need for solidarity meant that many formed strong bonds with other women, including strangers as well as family members, allowing women to look after and care for each other which helped in their survival and in keeping feelings of loneliness and desolation at bay. Other women spoke about how connections they had made before

the war in their own communities with non-Jewish neighbours and friends came in use when deciding to go into hiding or when needing food and protection. Still others mentioned how their relatively non-distinct appearance, especially when compared to many Jewish men whose appearance was often dictated by following religious beliefs, such as clothing, hairstyle and circumcision, helped them melt into the background and avoid arrest.<sup>18</sup>

Although it is difficult and defeating the purpose to generalise, survivors note that, without the same type of skills and with the previous experience of living more independently, men were less likely to adopt the same techniques for survival as women were. There was a specific name within the camps to describe those men who looked as if they were beyond hope or survival, 'musselmann', or someone who has lost the will to live.<sup>19</sup> In his article addressing the social scientific analysis of human identity and behaviour in the concentration camps, the historian Falk Pingel also acknowledges the term, defining it as, 'someone who had lost all incentive to act and was no longer capable of adhering to rules of behaviour. Without outside help, his death could not be prevented.'<sup>20</sup> And as Claudia Koonz surmises from testimonies recorded in her book *Mothers in the Fatherland*, many men who did survive did so by learning the skills and behaviours of women in trusting and relying on one another.<sup>21</sup>

These testimonies, taken from women of a variety of regional, socio-economic, and religious backgrounds, support other testimonies recorded of women who survived occupation, deportation and the camps. Malka Seifert Mittelman, a Czech Jew who moved as a teenager to Budapest with her family during the war, described how her mother made her sew a secret pocket under her skirt where she could hide a piece of bread.<sup>22</sup> Georgette Spertus, a Hungarian Jew who went into hiding in Budapest during the siege on the city in 1944-45, said that it was easier for her and her mother

to go out into the streets looking for water and food than it was for her father to venture out of their hiding place, especially if they were covered and dressed in the style of villagers.<sup>23</sup> Another Hungarian survivor spoke about the bonds she formed with her 'camp sister' on a death march that took them to a factory to make weapons for the German war effort. While there, they conspired to make the parts of weapons they produced unusable, allowing them to feel more in control of their situation and less like victims.<sup>24</sup> And testimonies recorded on various websites on the internet attest to the need for women in the camps to rely on strong familial relationships or those ties formed with one's camp sisters for survival.<sup>25</sup>

Other research, while overlooking a direct analysis of male and female differences within the concentration camps and ghettos, point to the same types of behaviour expressed by many female survivors as necessary means of surviving the extremity of the camps and enforced ghettos. Though ignoring the differences in coping strategies of men and women, Pingel points to group and community support as a primary tool in surviving the camps. Without group assistance, he states, individuals had to compensate for this deficiency in their situation by increasing their own physical and mental output, thereby further exhausting their own strengths and reserves.<sup>26</sup> Another necessary form of behaviour that further increased inmates' chances for survival, Pingel writes, was belief in positive expectations of the future. Though he offers political conviction, religious faith, or belief in the future of one's family as examples of this, female survivors often acknowledge expressing these same kinds of feelings in conversations they had with others or things they thought about on their own while in the camps. Their beliefs in the future could take on even more personal forms than those expressed by Pingel. Often, what sustained women were plans they made for their families and themselves for after the war, conversations involving meals they planned to cook, trips they would

take and celebrations they would enjoy with relatives and friends.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to note in Pingel's work that although he does not attempt to mention women's experiences and distinct behaviours, he uses examples of female survivors when suggesting behaviour and coping strategies as possible survival methods in the extreme conditions of the camps.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, while many historians continue to ignore female experiences in the Holocaust, others are wary as to how much importance should be placed on sex and gender differences in Holocaust research and in forming hypotheses concerning victims and survivors. Though involved in the research of gender differences in the history of genocide, Roger Smith does note in his article, 'Women and Genocide: Notes on an Unwritten History' that the intense horror of genocide may make any attempt to explore gender differences within it, '...an exercise in comparative suffering, another (sexist) version of denying that others have been victims.'<sup>29</sup> In his work, 'Gendered Suffering? Women in Holocaust Testimonies', Lawrence Langer questions the effect gender and sex-defined behaviour truly had on the eventual outcome of the Holocaust. Langer reasons that although differences in coping and survival strategies between men and women did exist in some cases and meant the ultimate survival of some over others, gendered behaviour cannot be seen to be the reason why those who did survive survived when so many others who expressed the same kinds of behaviour did not. Women did not survive or behave 'better' than men, Langer states; generally, survival was based on situational accident, not gender-driven choice.<sup>30</sup> In her book *Thinking About Women*, Mary Ellman writes that where all are subject to death and destruction, normal traits and distinctions, including gender, become meaningless. With the Holocaust, Ellman concludes, '...the modern concept of mutual vulnerability was established, before which the traditional sexual contrasts of strength and weakness, courage and timidity, authority and subservience

become meaningless'.<sup>31</sup> Other scholars have expressed similar beliefs. In a lecture given on forms of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, the historian Steven Katz contended that he didn't think a study of women's experiences in the Holocaust was valid because he felt it separated and ignored the experiences of men and the general persecution experienced by all. By studying gender and sex in the Holocaust, he felt, historians place modern day trends and notions upon an era that did not think in the same terms.<sup>32</sup>

These points are valid but they overlook the reasons why some historians have turned to sex and gender analysis in their research on the Holocaust. This is not to prove whether men or women were ultimately better at survival or who experienced suffering or tragedy more honourably, or even who was more at risk of persecution and harm. As Langer states, often the reasons for one's survival had nothing to do with the way one behaved or the choices they made. It was instead due to basic luck and timing - at what point during the war they entered the camps, the skills they had, contacts that were made with non-Jews, what type of Jewish background they were coming from, even, as is the case with Hungarian Jews, whether they resided within urban or regional and rural areas.<sup>33</sup> Sex and gender analysis does not attempt to divide men and women. It does, however, give a voice to women who have previously been viewed as part of a mass, and by comparison, allows for the individual experiences of men to be addressed as well. As Roger Smith attests, focusing on the history of women can at the same time open up the history of men and children and their experiences with genocide, as well. Bringing together the history of women and the history of genocide can greatly illuminate the other.<sup>34</sup>

One can make interesting comparisons with another new, controversial area of research within Holocaust studies, the archaeology

and the physical deconstruction of the Nazi death camps and concentration camps, when constructing valid reasons for the pursuit of gender analysis. Since the end of the war, the land the former camps were built upon has been used in several ways. As memorials and museums, they have been set up as areas for remembrance and as official sites the public can visit to learn more about daily life within the camps, the history of the Holocaust and the complex structure of the Nazis' systematic destruction of Jewish inmates and other victims. Camps that were destroyed before the end of the war are, in many ways, lost as areas of education and now are remembered only by memorials that may be placed upon the land they once encompassed or in books describing their history. Some camps now remain on land that stays empty and abandoned, but within countries that do not wish to open them to the public.<sup>35</sup> Others remain physically intact, but without the financing or co-operation of both Jewish and governmental funding bodies to remake them into open museums.<sup>36</sup> The archaeological work now being conducted at the site of the Belzec camp, sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the University of Torun in Poland, attempts to understand the experiences of those within the camps by physically dissecting the space in which the camp existed. In the same way that gendered analysis of the Holocaust tries to break down the individual experiences and lives behind each male and female victim and survivor, the archaeological dissection of the camps physically tries to deconstruct the ways victims differently experienced life and death. Its purpose, like gendered analysis, is to investigate each death as an individual one, to uncover the information and evidence left behind. After one dig, for example, a small silver cigarette holder was discovered with a name carved into it. After conducting research into the history of the object and who it had belonged to, investigators were able to track down the owner's family and return the box to them. By solving this small mystery,

researchers have been able to restore the history and life to a person who before would only had been seen as part of a mass, one face among many, in the same way that gender analysis has.<sup>37</sup>

The reality of the Holocaust is that, in general, more men than women survived Nazi persecution. Even with the survival skills women adopted, other factors worked against them in making them vulnerable to attack. As Ofer and Weitzman recount, because men were assumed to be more open to violent attacks, many men fled occupied areas, leaving a majority of women and children vulnerable on their own in ghettos across Central and Eastern Europe. Pregnant women and women with young children, who generally accompanied their mothers and not their fathers upon arrival at the concentration camps, were immediately singled out for death by the Nazis. Women were also subject to sexual harassment and rape more often than men were.<sup>38</sup> Though it was previously believed that rape happened on only rare occasions and was not actively pursued by the perpetrators, survivors are now speaking more openly about rape and sexual abuse that went on in the camps and ghettos. The recently published oral testimonies of many female survivors prove that the fear of rape and sexual assault was acute throughout various regions and that stories and cases of rape and the forced prostitution of Jewish women on the eastern front were wide-spread.<sup>39</sup> Only by separating the experiences of men and women are we able to gain access to these testimonies and better understand both gender groups as individuals, their strengths as well as their weaknesses. An analysis of sex and gender, therefore, becomes an important tool in diminishing the space the concept of the Holocaust has placed between historians and its victims and survivors.

## **Jewish Women, the Women's Movement, and the Jewish Community in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary**

In order to understand the experiences and behaviour patterns of Jewish women during the Holocaust an examination of their lives and interests before the war is needed. Within Hungary, this means assessing their position within the pre-war Jewish community and roles within the community structure, their commitment to Hungary and their relationships within and attitudes towards the women's movement and the push for female emancipation during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The writer Henry Huttenbach states that feminism and ethnicity, with their many interests and varying agendas, do not normally agree and are often even in a state of underlying conflict and dispute.<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note that the rise of Hungary's women's movement and the struggle for female emancipation occurred during an era of growing ethnic tension and division within Hungarian society and politics. The historian Maria Kovacs writes that the dislocation and burgeoning nationalism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and interwar period shaped the goals, ultimately the outcome of emancipation and the characteristics and profile of the women's movement.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, for Jewish women involved in Hungary's growing debate over emancipation, the struggle to establish identities independent from their Jewish ones meant that they were often at odds with the traditional agendas of Jewish communities throughout Central and Eastern Europe. This became especially apparent as communities across the region attempted to define what exactly it meant to be Jewish and what cultural and religious characteristics made up one's Jewish identity. For Hungarian Jews, this meant striking a balance between religious Judaism and Jewish culture and their historical affinity to Magyar nationalism and their patriotic support of Hungary.<sup>42</sup> Hungarian Jewish women, therefore,



attempted to establish themselves within several identities. First, as obedient wives and mothers within Jewish society, capable of maintaining a traditional household and raising children to be faithful, active participants within the Hungarian Jewish community. Secondly, as Hungarian patriots loyal to their nation. And third, for those women who believed in emancipation, as active members of a growing women's movement promoting the rights of all women, not simply Jews, within Hungarian society.<sup>43</sup>

The women's movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and pre-World War One era was highly different from the one that later emerged in Hungary after the war. Kovacs writes that the first generation of Hungarian feminists, organised in 1905, developed largely from the urban, liberal middle-class, products of the progressive, political elites dominating Hungary at the turn-of-the century.<sup>44</sup> These early feminists shared the beliefs and goals of many women's movements established in Western Europe. They supported equality, cultural and political emancipation and the rights of the individual.<sup>45</sup>

For educated, middle-class Jewish women, coming mainly from a neolog, urban and intellectual background, the aims of the early Hungarian feminist movement coincided with their own values and upbringing. As a result, many of the leaders of the early feminist movement were Jewish. They included such women as Rozsa-Bedy Schwimmer, perhaps the most widely known participant in the Hungarian women's movement, and Vilma Glucklich, co-founder of the movement. Schwimmer was raised in a middle-class, assimilated Jewish family, was initially a leading member of the Hungarian women's movement and later became co-leader of the international Women's Peace Movement. Glucklich later represented Hungary at the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.<sup>46</sup> Both women believed in maintaining close ties to feminist movements in

the west, leading the Hungarian women's movement in 1913 to host the International Suffrage Convention in Budapest, the year before the outbreak of World War One. The Convention attracted such internationally renowned feminists as the American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman.<sup>47</sup>

Schwimmer and Glucklich, as well as many other Jewish women within the feminist movement, rarely made any allusion to their Jewish backgrounds or ties to the Jewish community in their public lives.<sup>48</sup> This was due to several reasons. Having been raised primarily in urban, assimilated households with the possibility of obtaining high levels of education, learning languages and socialising with a broad mix of people, many of the Jewish women who felt comfortable involving themselves within the women's movement did so precisely because they did not have constraining ties to the traditional aspects of Jewish culture and religion. Others felt wary of giving their opponents the opportunity to make direct ties between the feminist movement and Judaism. Women's groups throughout Europe were often labelled as Jewish movements by their critics and became targets of anti-Semitic attack. Later on, during the interwar period, when the Hungarian women's movement adopted a more right-leaning, conservative stance, this type of xenophobic criticism was adopted within the women's movement itself in order to keep Jewish women from getting involved.<sup>49</sup> Still other women knew that, due to the traditional views held by many within the Jewish community, they never could have pursued their aims within a solely Jewish context. As the writer Naomi Shepherd states, issues such as birth control and pacifism were largely unpopular within Jewish society in Europe during this time. Knowing that they may be considered rebels within their own communities because of their beliefs made many Jewish women hesitant to publicly announce their ancestral background alongside their political views. At the same time, Shepherd surmises, those open allusions that Jewish feminist leaders did

make to Judaism and their work within the women's movement have become all the more fascinating because they indicate both personal pride in their origins and acknowledgement of the difficulties they faced in both non-Jewish and Jewish society.<sup>50</sup>

The early Hungarian women's movement focused on several primary issues including prostitution, motherhood, birth control and women's education. Their main objective, however, was establishing the female right to vote.<sup>51</sup> Feminists were highly aware of the arguments against political emancipation. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman stated in her address to the International Suffrage Convention in 1913, these included the ideas that liberated women would relinquish their traditional role as mothers, that they would no longer be subservient to their husbands, that, ultimately, emancipation would lead to an overall population decrease around the world.<sup>52</sup> Understanding the difficulties they faced in attempting to pass a universal Suffrage Bill, the Hungarian women's movement decided to support a more gradual move towards suffrage. Forming an alliance with the politician Vilmos Vazsonyi and the Liberal Party, the Hungarian women's movement backed a bill restricting voting rights with 'cultural qualifications'. These included giving women the right to vote who were either in possession of at least a middle-school education or who were able to prove membership to some type of cultural or scientific association. The Bill on Suffrage was submitted to the Hungarian Parliament in 1917.<sup>53</sup>

Hungarian feminists were unprepared for the uproar in which the Bill was met. Its chief opponents were Christian political parties and women's organisations, many of whom had previously allied themselves with the feminist movement in their efforts to achieve political emancipation for women. Their main criticism was not that it was a suffrage bill but that any educational restrictions had been placed upon suffrage in the first place. Christian organisations worried that basing voting rights on educational

qualifications would allow for a stronger representation of more 'urbanised' groups, namely Hungary's Jewish and German minorities.<sup>54</sup> As Edith Farkas, the leader of the Christian Socialist Organisation of Catholic Women, wrote in the organisation's journal in 1918,

Vazsonyi's Bill is a failure in itself, as it clearly favours the type of oversophisticated ladies who do not exactly belong among our truly Hungarian women...we therefore demand that there either be no women vote at all, or, if it is to be introduced, then our valuable Christian women with their healthy, sober mentality be included.<sup>55</sup>

The debate over the Suffrage Bill allowed for both anti-minority and anti-Semitic feelings to publicly surface within the women's movement for the first time. The fear of giving too much political power to Hungary's minorities did not take into account the many Jewish women living within strict, traditional environments or on the poverty line outside urban areas who did not have the possibilities or resources available to them to fulfil the Bill's requirements themselves.<sup>56</sup> By solely defending the position of the largely agrarian, Christian middle-class living within Hungary's regions and stereotyping the movement as run chiefly for the benefit of the liberal, urban Jewish and German bourgeoisie, the Christian women's organisations adopted the increasingly anti-liberal, anti-Semitic rhetoric of the time and made it acceptable, dramatically changing the face and character of the Hungarian women's movement.<sup>57</sup>

By 1920, after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the failed governments of the liberal, pacifist Mihaly Karolyi and five-month Bolshevik Revolution of Bela Kun, women were finally given the right to vote.<sup>58</sup> However, the Suffrage Bill that passed was very different from its 1917 predecessor. The concept of educational qualifications was limited to a requirement of literacy without any kind of proof of formal schooling. Apart from this minor restriction, women enjoyed the same voting rights as

men.<sup>59</sup> Unsurprisingly, Christian women now made up the majority of female voters. In the 1920 elections, they heavily assisted in voting to power the conservative Christian National Party.

The old alliance between the once all-encompassing feminist movement and various Christian and liberal political parties had now permanently disintegrated. The conservative, anti-minority factions now dominated the women's movement, making Jewish women feel increasingly unwelcome and excluded. Former leaders such as Schwimmer and Glucklich now became involved with the international women's and pacifist movements based largely in Western Europe and America.<sup>60</sup> In the xenophobic, anti-liberal and nationalist atmosphere of interwar Hungary, the new Hungarian women's movement was characterised for its distinct separation from international feminism. It became an inherently Hungarian movement made up exclusively for the benefit of Christian women.

The women's movement now took a decisively anti-Jewish stance in regards to the Jewish question in Hungary. Within higher education, many universities, in response to the overwhelming numbers of refugees coming into the country from the dislocated Hungarian communities in Romania, Slovakia and Serbia and fearful of female students taking away opportunities from their male counterparts, began calling for an official limit to the number of women allowed to enter higher education. Some universities simply banned women from enrolling outright. After a year of public debate, the *Numerus Clausus* was formed, a quota system restricting female enrolment. However, with anti-Semitic sentiment sweeping the country and with the fervent support of the Hungarian women's movement, the *Numerus Clausus* was eventually changed to a restriction on the number of Jewish student allowed to enter the Hungarian university system. Now, Jewish students could make up just 6 percent of the student

body. The access of Christian women to higher education was fully reinstated.<sup>61</sup> In the end, the group that suffered most was Jewish women.

The movement that had begun with the rights of all Hungarian women in mind and with the avid support of many Jewish activists ended in a display of bitterness and segregation. Throughout the interwar period, Jewish women were discriminated against and excluded from the Hungarian women's movement. As a result, many turned their back on the idea of an inclusive women's movement and returned to the more traditional women's organisations of the Jewish community itself. Some left the country to pursue educational opportunities and political involvement elsewhere. But the majority, continuing to believe in Hungary as their homeland and hopeful that the atmosphere within the country would change for the better, concentrated on their work and involvement within their own families and community. Like many in the Jewish community at the time, Jewish women turned inwards for support, fulfilment and strength. They created their own cultural events, schools and educational circles, religious groups and social programmes to involve themselves with. In the 1920's and 30's, the number of people attending synagogue and Jewish holidays rose to record levels.<sup>62</sup>

Ultimately, for many women, re-focusing energy on traditional activities and family ties before the outbreak of war affected their experiences during the Holocaust. For some, the rejection of surrounding society and events meant not recognising the need to leave Hungary when they could. For others, it was this commitment to traditional values that gave them the strength to survive during the later years of the war.<sup>63</sup>

The extreme positions the Hungarian women's movement took during the interwar period worked against all Hungarian women in the end. As Kovacs writes, having abandoned all objectives that could have mobilised a large, dynamic group and made the changing roles of women

within family and society the top of any political agenda, the movement became simply a dull, conservative association, unpopular with future generations after the war.<sup>64</sup> For both Jewish and non-Jewish women, its main legacies to the country are both the negative connotations surrounding the idea of feminism in Hungary today and the traditional networks continuing to work against women within many aspects of Hungarian politics and society.

### **Gender and the Jewish Community Today**

In the article, 'Organized Bodies: Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment in Contemporary Organizations', two types of organisational structures are identified as the framework of modern bureaucracies. Classified as the 'gender paradigm' and the 'sexuality paradigm', they distinctly stand apart from one another. The former stresses its gender-neutrality and impersonal manner in ensuring the predictability and uniformity of carrying out the functions of the bureaucracy in question. The latter focuses on the intertwining nature of male sexuality and power in organisational life.<sup>65</sup> However, both structures are similar in their inherent bias towards a patriarchal and masculine base. They both routinely privilege men and characteristically masculine traits within organisational policy and within organisations themselves. The gender paradigm adopts a passive-aggressive attitude towards gender by presenting itself as a neutral model while at the same time creating a new type of patriarchal structure by excluding so-called 'chaotic' feminine traits. The sexuality paradigm benefits men by directly linking male sexuality with power.<sup>66</sup> As a result, men, more often than women, are ultimately more likely to feel, as well as be perceived by others in their given organisation, that they have the requirements needed to assume a role of leadership and authority and succeed.

Jewish communities and Jewish community organisations, especially those existing within more traditional regions such as Central and Eastern Europe, can often be described with such constructs as the 'gender paradigm' and the 'sexuality paradigm' in mind. Surprisingly, though these communities and their organisations are less exposed to modern social trends such as feminism and gender equality and are therefore less influenced by them, their traditional characteristics often resemble the attitudes of modern bureaucracies in regards to gender and sex. Generally, both the Jewish communities and their organisations reflect a combination of traits similarly described within both the gender and sexuality paradigms.

In Hungary, for example, the home of the largest post-war Jewish population in Central and Eastern Europe with the exclusion of Russia, Jewish communities and organisations have historically been shaped by the patriarchy and sexism found within both Hungarian Jewry and non-Jewish Hungarian society. From the outset of the women's movement, the traditional conservatism of the Jewish community was never challenged by Hungarian Jewish feminists. Though many Jewish women greatly contributed to the feminist cause, there were few connections made between their feminist identities and their Jewish ones.<sup>67</sup> The traditional structure of Hungary's Jewish communities and organisations, therefore, were not overtly changed or influenced by feminism. Jewish women remained an integral part of Hungarian Jewry while at the same time forming their own, modern social networks outside Jewish society. As previously stated, their cause was not the liberation of Jewish women from traditional Jewish confines, but the emancipation of all Hungarian women.

Despite war, the Holocaust, large-scale emigration and great changes within the political landscape throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the traditionalism and conservative relationships existing between men and women within



Central and Eastern European Jewish communities have remained unaffected for several reasons. The first is the hesitation of many Jews to separate the roles of women from the rest of Jewish society and to analyse each sex as independent beings. Jews feel that both women and men play a distinct and important role in maintaining the success and the continuation of the community as a whole. In order to be seen as strong and united by non-Jews, many Jews feel that they must not be divided on issues such as gender and sex. To do so, they stress, would weaken communities and leave Jewish society more vulnerable to anti-Semitic attack. Any deviation away from the traditional structure of the community, the setting up of a liberal or reform movement or the move towards educating female rabbis, for example, may be seen as a rejection of the community and of Judaism itself. It is therefore unacceptable in the eyes of many Jews involved in these core communities and organisations. It is ironic that many women working in established Jewish communities within the region today are on one hand outspoken reformers in non-Jewish society and on the other quick to declare that feminism and its ideals have no place within cultural and religious Jewish life.<sup>68</sup>

The second reason for the stubborn traditionalism and patriarchy found within Central and Eastern European Jewry is, especially since 1989, the backlash within society on the part of religious groups, chauvinist nationalist groups and many political parties against the feminist movement. Under communism, the government at least officially supported women's equality and women's movements, especially those organisations representing the work of communist women. However, governments throughout the region still maintained the belief that with the arrival of socialism the 'woman's question' had become obsolete and, for the most part, ignored the economic and social difficulties women continued to face. However, an open, public backlash directed towards the women's

movement and women's issues such as reproductive rights and equality in the workplace did not actually occur until after the political changes of the late 1980's. With the arrival of right-leaning, nationalist political parties, the freeing up of the economy and rising levels of unemployment and, in countries like Poland, the resurgence of the church, the pressure on women to emulate the traditional, stereotyped vision of the ideal mother, homemaker, and wife, disinterested in feminist values or the women's movement, has become more apparent.<sup>69</sup> Abortion has become a matter of great debate in countries like Hungary and Poland. With unemployment rising at a rate not seen before in the region, the pressure on women to leave the workplace to open up more jobs for men has becoming increasingly higher.<sup>70</sup> The resulting characteristic of both ideologies, socialism and nationalism, has been their utter failure when it comes to the woman question. Socialism failed because its promise of a gender-equal utopia could only take place in a vague and far-off future. Nationalism did not succeed because of its glorification of traditionalism and a romanticised, unrealistic vision of the past.<sup>71</sup>

Within countries experiencing periods of great instability, the reaction to place blame on certain groups like women or ethnic minorities is, unfortunately, not surprising. What is even more troubling, however, is the attitude of women and women's groups to the social backlash against feminism and the internalisation of society's views within their own visions of themselves. In a paper concerning the powerlessness of women within democratic Hungary and the emergence of women's groups in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, for example, it is interesting to note that the author believes the main distinguishing feature of women's groups throughout the region is their collective rejection of any affiliation with feminism. Though the issues holding greatest importance to many of the region's women's groups reflect many of the fundamental causes of

feminist movements - reproductive rights, women's position within the workplace, the rights of mothers and their children, the education of young women - it is difficult to define a group as feminist which, while pursuing feminist aims, refrains from being classified as a feminist organisation itself.<sup>72</sup> This aversion on the part of women to this classification and even to the label 'feminist' stems not only from society's aversion to the notion of feminism and what a feminist, in their mind, is like, but also from its historical rejection of the character of women's movements within Western Europe. Much of Central and Eastern Europe sees feminism as a purely western construct with no purpose in their own regions.<sup>73</sup>

The reality is that social roles open to women within Central and Eastern Europe have remained limited for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whether political power was in the hands of communists or democrats had little affect on the way women were viewed within society or within their relationships with men. On a whole, society maintained a chauvinist and sexist attitude towards women throughout both political eras.

This more recent backlash, combined with Central and Eastern European society's historically traditional leaning, continues to affect the attitudes and structural make-up of the region's Jewish communities as well as the relationships of Jewish men and women. If anything, the experiences of non-Jewish society only work to reiterate and reinforce the conventional attitude already existing within Jewish society. As Paula Hyman states, Jewish society, like many others, has traditionally distributed power primarily among men.<sup>74</sup> If again one examines the position of women within the Hungarian Jewish community, it is obvious that, on average, women play supporting roles within the community rather than roles of leadership. In the offices of MAZIHISZ, for example, women's leadership roles include the organisation's chief accountancy position, the economic

advisor for neolog communities and the head of the Jewish Tourist and Cultural Centre. Men hold all other existing positions of authority.<sup>75</sup>

Women have enjoyed limited influential roles within the Budapest neolog community in the past. The largest community existing within Hungary and the most powerful one within MAZSIHISZ, the community network is split into districts, each one responsible for its own synagogue. Each synagogue generally has a woman's group attached to it that deals with the philanthropic and social needs of its own district. And for almost two decades in the 1970's and 1980's, Dr. Ilona Seifert acted as director of the entire neolog community. During this time, a central advisory board made up entirely of women existed which represented each district's women's group. Since 1989, however, the central board no longer exists and support for the women's groups has become so low that only 2-3 groups remain active. Whether this change points to organisational restructuring following Hungary's political changes and a shift in the projects MAZSIHISZ invests its time and money in or a definitive move away from supporting groups which women have historically organised and been involved with remains unclear. It is interesting to note the lack of interest in these traditionally female-dominated organisations. Currently, no other Jewish women's groups within Hungary have been officially recognised by MAZSIHISZ to take their place. New Jewish women's groups do exist but they receive no official financial support. Efforts on their part to become active, official members of MAZSIHISZ have also been rejected.<sup>76</sup> The Szim Shalom group, for example, a Jewish reformist group run mainly by women and led by the only female rabbi within Hungary, Kata Kelemen, is neither officially recognised by MAZSIHISZ nor by the Central Board of the Rabbinate. Rabbi Kelemen herself had to obtain her education and official title in the United States and Israel.<sup>77</sup>

The question of a Jewish women's organisation being granted official status is an interesting one. If a group is not given official recognition is it seen as less effective or any less legitimate than an officially recognised one? If so, who believes in its ineffectiveness and illegitimacy? For those who believe in its value and need within the community, what is their reasoning behind this? Often, these opinions depend on how one defines the idea of a Jewish community. As Hyman writes, when historians have written about the Jewish community in the past they usually meant the institutions officially organised and recognised within that community.<sup>78</sup> This assertion, however, often excluded the female experience of Jewish community and communal life. In Hyman's research on immigrant Central and Eastern European Jewish women in New York, for example, women can be seen as pioneers of modern-day 'neighbourhood organising'. Though they often disappeared from officially organised political activity after marriage, women did not become apolitical. Instead, they became skilled at organising within their neighbourhood, streets and their homes, areas they defined within their community and which provided them with an arena in which they could be in control.<sup>79</sup> The concept of a 'neighbourhood' Jewish community works especially well in a Central and East European context. As more and more people begin to discover and explore their Jewish roots and feel excluded by definitions still remaining within the traditional Jewish network as to who is seen as Jewish and who can be accepted as a member, they may more often turn to unofficial organisations, such as Szim Shalom, to fill this void. This move towards unofficial organisations could be made for several reasons. This could be an interest in a more modern approach to community action, the lack of a severe religious stance, the need for a less formal approach and more openness within the relations of community members, the ability of unofficial organisations to work without the

leadership of one person, but instead to find value in the input and opinions of all members in order to survive. For women disappointed in the conservative atmosphere surrounding the official community, the chance to become involved in organisations run by women which focus on social and charitable work but which follow the nature of informal female organising is exciting. The idea, therefore, of a growing network of neighbourhood organisations that do not have to answer to official leaders and follow their regulations could become highly desirable. It would be interesting to see how the adoption of this female definition and experience of Jewish community organising, as well as the acknowledgement of women's importance within communal life, could benefit all Jewish organisations in the region by increasing their popularity and boosting their numbers, both within official and unofficial, religious and secular circles. It would help if world-wide Jewish communities, as well, support, both financially and emotionally, burgeoning unofficial organisations by widening their definition of community and raising the importance they place upon female involvement within Jewish life. Without expanding the monetary support Central and East European Jewish organisations receive from their counterparts spread across the globe to include those groups rejected for official status, the chance of a growth in neighbourhood organisations which will attend to the needs of all kinds of Jews who wish to be involved in community activity will be lost.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter assessed the lack of scholarship by and about Jewish women currently found within Jewish studies. It examined the paths women's histories have taken within modern Jewish history and how gender differences have influenced the positions women found themselves in and

the choices they made, specifically within the Jewish experience of 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary. Finally, it looked at the involvement of women within the Hungarian Jewish community today and questioned whether the community structure could become more accepting and supportive of those types of organisations that give women the opportunity to enjoy a stronger voice and more influential role within society.

Sections one and two considered some of the differences in the terms sex and gender and defined how they would be used in relation to the study of Jewish women throughout this chapter. They also examined how objective Jewish historians and Jewish studies really are when dealing with the history of Jewish women. These sections concluded that though many scholars feel Jewish history is presented in an inclusive and unbiased manner, objectivity is lost because of the emphasis placed upon the lives of Jewish men. Women's experiences are too often incorporated into or lost within the experiences of men. In order to change this trend, it was suggested that Jewish history become more democratic and pluralistic. Scholars studying Jewish women's history should be given a more prominent voice within mainstream scholarship. Gendered analysis and women's history should become more accessible and available to Jewish studies students as well.

Sections three and four focused on a specific area of Jewish history where the inclusion of gendered analysis has caused great debate. Examining the study of gender within the Holocaust, these sections supported the belief that gender differences had a definitive impact on men and women's experiences during the war. Though it has been argued that gendered analysis places men against women by comparing who suffered more or survived best and imposes modern constructs on an era that did not think in the same terms, these sections contend that gendered analysis is a positive step forward in understanding the experiences of both men and

women during the Holocaust. It offers a greater knowledge and appreciation for their lives as well as their deaths.

Section five turned specifically to the experiences of Jewish women within Hungary. By offering a brief history of their lives within the Jewish community and women's movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and interwar period, this section hoped to provide the reader with a better understanding of the world Hungarian Jewish women negotiated their identities within during this time. It explored how these pre-war experiences shaped their fates and choices made during the Holocaust. It also gave the reader an understanding of some of the historic reasons behind the current attitudes in Hungary towards feminism and the role of women within the Hungarian Jewish community.

Finally, section six described the state of women's involvement within the modern Jewish community. Recognising the lack of female involvement at all levels of the official community organisations, this section called for both emotional and monetary support from the main community and Jewish bodies world-wide for the growing network of unofficial, neighbourhood organisations in Hungary that welcome the work of women and that are organised and run in a manner which fits the patterns of women's lives.

Ultimately, this chapter hoped to provide the reader with an overview of some of the historical and contemporary experiences shaping the lives of Jewish women within Central and Eastern Europe, with particular attention to Hungary. Despite the growing prevalence of both women's and gender studies, Jewish women continue to be marginalised and forgotten in Jewish history and Jewish society. As Hungary and the Hungarian Jewish community move towards creating new opportunities and institutions for themselves within the international arena, it is hoped they will also gain a new appreciation for the distinct achievements that



Jewish women have made and contributed towards their history and present-day success.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Feminist Perspectives in Jewish Studies*, ed. by Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Marion Kaplan, 'Priestess and Hausfrau: Women and Tradition in the German-Jewish Family', in *The Jewish Family, Myths and Reality*, ed. by Steven M. Cohen and Paula Hyman (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> Ann Oakly, *Sex, Gender & Society* (Aldershot: Gower Publishing, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> *Becoming Visible – Women in European History*, ed. by Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz and Susan Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> In their book *Women in the Holocaust*, Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman also use sex as a component of gender difference and a gendered analysis. See their introduction in *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 1-18.

<sup>6</sup> Paula Hyman, 'Gender and Jewish History', *Tikkun*, 1, (1988), 35-38.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Davidman and Tenenbaum, *Feminist Perspectives*, pp. 1-15.

<sup>9</sup> The class was part of Central European University's summer programme held in Budapest, Hungary in July, 1998. It was attended by the author.

<sup>10</sup> Andrea Dworkin, 'The Unremembered: Searching for Women at the Holocaust Memorial Museum', *Ms. Magazine* (Nov.-Dec., 1994).

<sup>11</sup> From a programme of the conference The Holocaust in Hungary, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, 6 November, 1999. Statistics on Hungarian Jewish survivors were included in a paper given by Peter Hidas on 13 December, 1992, at the Temple Emanu-El Beth Solom Synagogue in Quebec, Canada. Hidas states that Jewish female survivors outnumbered male survivors by 37% in Hungary, the number increasing to 65% within Budapest alone.

<sup>12</sup> From interviews conducted with curators on the Holocaust exhibition, The Imperial War Museum, London, England, July, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Paula Hyman, 'Feminist Studies and Modern Jewish History', in Davidman and Tenenbaum, *Feminist Perspectives in Jewish Studies*, pp. 120-139.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Raoul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders; The Jewish Catastrophe* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Ofer and Weitzman, *Women and the Holocaust*.

<sup>18</sup> *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust*, ed. by Brana Gurewitsch (University of Alabama Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Falk Pingel, 'The Destruction of Human Identity in Concentration Camps: The Contribution of the Social Sciences to an Analysis of Behaviour Under Extreme Conditions', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 6, 2, (1991), 167-184.

<sup>21</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Malka Mittelman Seifert, Holocaust survivor, Skokie, Illinois, USA, September, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Georgette Spertus, Holocaust survivor, Chicago, Illinois, USA, July, 1997.

- <sup>24</sup> From a talk given by Holocaust survivors at the Passover dinner of the Glasgow University Jewish Students Union, April, 1997, Glasgow, Scotland.
- <sup>25</sup> For example, see the testimonies of Irene Csillag and Judy Cohen at [women&theholocaust.com](http://women&theholocaust.com).
- <sup>26</sup> Pingel, 'Human Identity', p.169.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp.177-178.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp.171-172.
- <sup>29</sup> Roger Smith, 'Women and Genocide: Notes on an Unwritten History', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 8, 3, (Winter 1994), 315-334.
- <sup>30</sup> Lawrence Langer, 'Gendered Suffering? Women in Holocaust Testimonies', in Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*, pp. 351-363.
- <sup>31</sup> Mary Ellman, *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 72.
- <sup>32</sup> In a talk with Dr. Steven Katz at Leicester University, May, 1999.
- <sup>33</sup> Langer, 'Gendered Suffering?'
- <sup>34</sup> Roger Smith, 'Women and Genocide', p. 315.
- <sup>35</sup> For example, the remains of camps left within Belorussia. For more information, see the unpublished work of Robin O'Neil on the excavation work at the Belzec extermination camp.
- <sup>36</sup> For insight into problems facing the construction of Jewish museums and Holocaust memorial museums see David Clark, 'Developing Jewish Museums in Europe', *Institute for Jewish Policy Research*, 1, (February 1999).
- <sup>37</sup> Robin O'Neil.
- <sup>38</sup> Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*, pp. 1-19.
- <sup>39</sup> For writings that deal with the issues of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment during the Holocaust, see Judith Magyar Isaacson, *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Joan Ringelheim, 'The Split between Gender and the Holocaust', in Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*, pp. 340-350. S. Lillian Kremer, *Women's Holocaust Writing: Memory & Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).
- <sup>40</sup> Henry Huttenbach, 'Dual Loyalty: Between Feminism and Patriotism', *Nationalities Papers*, 25, 1, (1997).
- <sup>41</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Ambiguities of Emancipation', *Women's History Review*, 5, 4, (1996), 487-495, (pp. 488-490).
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Andras Kovacs, historian and sociologist at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, April, 1998.
- <sup>43</sup> Naomi Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels & Radicals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 215-220.
- <sup>44</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Hungarian Women Entering the Professions: Feminist Pressures from Left to Right', in *Education and Social Structure in Central Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. by Victor Karady and Wolfgang Mitter (Vienna: Bohlau Verlag, 1990), pp. 247-257.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid, pp. 251-252.
- <sup>46</sup> For example, see information found concerning the histories of Rozsa Schwimmer and Vilma Glucklich. These include papers held at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, found online at [www.swarthmore.edu/library](http://www.swarthmore.edu/library).

- <sup>47</sup> Document 14: Jane Addams to Carrie Chapman Catt, 31 May 1927. From an online selection of the letters of Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman Catt, found at [www.wmhis.binghamton.edu](http://www.wmhis.binghamton.edu).
- <sup>48</sup> Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies*, pp. 218-219.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- <sup>51</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Hungarian Women', pp. 248-249.
- <sup>52</sup> The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Newsletter, published through Cortland University in New York and found at [www.cortland.edu/gilman](http://www.cortland.edu/gilman).
- <sup>53</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Ambiguities', p. 490.
- <sup>54</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Hungarian Women', pp. 254-255.
- <sup>55</sup> Edith Parkas, *Magyar No*, 15 March, 1918.
- <sup>56</sup> Outside of major urban centres, much of Hungary's Jewish population lived at a working class or lower-middle class standard in small, religious regional communities. Many worked as labourers, farmers and small business owners within villages, without access to the educational and cultural opportunities enjoyed by both their Jewish and non-Jewish urban counterparts. For example, see Hungarian section, *Hostages in Modernisation: Studies on Modern Anti-Semitism, 1870-1933/39*, ed. by Herbert Strauss (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 857-960.
- <sup>57</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Hungarian Women', pp. 55-56.
- <sup>58</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Ambiguities', p. 492.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> Swarthmore College Peace Collection, [www.swarthmore.edu/library](http://www.swarthmore.edu/library).
- <sup>61</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Ambiguities', pp. 492-493.
- <sup>62</sup> See interviews in Nagykoros, April, 1998.
- <sup>63</sup> For an example of this situation in Czechoslovakia, see *A Thousand Kisses: A Grandmother's Holocaust Letters*, trans. and ed. by Renata Polt (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999).
- <sup>64</sup> Maria Kovacs, 'Ambiguities', p. 494.
- <sup>65</sup> Susan Halford, Mike Savage, Anne Witz, 'Organized Bodies: Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment in Contemporary Organizations', in *Sexualising the Social: Power and the Organisation of Sexuality*, ed. by Lisa Adkins and Vicki Merchant (London: MacMillan Press, 1996).
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.
- <sup>67</sup> See interviews in Budapest and Nagykoros, April, 1998.
- <sup>68</sup> Antonia Szenthe-Haraszti interview, Budapest, Hungary, January, 1999.
- <sup>69</sup> Susan Gal, 'Gender in the Post-Socialist Transition: The Abortion Debate in Hungary', *East European Politics and Societies*, 8, 2, 1994, 256-286. Joan Kelly, 'Did Women have a Renaissance', in *Becoming Visible*, ed. by Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (New York, 1977), pp. 139-164.
- <sup>70</sup> Susan Gal, 'The Abortion Debate'.
- <sup>71</sup> Huttenbach, 'Dual Loyalty'.
- <sup>72</sup> From the paper, 'Within Yet Without: Problems of Women's Powerlessness in Democratic Hungary', *Central European University's Working Paper Series*, Budapest, 1998, pp. 36-39.
- <sup>73</sup> Though there is a rejection and aversion of western-style feminism in the region, this does not mean that Hungarians do not accept a more traditional, or Eastern European form of feminism.
- <sup>74</sup> Paula Hyman, 'Gender and Jewish History', *Tikkun*, 3, 1, 35-38.

<sup>75</sup> From an email sent to the author by Eva Karpati Grayne, of the Joint Distribution Committee, Budapest, Hungary, March, 1999.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Hyman, 'Gender and Jewish History', p.37.

<sup>79</sup> Paula Hyman, 'Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: The Lower East Side Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902', *American Jewish History*, LXX, 1 (Sept. 1980), 91-105.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Gender and Holocaust Exhibitions: A Comparative Analysis

In her article assessing the inclusion of women's histories within museums, Edith Mayo writes that, 'Filtered through the prism of sex, history looks different.'<sup>1</sup> Having long been considered only within male-defined terms, Mayo states, history must now be examined in ways that are appropriate for understanding the stories and experiences of women.<sup>2</sup> Women's history has frequently been either marginalised or excluded from those forums and institutions that record the past. Men's experiences have overshadowed the representation and documentation of women's lives.<sup>3</sup> Museums must now begin to collect and interpret new types of objects and create new histories that chronicle the histories of women.

For museums that exhibit the history of the Holocaust, the inclusion of women's stories and, more complexly, the interpretation of gender differences, proves a controversial decision. Holocaust exhibitions have relied on the experiences of men to account for all survivors and victim's stories.<sup>4</sup> In the past museums, as well, have refrained from exhibiting those histories deemed too contentious or specialised for ordinary audiences.<sup>5</sup> Since its emergence in the 1970's, women's studies and 'gendered' interpretations of Holocaust history have frequently been stereotyped as research solely benefiting the interests of an elitist, feminist movement. Historians in this field were accused of imposing contemporary social constructs on a profoundly sensitive historical era.<sup>6</sup> With the end result in the camps and ghettos being no different for men and women, critics maintained, how could gender distinctions make any difference in the experiences of Jewish

victims and survivors? Museums used these arguments to exclude gendered interpretations from their representation of the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> However, as Joan Ringelheim, one of the leading historians of gender in the Holocaust states, 'Jewish men cannot stand in for Jewish women in daily life; even in the death camps, they stood in different lines. Jewish women's memories don't always parallel those of Jewish men. While the end was the same, the path to the end was not the same.'<sup>8</sup>

Museums today are becoming centres of communication, places for sharing memories and openly debating the past. Curators recognise that there is no longer one universal history, but many historical truths to interpret and represent.<sup>9</sup> The construction of history now also incorporates more than a single narrative. Multiple narratives are given a voice within exhibitions.<sup>10</sup> Are gendered interpretations, then, finding a place within Holocaust exhibitions? Have museums begun to accept and recognise gender differences as a viable method of analysing Holocaust history? If so, how are museums in both Eastern and Western Europe influenced by their surrounding social landscapes and distinct histories when approaching gender in Holocaust exhibitions? And are museum professionals in the East and West working with their audiences to understand the kind of history visitors wish to learn about within these exhibitions, giving communities a chance to interpret the past for themselves, while maintaining the museum's responsibility towards the translation and integrity of history?

Chapter One of this dissertation provided the reader with a general understanding of modern Hungarian Jewish history and the contemporary issues and debates affecting their position within society. Chapter Two examined the role of women within Hungary's Jewish communities. Now, Chapter Three will examine some of the current attitudes museums, curators and museum audiences hold towards the

inclusion of gendered interpretations of the Holocaust in Hungary. For comparison, an exhibition on the Holocaust has also been assessed in Great Britain. The Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London and the Budapest Jewish Museum (BJM) are used as case studies for this research. This was the first study of gendered interpretations undertaken at both museum exhibitions.<sup>11</sup> In 2000, the IWM established a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust. The BJM houses a smaller memorial and exhibition constructed in the 1970's, focusing specifically on the Holocaust in Hungary. These exhibitions were selected in order to explore how varying histories, geography, professional codes and relationships with surrounding communities may influence a museum's approach towards gendered interpretations.

Several methodologies have been used throughout this research. Section one of this chapter reviews those genres of literature utilised during the planning of Holocaust exhibitions. Because external academic research shapes decisions made by museums when constructing exhibitions and museum professionals often maintain close ties with academics and historians during the planning process, an overview of gender studies within Holocaust research was included.<sup>12</sup> As museums move beyond the collection of material culture and turn towards less tangible documentation to interpret history, the growing practice of oral history recording and the power of incorporating personal testimonials within museum exhibitions was also examined.<sup>13</sup> For women's history and gendered interpretations, especially, oral history helps to assert that everyday lives are important enough to record. It can help to reconstruct and even create new histories where there are no longer concrete objects and collections interpreting and representing the past.<sup>14</sup> Issues surrounding the representation of the Holocaust within museums were also explored, including the



involvement of communities in the interpretation and shaping of history and, as a result, the adoption of multiple narratives.<sup>15</sup> Because little has been written by Hungarian scholars on Holocaust exhibitions and gender, much of the literature surveyed deals with the ways gender and the Holocaust is viewed within Western Europe and America. However, research on the history of anti-Semitism in Hungary and how current tensions between Jews and non-Jews affect museum exhibitions and the BJM's relationship with its surrounding social environment are also relied upon.

Section two explores the ideas and concerns of those museum curators responsible for the construction of each exhibition. These were collected and analysed during a series of interviews conducted by the author in summer, 2001.<sup>16</sup> Included is a look at how internal and external dynamics have influenced the content of museum exhibitions and the attitudes of curators towards the use of controversial interpretations such as gender. The curator's own feelings regarding the involvement of the public in exhibition planning and design are also examined. Section three critiques the IWM and the BJM's Holocaust exhibitions and questions how effectively each exhibition has integrated gendered interpretations within its narratives. Section four moves to the museum audiences themselves. Using a short, informal questionnaire surveying visitor perspectives and attitudes towards gendered interpretations of the Holocaust, an initial awareness of the audience's feelings concerning the study of gender in museum exhibitions and their thoughts on whether museums could do more to analyse this research is gathered.

This chapter, ultimately, hopes to provide a better understanding of each museum's attitude towards gendered interpretations in the Holocaust and the factors guiding these approaches. It also sets out to

demonstrate how the BJM, especially, has been influenced by external social, political and cultural surroundings in their attitudes towards widening perspectives and tackling controversial material like gender when dealing with Holocaust history. The inclusion of interviews with museum staff and visitor's own reactions towards gendered interpretations intends to provide the reader with a better grasp of the levels of communication and understanding existing between curators and the public during the process of creating an exhibition on the Holocaust. Can the 'prism of sex' offer audiences a more powerful, personal representation of Holocaust history that is acceptable both to museums and their visitors? The next four sections will attempt to answer this question.

### **Literature, Gender and the Holocaust**

The creation of any public history exhibition requires an examination of a range of literature genres. Curators must be aware of the ways academics, historians, those who lived through the historical period in question, the public and museums themselves approach and accept the representation of the past in order to construct an exhibition that informs, connects and challenges its visitors' understanding of history. Often, the museum is the only public arena that can seriously and legitimately question previous interpretations of the past and raise contentious issues while reaching a wide audience. With this responsibility in mind, it is important that curators remain knowledgeable in ways their exhibition topic is written about and discussed in order to accurately inform the public of the exhibition's integrity and worth. This is especially important when dealing with

sensitive historical eras that involve religious, cultural and social representation.

Building valid representations within an exhibition on the Holocaust demands the involvement of a variety of literature and research methods. Literature informs curators of new historical approaches. At the same time, as new interpretations of Holocaust history are constructed for the first time within exhibitions themselves, literature shapes and justifies the questions and debates raised by museums.<sup>17</sup>

Gender studies of the Holocaust is a relatively new area of research. It is one still often considered to exist for the interests of modern-day feminism.<sup>18</sup> If museums decide that making distinctions between Jewish men and women's Holocaust experiences both contextualises the past and gives audiences a greater understanding of the lives of individual Holocaust survivors and victims, then curators must be aware of the research and methods they will need to shape this new interpretation within an exhibition. This includes an understanding not only of those writing within the field of Holocaust studies, but also of literature that explores the tools needed to gather the history and testimonies represented within a gendered interpretation.

However, if gendered interpretations offer a richer view of the Holocaust, why has the issue of Jewish men and women's distinct experiences not been addressed more often within museum exhibitions and Holocaust memorials? In choosing whether to adopt a gendered approach to the Holocaust, curators must also address those areas of literature that question the legitimacy of gender distinctions. Is it appropriate to examine the past using contemporary constructs like gender and feminism? Should the public be offered a controversial interpretation of such a sensitive and emotional past? This chapter will

review several bodies of research. These include Holocaust studies, the delicate process of oral history documentation and issues surrounding representation within museums. It will examine how these literatures both positively and negatively influence a museum's decision to incorporate gender studies within Holocaust exhibitions.

The study of Jewish women's separate experiences from men during the Holocaust began in Western Europe and America in the early 1980's. As recent as this is, it is not unusual given that Holocaust studies itself was not widely pursued by academics until the 1970's.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, in Hungary and other countries in Eastern Europe, gender and the Holocaust remains an area of research caught in the very initial stages of assessment today in both academic and museological circles.<sup>20</sup> The first collaborations on Jewish women in the Holocaust took place in 1983 in New York during the conference 'Women Surviving: The Holocaust.' The conference proceedings were later published as a book.<sup>21</sup> Initially, research took a strongly feminist, female-centred stance, focusing on women's roles in the ghettos, camps and resistance groups, their survival strategies and unique vulnerabilities due to their biological role as perpetuators of the Jewish race and social roles both as mothers and as carers to the elderly. These two factors would ultimately lead to the immediate death of many pregnant women and those who would not be separated from their children or relatives upon arrival at the camps.<sup>22</sup> Early research often heavily relied on the oral and written testimonies of female survivors to support findings, with the same testimonies re-interpreted to fit each scholar's version of the 'real' female experience.<sup>23</sup> In a paper written for the Holocaust Educational Trust, Anna Hardman has described this work as the 'First Wave' of gender scholarship on the Holocaust.<sup>24</sup>

The 'Second Wave' of scholarship began in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Scholars began to take a more pluralistically gendered approach to research and attempted to identify the difficulty of interpreting Holocaust testimonials and their reliability as a basis for all women's Holocaust experiences.<sup>25</sup> Joan Ringelheim, one of the organisers of the 1983 conference, criticised her early work for using 'cultural feminism' as a means to interpret Jewish women Holocaust survivors.<sup>26</sup> Her 'woman-centred' perspective and the questions stemming from this were misguided, she believed, and should be changed. Ringelheim also felt that survivor testimonies offered only, 'impressions and speculations...rather than answers.'<sup>27</sup> However, this is not to say that early feminist approaches to gender and the Holocaust were invalid. In her review of Ringelheim's self-reflective article, the philosopher Kathryn Addelson states that Ringelheim's early research was a contribution to good scholarship by challenging previous Holocaust research that emphasised the experience of Jewish men and universalised it, masking the experiences of women.<sup>28</sup>

How have both waves of scholarship influenced the involvement of museums in gendered interpretations of the Holocaust? On the one hand, this kind of literature offers museums a new method of exploring Holocaust history within exhibitions. On the other hand, a gendered approach to the Holocaust remained separate from other Holocaust literature because of its connection to feminism and its emphasis on women's experiences. It was not until 1998 that an international, more mainstream collection of research was published which critically analysed the relationship between gender studies and Holocaust experiences, including those scholars who rejected the connections between the two areas of study.<sup>29</sup> For western museums, this marginalisation has meant that curators may have seen this research as

too specialised to incorporate into general exhibitions on the Holocaust.<sup>30</sup> For eastern museums, the research itself may have simply been too inaccessible and felt too disconnected from their own histories and lives to seem valid. Few researchers working within museum studies have written about the effect gendered interpretations within Holocaust exhibitions have had on museum audiences. Intentionally or not, museums have often used the experiences of men to illustrate the experiences of both Jewish male and female survivors and victims. In 1994, for example, the writer Andrea Dworkin wrote that the experiences of women were missing from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.<sup>31</sup> A recent search into its website and database revealed that no new exhibitions on women's experience or gender had been included since Dworkin's criticisms were published.<sup>32</sup>

Disagreement over more taboo subjects within gendered interpretations of the Holocaust may have also made some museums wary over including more controversial material within their exhibitions. There has been little concrete research done on the levels of lesbianism, sexual abuse and rape that existed within the camps and ghettos.<sup>33</sup> From the earliest waves of scholarship, argument has surrounded these topics, even within feminist circles.<sup>34</sup> Though some researchers say that sexual abuse and rape of Jewish women rarely occurred, exact levels remain unknown. Many scholars are reluctant to pursue these topics and survivors are unwilling to speak about their experiences. There are even rumours that rape victims were murdered afterwards and were therefore unable to tell their story.<sup>35</sup> Instead of taking a leading role in researching these areas, museums have remained cautious when exploring these subjects in general exhibitions, choosing instead to relegate them to temporary exhibitions and more specialised conferences to which the wider public may have less access.<sup>36</sup>

When constructing exhibitions on the Holocaust, museums use oral testimonies to illustrate and give evidence of past events. As Judith Baumel writes, oral documentation can be fundamental in providing a broader understanding of the Holocaust.<sup>37</sup> It draws an audience into an exhibition, provides the details of everyday life, giving a human face to both victims and survivors. Oral history allows visitors to understand events on a personal level, just as the novelist Ian McEwan writes, 'we fantasise ourselves into events. What if it was me? This is the nature of empathy, to think oneself into the minds of others.'<sup>38</sup> With the criticism of the popularisation of Holocaust history, oral documentation presents historians with new tools to further investigate those areas of the past that remain untouched and misunderstood. Oral history, therefore, can justify a need for further exploration and scholarship, both within academia and museums.<sup>39</sup> Oral history is also especially effective when interpreting those histories overlooked by mainstream historical literature, such as women's histories. But curators must be careful that the testimonies chosen portray an honest interpretation of the past. Ruth Linden, a founder of the Holocaust Oral History Project in San Francisco, writes that museums and memorials often distort history in their attempt to reconstruct the past.<sup>40</sup> The professionalisation of oral history and the growing 'remembrance industry' has meant that a field of 'experts' now controls the collection of Holocaust testimonies for film, literature and museums.<sup>41</sup> What has this meant for the integrity of oral history documentation? Who controls discussions between interviewers and respondents? Who decides what topics are appropriate to examine and record? Though a certain level of manipulation may occur as memories meet present-day beliefs and ways of thinking, the uncertainty over who controls the text, and ultimately history, places museums in an uncomfortable situation as an 'authority' on the past.<sup>42</sup>

In a paper analysing interpretative conflict in oral history, the historian Kathryn Borland writes that understanding is often missing from the relationship of interviewer and interviewee.<sup>43</sup> Often, speakers cannot relate to contemporary constructs used to interpret their own past, such as feminism and gender differences. These ideas might seem impersonal and exclusive when describing an individual's life. People giving testimony may no longer be able to find themselves in their own history. They become separated from their own lives. In Hungary, for example, where the notion of feminism remains a foreign concept to the majority of women, older Holocaust survivors especially might find it difficult to view their histories through a gendered construct. Borland states that a balance must be found between giving speakers, 'interpretative respect without relinquishing responsibility to interpret their experiences.'<sup>44</sup> A narrator's own ideas about their life can greatly contribute to the interpreter's understanding of it. At the same time, interviewers who bring their knowledge and experience to testimonials can provide a richer interpretation of events.<sup>45</sup> Most importantly, the oral historian Sherna Gluck writes, one must remember that oral history is a human interaction that should be governed by the same warm, human behaviour shaping other interactions.<sup>46</sup>

Museums must also be wary of relying on oral history literature that solely commemorates the experiences of Jewish women during the Holocaust. Anthologies such as Brana Gurewitsch's *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters* tend to focus on religious women who survived with the support of communities of females formed in the ghettos and camps.<sup>47</sup> However, this cannot account for the many women who held the same beliefs and had the same experiences and died, or for those who did not and survived. Though these anthologies and interpretations remain important contributions to Holocaust literature, they should only be



viewed as one version of history. If museums hope to provide a multi-layered understanding of gender in the Holocaust using oral documentation, they must gather a wide variety of testimonies and strive to maintain each speaker's original voice and unique perspective on the past.

Those writing on representation and interpretation often focus on the necessity of museums to more fully integrate the needs and ideas of audiences into exhibition planning.<sup>48</sup> Constance Perin writes that museums rely on their internal professional community for advice and support. Audiences, however, should be seen as part of an extended museum community and a valuable resource to delve into when interpreting an exhibition and developing representative material.<sup>49</sup> Audience opinion can prove more willing to accept controversial approaches to exhibitions than internal museum advisors, challenging both visitors and museums themselves to consider new and thought-provoking examinations and representations.

This is especially true of Holocaust exhibitions. Audiences are often more interested in exploring dynamic and contentious representations, such as those found in gendered studies, than curators and scholars realise.<sup>50</sup> Though recent books have criticised the 'brandnaming' of Holocaust history and have pointed to a Holocaust 'fatigue' within society, audiences continue to question and analyse this aspect of history in both classrooms and museums.<sup>51</sup> For museum audiences in Eastern Europe, where the history of the Holocaust has been neglected and overlooked, any information on the Holocaust is appreciated and remains in demand. What western audiences might perceive to be common knowledge is often cutting edge and highly powerful in the East and can lead to more open and honest debates regarding Holocaust history within other aspects of society.<sup>52</sup> Despite

the fear of curators that offering potentially controversial interpretations of the Holocaust will shock or anger museum visitors, opportunities to comprehend history in new and unique ways are welcomed. For many learning about the Holocaust, a barrier remains between the information provided and truly understanding what happened. Lawrence Langer writes that the responsibility of future historians and curators is to restore the depth and severity of history and its terrible realities to the public.<sup>53</sup> The writer Aharon Appelfeld agrees, stating historians must attempt to, 'make events speak through the individual...to restore the person's given and family name, to give the tortured person back his human form...'.<sup>54</sup> With this in mind, it is imperative that curators choose representations that explore the Holocaust in difficult ways, allowing a relationship to form between audiences, survivors and victims and real understanding to be reached.

Does the study of Jewish men and women's distinct experiences hold a place within Holocaust exhibitions? Lawrence Langer, a critic of gendered examinations of the Holocaust, believes that history must be returned to individuals. He rejects the notion of a 'collective' survivor and victim identity, stating that though it is often difficult for those studying the past to accept, there was no one 'correct' way of behaving and living in the camps or in the ghettos.<sup>55</sup> For many museum visitors born after the war, more details are needed in order for them to appreciate this individuality. Using contemporary issues, like gender, allows audiences to make connections between the present and the past.<sup>56</sup> A study of the ways Jewish men and women lived and died can, ultimately, only benefit our comprehension of their lives. Museums must act more courageously, and as a result more controversially, by raising questions and offering their audiences new interpretations of history. The following sections will examine how two museums and

their communities regard gendered studies of the Holocaust and their inclusion within museum exhibitions.

### **The Curators' Perspective**

Museums are influenced by several factors. Their own internal structures, the external local, national and international communities they represent and the social, political climates around them all guide and inspire a museum's decisions and direction. For museums that feature Holocaust exhibitions or who document and collect the histories, objects and memories of the Jewish people, the connections between institutions and their outside Jewish communities are especially strong. Often, it is the community that founds the Jewish museum or who fundraises and lobbies for the inclusion of a Holocaust exhibition within a national museum.<sup>57</sup> As a result, the community can have power over the shaping and construction of the museum's beliefs, mission, and the research pursued when creating interpretations within exhibitions.

Museums are also the products of the histories lived through by their communities. For some Jewish museums or those examining Jewish heritage within their exhibitions, this can bring a great sense of empowerment as society becomes more culturally pluralistic and accepting of the diverse ethnic and religious groups that live within it.<sup>58</sup> For others, this entails existing within a larger society that resents the religion, culture and past they present and convey to visitors. In many countries, anti-Semitism continues to be a societal problem of great concern. For museums, this means interpreting sensitive historical issues with visitors who have lived through history and who may be traumatised by the past and worried of antagonising the social climate in which they live.

Because of these fears, those involved in constructing exhibitions on the Holocaust often approach material with extreme caution and objectivity. Advisory boards question the need and appropriateness of every detail and analysis before incorporating them within an exhibition.<sup>59</sup> This includes an examination of interpretations deemed potentially too controversial to use, such as a gendered interpretation of the Holocaust. Is this awareness of outside tension and sensitivity excessive? Does it actually sanitise the realities of history? Is it possible for museums to become too objective in their representation of the past? Using the Holocaust exhibitions at the Imperial War Museum in London and the Jewish Museum of Budapest, Hungary as case studies, this section will examine how internal and external social dynamics have shaped the choices made in these exhibitions and their attitudes toward the inclusion of gendered interpretations of the Holocaust.

The Imperial War Museum (IWM) opened its permanent exhibition on the Holocaust within a newly constructed extension of the museum's main building in June, 2000. The first national museum in Britain to house a Holocaust exhibition, it attempts to depict, '...one of the most horrific and controversial events of modern times', documenting, '...the suffering of its victims under the same roof as that of millions of other victims of twentieth-century conflict.'<sup>60</sup> From the beginning, the purpose of the exhibition was to particularly examine the experiences of European Jewry. Katherine Jones, one of the curators working on the exhibition, stated that, 'We tried to tell the story of the Holocaust as it was for Jews.'<sup>61</sup> A thematic approach was used to illustrate and guide the central timeline followed within the exhibition. Other subjects, such as the history of anti-Semitism, were included to contextualise the storyline. These displays were physically removed and

contained in rooms attached to, but not part of, the main route of the exhibition.<sup>62</sup>

Suzanne Bardgett, the Project Director of the IWM's exhibition, writes that curators and their external museum Advisory Group, made up of historians, designers and community and religious leaders, were constantly worried of creating a 'voyeuristic experience' with the artefacts and interpretations they chose.<sup>63</sup> Concern arose especially when images depicted naked women and children.<sup>64</sup> They worried that the objects or photographs exhibited might upset Holocaust survivors or be considered extreme or even pornographic.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, they did not want to lessen the severity of the past and chose to assess each questionable aspect individually.<sup>66</sup>

When analysing the experiences of survivors and victims, they did not openly discuss including gendered interpretations. Whether this was because the Advisory Group was exclusively male, did not see a difference between men and women's experiences or felt that the topic was inappropriate within the context of the Holocaust, Jones felt that though they attempted to show a variety of experiences and perspectives, researchers never sat down to try and portray gender differences. 'There was an unspoken awareness that we were trying to tell a million different stories, with different experiences but with common links.'<sup>67</sup>

James Taylor, one of the senior curators of the exhibition, felt that as a non-specialist exhibition used as an educational tool for the national curriculum, exploring a gendered interpretation would neither be appropriate nor interesting to the majority of 'casual' visitors the exhibition would attract. There were more pressing issues on which to educate their audience. 'The majority of younger visitors do not even know what the term "fifth column" means. Not every detail of the

Holocaust could be included. I feel that gender wasn't a significant factor in people's experiences. Visitors wouldn't have been able to take in details of sexual abuse, rape, fear of pregnancy, if we had presented them.<sup>68</sup>

Despite these sensitivities and doubt in the significance of gender differences, Jones hoped that, subtly, the exhibition attempts to show how uniquely vulnerable women were, especially because of their ties to children, letting both photographs and testimonies speak for themselves. Both Jones and Taylor felt that the subject of gender differences of Jewish men and women in the Holocaust would be better handled in a temporary exhibition, but that it was wrong to represent people within artificially constructed groups if there was not already enough research to support interpretations.<sup>69</sup>

Externally, the museum exists within a society that is generally supportive of the Holocaust exhibition. The Holocaust is part of the British national curriculum and schools widely use the extensive educational programme set up by the museum to coincide with the exhibition. Holocaust survivors and their families collaborated with the museum by donating personal collections and oral testimonies. The Queen attended the exhibition's opening. However, from the beginning, the museum was adamant that it would take a purely objective stance, uncertain of the reaction of extremist groups and Holocaust revisionists.<sup>70</sup> A traditional, general storyline was followed which did not allow for the inclusion of more contemporary interpretations. And, most significantly, apart from the specialist Advisory Board, the museum did not seek the advice of members of the public. Fears of becoming too controversial or of allowing visitors to decide the history they would like to learn about are still apparent.

The Budapest Jewish Museum (BJM) is located in a wing of one of the oldest synagogues left in Europe. Now owned by MAZSIHISZ, the neolog branch of Hungarian Jewry, the museum's direction is closely tied to the wishes of the community organisation.<sup>71</sup>

The BJM was always strongly influenced by the wider social and political conditions in which it existed. From 1945 until the mid-1990's, Hungary never attempted to accept responsibility for the destruction of Hungarian Jewry during the war. Under communism, as well, Jews were only allowed to openly express their religious identity, not their cultural one.<sup>72</sup> Robert Turan, the Director of the BJM, believes these two aspects of Hungarian society limited the choices and voice of the museum.<sup>73</sup> The BJM's permanent exhibitions include a vast collection of religious and ceremonial objects with little context to explain their historical or social significance. In the 1970's, a single-room anti-fascist memorial exhibition was created to remember Jewish victims. So far untouched since its opening, the cramped space provides visitors with a brief examination of the history of Hungarian Jewry and the singular destructiveness of Hungary's Holocaust.

Since the political changes of 1989, Hungarian Jewry has experienced a cultural renaissance. However, this was pursued mainly by those Jews born after the war. A new community centre was opened. A Jewish cultural festival is held every summer. The BJM has held temporary exhibitions on the history of Hungarian Jewry and on the work of the Jewish painter Marc Chagall. Slowly, Turan believes, these exhibitions are helping Jews reclaim their culture and their pride.<sup>74</sup> 'It's amazing how many people travel from all over the country simply to see these exhibitions. People seem very interested and very proud', he states.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, many Hungarian Jews continue to hide or reject their religious and cultural identity as 'secret' or 'hidden' Jews.<sup>76</sup> The museum finds it difficult to attract these people to exhibitions, especially if the content is too controversial. Anti-Semitism, as well, remains a major concern for the BJM.<sup>77</sup> The recent ruling by the government on whether a Hungarian Jewish businessman could buy the national football team especially worried museum staff and others working to change the image of Jews and the Jewish community within society.<sup>78</sup> Though the BJM might want to address the problem of contemporary anti-Semitism within an exhibition, it is concerned that it may frighten off those Jews who are just beginning to re-identify with their cultural past. The BJM also worries that openly questioning the historical relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians might risk inciting new racial attacks on Jews.<sup>79</sup>

Exploring the history of the Holocaust using contemporary constructs like gender is also seen as improper. Questions on men and women's different experiences were met with shock and distrust.<sup>80</sup> There are several reasons for this. Turan said, 'It is difficult to act sophisticated in a primitive part of the world. All our conditions come from a lack of democracy.'<sup>81</sup> When anti-Semitism cannot even be dealt with by the museum, it seems unrealistic to expect an exhibition to examine gender in the Holocaust. The internal structure of the museum itself also suffers from this absence of democracy. All direction comes from Turan. He is a product of his own society. If Turan does not agree with a line of analysis or way of thinking, it is unlikely to find a place in the museum.<sup>82</sup> The lack of co-operative working relations may seem archaic and unethical within a British museum, but hierarchy and exclusive working conditions are normal within many Hungarian institutions.<sup>83</sup>



Despite the disregard for gender studies, the BJM's next major temporary exhibition will be on the history of the Jewish woman. 'This will not just focus on kitchen problems', Turan said. He believes it will be a study of their historical role and struggle for civil rights, both in the Jewish community and within Hungarian society.<sup>84</sup> However, the study of Jewish women's experiences within the unique Holocaust of Hungary will undoubtedly not be included. They, like the rest of Hungary's Holocaust history, will remain untouched.

When assessing the situations of the Imperial War Museum and the Budapest Jewish Museum, the IWM appreciates a more tolerant society and untroubled past in which to interpret history. Exhibitions can be constructed with both internal and external support. A network of museum professionals and historians can be looked to for advice and collaboration. Though the IWM needs to begin to trust its audience more, the process of thinking about and representing history is a communal one.

For the BJM, exhibition planning is very much a struggle against society and even history itself. The internal structure of the museum and the Jewish community are seen as the only safe places to seek advice and assistance. Despite claiming that 50% of all visitors are non-Jews, the 'healthy half of Hungarian society', exhibitions feel geared towards an exclusively Jewish audience.<sup>85</sup> Consisting mainly of presentations on Jewish religious ceremonies, holidays and religious artefacts, there is little historical context to assist non-Jews in understanding their significance and place within Jewish history and culture. Though the BJM tries to establish new exhibitions that empower and excite Hungarian Jews, without open collaboration between Jewish and non-Jewish organisations and society, the museum contributes to the barriers existing between these two groups and the continued denial of the past.

Both museums need to take more chances in their exhibitions and the way they communicate with visitors. Could they find that audiences are more willing to accept challenging, even controversial interpretations of history? The following sections will critically examine each Holocaust exhibition and their visitors for these possibilities.

### **An Exhibition Critique**

In her feminist critique of social history museums, Gaby Porter writes that museum collections and exhibitions do not represent the histories of women as honestly and completely as those of men. Women, she states, are presented as passive and underdeveloped. Men are active, open and complex. Conventional interpretations bind both male and female representations to stereotyped, idealised views of what is masculine and feminine.<sup>86</sup>

Museums that explore the history of war have frequently marginalised the experiences and contributions of women. Holocaust museums and exhibitions, as well, have often allowed the experiences and histories of men to speak for female survivors and victims.<sup>87</sup> These exhibitions are not only shaped by their collections and the curators who create them, but are also products of the wider museum in which they exist. The history of the museum itself, the construction and manipulation of exhibition space, the insistence of a professional code based on objectivity, neutrality and order can all contribute to a lack of strong female histories and gendered interpretations of the past.<sup>88</sup> When dealing with military history, genocide and war, museums may have little previous experience representing women and gender differences. Space might be geared towards larger objects, such as military equipment and vehicles that help to interpret the male experience in

wartime. The objectivity and neutrality that museums hope to convey to the public might provide little understanding and patience when researching and collecting information and objects that represent the disjointed and inconsistent character of women's history, an area that until recently has remained poorly documented and virtually ignored.<sup>89</sup>

Can contemporary Holocaust exhibitions break with this past by offering visitors insight into women's richly varied lives? Can they adopt gendered interpretations? Can they diversify their narratives to include the female voice? Critiquing the Holocaust exhibitions at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the Budapest Jewish Museum (BJM), this section will examine how successfully these two museums have incorporated the stories of both Jewish men and women into their exhibitions.

The Holocaust exhibition at the IWM incorporates a newly built wing of the museum's main building in London, England. The extension was specifically designed as a home for the new permanent exhibition. It includes two enclosed floors, with no windows or natural lighting entering the exhibition space. The exhibition begins in the top floor and ends with its exit overlooking the rest of the museum.<sup>90</sup>

The exhibition is divided into a series of themes that lead visitors through a narrative storyline. They begin with an examination of Europe's Jewish communities, their culture and religion before the war and end with the liberation of the camps and the rebuilding of life after the Holocaust. Katherine Jones stated that though the exhibition follows a chronological time frame, presenting a complete overview of the Holocaust meant co-ordinating many historical events happening simultaneously. As a result, a thematic approach was introduced to help visitors focus on particular points occurring during 1933-45.<sup>91</sup> Individual stories were included throughout the exhibition in the form of

vidco-based oral testimonies. These helped to draw audiences in on a personal level, allowing them to connect to and understand history through the eyes of real people. This was especially important for those visitors who were unfamiliar with Jewish culture and religion and who previously might have looked upon Jews as foreign and separate from themselves. Collections, especially those donated by survivors and their families, were also accompanied with the stories of the individuals who had owned them. This helped to contextualise objects and enhanced their significance. A yellow star, for example, was not just an historical artefact any longer, but one that had belonged to and been worn by a real person.

Curators of the IWM's Holocaust exhibition insist that representing gender and Jewish men and women's different experiences was never an issue for them. Visitors, they said, would be unable to relate to this kind of interpretation of Holocaust history. It also might cause too much controversy and was, they felt, a relatively insignificant factor shaping experiences and events. Instead, they tried to highlight the lives of as many individuals as they could.<sup>92</sup> However, despite these sensitivities, images of women and their stories were included throughout the exhibition alongside men. Family photos and home movies depicting men and women's lives before the war surround visitors as they enter the exhibition.<sup>93</sup> Within oral testimonies, some female survivors speak of 'swapping recipes' by recalling images of food prepared in the past in order to curb hunger in the camps. Others talk about the substitute 'families' they formed for survival. The subject of rape and sexual abuse is even briefly touched upon when the exhibition examines the invasion of the Soviet Union.<sup>94</sup> While maintaining a position cautioning against gendered interpretations of the

Holocaust, the curators at the IWM have subtly let the voices and images of women speak for themselves.

Within other areas of the exhibition further representation of gender and women's experiences could be included. Under the section detailing the racial state and the idealisation of the German woman, for example, information is needed on how the day-to-day lives of Jewish women were affected. Because Jewish women had daily interaction with non-Jews in work, shopping and within their communities, assessing how their lives were affected by anti-Jewish laws, restrictions and anti-Semitism is highly significant.<sup>95</sup> An examination into the specific conditions, such as sanitary problems, rape and medical experiments, affecting women in the ghettos and camps would also prove beneficial to an audience's comprehension of this complex system. Furthermore, a section highlighting the debate over whether gender played a part in the survival of Jewish men over women would be a unique and bold stance for the museum to take. An area focusing on gender differences during the Holocaust could be one of the themes used to contextualise the main storyline and bring more detailed analysis and consideration to the central narrative, such as the display examining the history of European anti-Semitism.

Considering that the IWM is a museum dedicated to the interpretation and representation of war and military history, it is a tribute to the curators of the Holocaust exhibition that any attempt to portray women's histories and experiences was included. No previous permanent exhibition at the IWM gave so much consideration to gender and women in particular.<sup>96</sup> However, female academics and historians, as well as male and female members of the public, should have been invited to join the advisory group that assisted the museum in its research and decisions over what interpretations to use.

It is also important that the museum created a separate, distinctive space to house the exhibition. Upon leaving the wing dedicated to the Holocaust and assessing the vast, original arena of the museum, filled with those collections illustrating the glories of military achievement, one can only conclude that to have included this type of exhibition within that particular space would have been inappropriate and wrong. Women, even in the subtle ways in which they are represented, would have found no welcome there.

The most interesting aspect of the Holocaust exhibition at the BJM is that it has not been altered since its opening in the 1970's.<sup>97</sup> This fact makes the exhibition both a memorial to the Hungarian Jewish victims of fascism and an artefact left over from the communist era. Under communism, Jews were not allowed to express their cultural identity. Any reference to Jews being the victims of anything other than fascism was also banned.<sup>98</sup> This can leave visitors, especially those unfamiliar with Jewish life in Hungary today, with the impression that since the war anti-Semitism in Hungary has been erased. A more thorough examination of contemporary Hungarian society by the BJM would demonstrate that this is not the case.

The Holocaust exhibition and memorial are currently located in a small room off the main floor of the museum. The museum itself is housed within a wing of the main synagogue in Budapest. Initially constructed as an 'anti-fascist exhibit', the exhibition details the uniquely tragic history of the Hungarian Holocaust.<sup>99</sup> With little money at its disposal, the BJM relied on photocopies, photographs, limited collections and small text panels to provide a chronological narrative. As Ilona Benoschofsky, the former director of the BJM writes, because of funding shortages, enlarged photographs and easily read printed texts, placards and leaflets could not be made.<sup>100</sup> Hungarian Jewry, wary of

calling attention to its individual religious and cultural identities, offered few personal objects that would have made the exhibition more meaningful.<sup>101</sup> Oral testimonies, as well, were not included in the exhibition. Visitors are given little information on how the Holocaust affected everyday life for Jews in Hungary.

The exhibition begins with the alliance signed by Hitler and Miklos Horthy, the leader of Hungary until 1944, and runs through the liberation of Budapest by the Soviet Army and the execution of Ferenc Szalasi, the leader of Hungary's fascist party, the Arrow Cross, in 1945. Though designed to follow a timeline, the narrow dimensions of the room meant that visitors often walked haphazardly throughout the space, unable to locate the beginning and end of the exhibition. The fact that the majority of text in photographs and photocopies is presented in Hungarian alone adds to the sense of confusion. Because of the limited number of text panels, there is little contextualisation of objects and photographs that would help audiences better understand their significance. For example, one whole panel of photographs falls under the title, 'People who tried to help Hungarian Jews.' Under each photo is the name of the person, but no background information describing who they were or what they did. For those unfamiliar with Hungarian Jewish history, which includes many visiting the BJM, this lack of context makes it difficult to grasp the great significance these people had to those who did survive the Holocaust.<sup>102</sup>

Gendered interpretations were simply not a consideration for those constructing the BJM's Holocaust exhibition.<sup>103</sup> One must remember that when the BJM's exhibition was set-up in the 1970's, Holocaust exhibitions in Britain and other parts of Western Europe would not have considered including gendered interpretations within their exhibitions. Given that it was also difficult, perhaps even illegal,

for curators to explore Hungarian anti-Semitism during this time, it is even more understandable that gender differences would not have been a topic represented in the exhibition. Limited space, as well, does not provide a setting conducive to exploring those interpretations determined too controversial by curators. However, the BJM does manage to include many images of women in the Budapest ghetto and in the camps. The labour battalions, a distinctly Hungarian form of punishment that forced men to join work camps on the eastern Front and in the brick factories around Budapest, are also examined. This was a form of genocide that Hungarian women were not subjected to, but that left them vulnerable to attack and deportation at home as male family members were sent away. What is notably missing is any information on cultural life of Hungarian Jewry before, and even during, the war. Until spring 1944, Jews in Hungary were allowed restricted access to cultural programmes and events. Home life is also a topic missing from the exhibition. An examination into these two areas may have provided more understanding of the separate experiences and histories of Jewish men and women in Hungary.<sup>104</sup> Here again, though, government restrictions have limited what curators could include in the 1970's.

Though the BJM plans to renovate the Holocaust exhibition within a larger hall, both the space and financial support have yet to be found for this project. With the current level of anti-Semitism existing in Hungary, the overtly cautious attitude of museum staff, the need to collect more personal objects and memories and to embrace contemporary approaches to exhibiting history, it is doubtful that gendered interpretations will be a priority of the new exhibition.

The IWM and BJM's Holocaust exhibitions are, ultimately, incomparable. One is contemporary. The other, for the moment, remains a relic of another era. One is the product of a democratic, open society.



The other is attempting to re-invent itself in a society emerging from a rigid and restrictive past. It is interesting that despite diverging histories, both museums' curators continue to find direct discussions of gendered interpretations too sensitive and controversial for audiences. What are the opinions of visitors who encounter gender differences in Holocaust exhibitions? The final section will examine some of these attitudes.

### **The Visitors' Perspective**

In his examination of the interview as a tool of research, Elliot Mishler defines interviewing as a form of discourse taking place between speakers. The process of questioning and answering is a natural intellectual inclination, he writes, one that should treat people's ideas and opinions with respect and seriousness and use them to make sense of and improve their wider environment and world.<sup>105</sup>

The museum visitor questionnaire can be a form of research interview. It can provide an understanding of the ways communities perceive and value museums, their exhibitions and public services, what they enjoy and what aspects of the museum they wish to see changed. Ideally, it should allow a dialogue to begin between museum professionals and the people they serve, sharing their thoughts on what they want to happen and learn about in the museum.<sup>106</sup> Often, however, museums do not involve the ideas of their audience in exhibition planning. What visitors think, what they know and will accept can be taken for granted by curators.<sup>107</sup> Exhibitions, therefore, become a reflection of the museum's own knowledge and perceptions. Museums become institutions audiences can visit and observe, but not centres of knowledge they can interact and relate with.

How well have the Imperial War Museum (IWM) and the Budapest Jewish Museum (BJM) dealt with incorporating the interests and opinions of their audiences within their Holocaust exhibitions? Curators and advisory groups for both exhibitions have made assumptions about whom their visitors are and what they will tolerate when learning about the Holocaust.<sup>108</sup> Has this lack of communication prevented curators from better understanding the communities they work within and stopped them from including more of the kind of interpretations that audiences find valuable?

In summer, 2001, visitor questionnaire surveys were conducted at the IWM and BJM on the inclusion of gendered interpretations within Holocaust exhibitions.<sup>109</sup> Previously, curators for both exhibitions had been interviewed. Both groups discussed the fact that visitors had not had a voice in exhibition planning. Each demonstrated an intriguing limit in their understanding of whom their audiences were, what their previous knowledge was and what they would accept when learning about the Holocaust, especially when it came to the inclusion of gendered interpretations within the exhibitions.<sup>110</sup>

The questionnaires were designed to give visitors a chance to voice their opinions about the inclusion of gendered interpretations of the Holocaust. The same questions were used at both exhibition sites. Questions were open-ended and allowed people to reflect and include detailed answers and opinions.<sup>111</sup> Language was non-specialist and used terms like 'men and women's differences' rather than 'gender' so non-native English speakers and people who had not used more exclusive, academic terms before would have a better understanding of what was being asked. Some background, demographic questions were also included to provide an understanding of each respondent.<sup>112</sup> Visitors

were given the time and space to answer the questionnaire on their own or to discuss and answer the questions with the interviewer.<sup>113</sup>

The questionnaire was not meant to be a complex quantitative or qualitative study of museum visitors. It was not meant to explain or speak for the entire exhibition audience. Instead, it was constructed to provide an initial understanding of what a sample of visitors felt about the inclusion of gendered interpretations and to offer an alternative to the assumptions curators had made about audiences.<sup>114</sup> It also provided a comparison to the way the author of this dissertation critiqued both exhibitions and their representation of gender differences between Jewish men and women. This final section will examine the IWM and BJM visitor questionnaires and evaluate the different perspectives curators, museum audiences and those studying museums have on the inclusion of gender studies within Holocaust exhibitions.

On 13 July, 2001, the visitor questionnaire survey was conducted at the IWM in London.<sup>115</sup> Fifty audience members were randomly asked to complete a questionnaire as they left the Holocaust exhibition. Respondents ranged in age, gender, nationality and religious affiliation. They had both visited the exhibition in small groups with family members and friends, as well as visited independently. All IWM respondents worked with the questionnaire on their own instead of with the interviewer.

Respondents approached questions concerning the inclusion of gendered interpretations within Holocaust exhibitions in a variety of ways. Four people felt it would have been interesting if one section of the exhibition had been split by gender, detailing the daily lives and separate experiences of Jewish men and women.<sup>116</sup> One woman from France said that the exhibition should more clearly demonstrate how the 'future' lives of men and women were often different, based on

women's connection to their children, once they reached the camps.<sup>117</sup> Three visitors agreed with the curators, stating that lack of space and a need to avoid making gender differences into something almost pornographic meant that the exhibition had already handled the topic well enough.<sup>118</sup> One woman from the United States said that there should be an exploration of gender as a matter of historical interest but that the overall experiences should remain the ultimate focus of the exhibition.<sup>119</sup> A male priest from New Zealand felt that gendered interpretations should be included because it would help to, 'highlight the unconscious demeaning of women.'<sup>120</sup> It becomes clear from the questionnaires that, unlike the curator's previous beliefs that visitors would be 'casual' ones unacquainted with Holocaust history, these respondents, both teenagers and adults, were able to write critically and thoughtfully about their feelings towards gendered interpretations and what they felt would be appropriate and interesting to include within the exhibition.<sup>121</sup>

From the twelve questions posed, several connections can be made between visitor responses. The first concerns previous knowledge of gender differences in men and women's Holocaust experiences. Thirty-four out of the fifty respondents that answered this question stated that yes, they had knowledge of gender differences before coming to the IWM exhibition.<sup>122</sup> This contrasts with curator's beliefs that visitors would have no knowledge of gender differences in the Holocaust and therefore felt it was inappropriate to include discussions of gender within the exhibition.<sup>123</sup>

The second parallel that developed related to the question on whether visitors thought the exhibition should explore differences between men and women in Holocaust exhibitions.<sup>124</sup> Of the thirty-nine answers to this question, twenty-three felt that yes, gendered

interpretations should be explored. This differs with the curator's beliefs that visitors would not be able to handle or approve gendered interpretations.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, in response to the question regarding the IWM and whether it had examined differences between men and women within their Holocaust exhibition, of the forty people who answered this question, twenty-three felt that it either gave a limited interpretation of gender differences or none at all.<sup>126</sup> The subtle approach adopted by curators towards gender differences, then, might have been too restrained or not inclusive enough of the history some visitors wished to learn about.<sup>127</sup>

It is interesting that while curators worried about their audience's ability to understand and handle controversial material, the majority of these visitors would have felt comfortable with a more detailed examination into gender than had been provided by the museum. Though these visitors cannot speak for the exhibition's entire audience, their responses point to a possible divide in the way curators perceive visitors and who visitors actually are and what they believe.

The BJM visitor questionnaire survey was carried out on 10 August, 2001.<sup>128</sup> Robert Turan, the director of the BJM, did not believe that gendered interpretations of the Holocaust were appropriate within the museum and had not approved of the information this questionnaire was trying to gather. Therefore, conditions surrounding its collection varied greatly from the IWM and possibly influenced the number of responses. Questionnaires were conducted outside as visitors left the museum. The weather was hot, around 37c, and there were few places for visitors to comfortably stand and write. Though more time was spent obtaining questionnaires than at the IWM and an interviewer and a translator conducted the survey, fewer questionnaires were completed.

Of the twenty-eight questionnaires filled out, only five were Hungarian. The majority of respondents were foreign tourists visiting the museum in large groups, as well as a few visiting the museum alone.

Despite the director's warning that visitors would react 'strongly negatively' to the questionnaire, those who participated were receptive to the questions and gave thoughtful, sincere answers. One woman, a Holocaust survivor from Romania, described how she had experienced the ways gender had influenced men and women's survival in the camps and the ways they worked together and helped each other.<sup>129</sup> A Hungarian woman stated that in order to give a detailed account of Holocaust history it would be better to include gendered interpretations but that for those visitors who were not religious, it would not be interesting.<sup>130</sup> And a woman from Portugal felt that representing gender within the Holocaust was wrong because men and women had been affected in such a way that gender did not matter.<sup>131</sup>

Because the number of respondents was relatively small in comparison to the IWM, it was also interesting to observe the reactions of visitors and passers-by to the interviewers and the museum in general. Several Hungarian visitors were interested enough to stop and speak about the questionnaire but did not want to officially add their thoughts. Others who had not visited the museum would walk by and make anti-Semitic remarks to the building itself. Conducting the visitor questionnaire on the street made one both aware of Hungarian Jewry's hesitation in participating in official assessments and the level of everyday anti-Semitism still existing within Budapest society.<sup>132</sup>

Though it is more difficult to make connections between this selection of BJM visitors than it was between those at the IWM, links can still be formed among those who did respond to the questionnaire. For example, of the twenty-eight responses, half stated that they were

aware of gender differences during the Holocaust before visiting the exhibition.<sup>133</sup> These findings contrast with the director's statement that gendered interpretations of the Holocaust would seem irrelevant and insensitive to all visitors and therefore had no place within the exhibition.<sup>134</sup> Eighteen also felt that the BJM could do more to represent gender differences within the exhibition. The most notable characteristic of BJM visitors was their openness towards the questionnaire. Some spoke about connections they had observed between the attitudes towards Jewish life and Holocaust history within the rest of Hungarian society and the limitations of the BJM. Others decided that despite the external pressures of society, it was the BJM's responsibility towards the past to provide visitors with well-documented, honest accounts of history. Far from taking offence, most visitors approached were interested to both discuss the questions and voice their ideas regarding gendered interpretations within Holocaust history and the state of the exhibition in general.

How do these findings compare with the exhibition critiques examined in section three? For someone with comprehensive knowledge of gender differences during the Holocaust, the IWM's subtle approach to gendered interpretations may seem restrained, though understandable, given the museum's relatively conservative past and the curator's attitude towards the suitability of gender within the exhibition. For visitors who are interested in learning about gender in the Holocaust but who may have limited past experience with this type of research, a more direct representation of gender differences within the exhibition may be required. At the same time, many visitors interviewed at the IWM for this study found the exhibition to be a moving investigation and tribute to Holocaust history and Jewish life, despite potentially shying away from more controversial areas of research.

At the BJM, visitor opinion re-emphasised the critique's findings. Some found it difficult to relate to the Holocaust exhibition, not only because of its exclusion of contemporary interpretations but because of its lack of material, such as oral histories and video testimonies, which allow audiences to connect with the past on a personal, human level. Many accepted the fact that the BJM was a product of the turbulent society in which it was a part. However, they also felt that the museum was trying to re-shape its exhibitions and image into something that positively and honestly reflected Jewish life in Hungary while providing the information and background less informed audiences might need. Both audiences supported the assumptions of the exhibition critiques by defying curator's perceptions of being 'casual' visitors lacking the tools to critically analyse history. All who participated in the questionnaire responded in an informed and thoughtful manner, whether they agreed with gendered interpretations or not.

The questionnaires and the exhibition critiques demonstrate a need for change in the ways curators and visitors communicate during the exhibition planning process. The future adoption of controversial material like gendered interpretations requires open consideration of the ideas and opinions of visitors by curators. For the IWM, this means reaching out and trusting the communities they serve. For the BJM, the museum's relationship with both visitors and non-visitors and its position as a potentially effective vehicle for social change within Hungarian society must be re-evaluated.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter attempted to examine the varying approaches museums and their communities take towards gendered interpretations of the



Holocaust in both Eastern and Western Europe. It analysed the levels of communication existing between curators and museum audiences throughout the exhibition planning process, particularly the influence visitors and surrounding communities have on the adoption of difficult and controversial representations and material. It also assessed the impact external social, political and cultural dynamics have on the exhibition planning process.

Section one explored the literature used when constructing an exhibition on the Holocaust. It demonstrated how various genres both positively and negatively shape a museum's decision to include gendered interpretations within Holocaust exhibitions. It was surmised that, although gendered studies of the Holocaust is a new and relatively contentious area of research, museums have a responsibility to their audience to explore those interpretations that have the potential ability to make the past more personal and real to visitors. This was found to be especially true in countries such as Hungary where Holocaust history remains a fairly recent and emerging field of study that holds great significance within contemporary society and within the complicated relationships and burgeoning communication levels of Jews and non-Jews.

Section two attempted to gauge the ways museum curators at both case study museums, the Imperial War Museum (IWM), London and the Budapest Jewish Museum (BJM), Hungary, perceived gendered interpretations and the influence these preconceptions had on the inclusion or exclusion of gendered studies within Holocaust exhibitions. It also observed the attitudes of curators towards their surrounding communities and the incorporation of visitor ideas in exhibition planning. The intention was to provide the reader with an understanding of the underlying historical and social context surrounding each

exhibition and how these factors influenced each curator's approach to gendered interpretations and to their audiences.

Section three offered the author's own ideas and insights into both the IWM and the BJM's Holocaust exhibitions. It also proposed ways each museum could more adequately combine the study of gender in their exhibitions. It hoped to demonstrate how greater levels of communication and a better understanding by curators of museum audience's ideas concerning controversial historical representation could result in stronger, more diverse interpretations and narratives.

Finally, section four provided the reader with a sample picture of the IWM and the BJM's audiences and the complex perspectives existing within each museum's external communities. Using a visitor questionnaire, the author compiled an introductory overview of the ways visitors themselves felt about gendered interpretations of the Holocaust and the nature of Holocaust history itself. The author hoped to understand how a discourse between museum professionals and visitors could emerge over the inclusion of gender in Holocaust exhibitions. An awareness of the varying perceptions visitors and those researching gender in the Holocaust have towards Holocaust exhibitions was also achieved. Section four concluded that divisions did exist between the curators' understanding of the way museum audiences would think and react to controversial material such as gendered interpretations, and the ways visitors actually thought, felt and related to this issue. It also suggested that in order for controversial exhibitions to be successful and meaningful, the museum's internal and external forces must better appreciate and accept one another.

Ultimately, this chapter has provided evidence, however limited, that gendered interpretations bring a more inclusive, realistic examination of the past to exhibitions. A study of gender differences

allows museum audiences to appreciate a greater connection to those who experienced life during the Holocaust. This chapter also highlights the importance of open, accessible communication between museums and their audiences, especially when deciding whether to exhibit controversial material. It has suggested that museums could become important centres for social change by not avoiding contentious issues, but by providing society with the space to critically question history. In no other place do communities have the potential to so honestly debate sensitive historical and moral issues such as gender, identity, nationalism and anti-Semitism. Museums must be supported by surrounding social, cultural and political forces in order to help maintain their commitment to communication between all factions within society and the promotion of positive change.

As for the future, it is hoped that the 'prism of sex' will be used to much greater effect to examine the many diverse narratives emerging from the Holocaust. Only when this is done will museum curators, audiences and communities as a whole attain fuller and more complete representations and understanding of the past.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Edith P. Mayo, 'A New View?', *Museum News* (July/August, 1990), p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Gaby Porter, 'Seeing Through Solidity: A Feminist Perspective on Museums', in *Theorizing Museums*, ed. by Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 110-113.

<sup>4</sup> Andrea Dworkin, 'The Unremembered: Searching for Women at the Holocaust Memorial Museum', *Ms. Magazine*, V, 3 (November/December, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> From interviews with curators of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibition, summer, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. by Dalia Ofer and Leonore Weizman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Interviews at the Imperial War Museum and the Budapest Jewish Museum, Summer, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Ringelheim, extract from a paper, 'Eastern European Past: Gender and the Holocaust', given at the *Status of Women in the New Market Economies Conference* (Hartford: University of Connecticut, 15 April, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian*, Introduction (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1997), pp. 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Interviews at the IWM and the BJM.

<sup>12</sup> Note, for example, the historians included on the advisory group for the IWM Holocaust exhibition.

<sup>13</sup> Ken Howarth, *Oral History: A Handbook* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Sherna Gluck, 'What's so Special about Women? Women's Oral History' in *Oral History, An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. by David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1996), pp. 216-218.

<sup>15</sup> Ariella Azoulay, 'With Open Doors: Museum and Historical Narratives in Israel's Public Space' in *Museum Culture*, ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-109.

<sup>16</sup> Conducted by the author at the IWM and the BJM, summer, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> An example of this collaboration between museums and Holocaust scholarship is Harold Kaplan, *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> For examples of critics of gender studies and the Holocaust see Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Tydor Baumel, 'You said the words you wanted me to hear but I heard the words you couldn't bring yourself to say': Women's First Person Accounts of the Holocaust', *Oral History Review*, 27/1 (Winter/Spring 2000), 17-56.

<sup>20</sup> Taken from interviews conducted in August, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> *Proceedings of The Conference: Women Surviving: The Holocaust*, ed. by Esther Katz and Joan Miriam Ringelheim (New York: The Institute for Research in History, 1983).

<sup>22</sup> For example, see Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), and *When Biology Became Destiny*:

*Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. by Renate Bridenthal (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

<sup>23</sup> Anna Hardman, *Women and the Holocaust* (London: Holocaust Educational Trust Research Papers, 1999-2000), pp. 1-36, (p. 6).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Joan Ringelheim, 'Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research', *Signs* (Summer 1985), 741-761, (p. 753).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 758-761.

<sup>28</sup> Kathryn Pyne Addelson, 'Comments on Ringelheim's "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research"', *Signs* (Summer 1987), 830-833, (p. 831).

<sup>29</sup> Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with James Taylor, senior curator of the IWM's Holocaust Exhibition, 13 July, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Andrea Dworkin, 'The Unremembered'.

<sup>32</sup> Conducted by the author, June, 2001, at [www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org).

<sup>33</sup> For one example, see Jonathan Friedman, 'Togetherness and Isolation: Holocaust Survivor Memories of Intimacy and Sexuality in the Ghettos', *Oral History Review*, 28/1 (Winter/Spring 2001), 1-16.

<sup>34</sup> Ringelheim and Katz, *Proceedings of the Conference*, pp. 73-74 and 99-100.

<sup>35</sup> Hardman, *Women and the Holocaust*, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> James Taylor interview, IWM.

<sup>37</sup> Baumel, 'You Said the Words', p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Ian McEwan, 'Only love and then oblivion. Love was all they had to set against their murderers', *The Guardian*, September 15, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Friedman, 'Togetherness and Isolation', p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> R. Ruth Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), pp. 74-75.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>43</sup> Kathryn Borland, 'That's Not What I Said': Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research', in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (New York: Routledge Press, 1991), pp. 63-75, (p. 64).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> Sherna Gluck, 'What's so Special about Women?', p. 220.

<sup>47</sup> Brana Gurewitsch, *Mother, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> For example, *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian*, ed. by Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppler (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1997), and, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. by Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Constance Perin, 'The Communicative Circle: Museums as Communities', *Museums and Communities*, pp. 183-219.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see visitor questionnaire survey responses.

<sup>51</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, 'Exhibiting Hatred', *History Today* (June 2000), 18-20, (p. 20).

<sup>52</sup> From interviews conducted with museum visitors at the IWM and BJM, August, 2001.

- <sup>53</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 179-184.
- <sup>54</sup> Aharon Appelfeld, 'After the Holocaust', in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. by Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), pp. 91-92.
- <sup>55</sup> Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, p. 183.
- <sup>56</sup> Marja Verbraak, 'The Paradox of the Anne Frank House', *Museum International*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2001), 28-31.
- <sup>57</sup> Many Jewish communities and organisations have helped to fund Jewish museums and Holocaust exhibitions. See, for example, the experiences of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Vienna Jewish Museum, the Jewish History Museum of Amsterdam and the Jewish History Museum in Frankfurt, Germany.
- <sup>58</sup> See the Jewish Children's Museum at the Amsterdam Jewish History Museum and the Museum of the Diaspora, Tel Aviv, two examples of museums exhibiting positive imagery of Jews as a result of the support of their surrounding communities.
- <sup>59</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, 'Exhibiting History', p. 20.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>61</sup> Interview with Katherine Jones, curator of the IWM's Holocaust exhibition, 16 June, 2001.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, 'Exhibiting History', p. 20.
- <sup>64</sup> James Taylor interview, IWM.
- <sup>65</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, 'Exhibiting History', p. 20.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup> Katherine Jones interview, IWM.
- <sup>68</sup> James Taylor interview, IWM.
- <sup>69</sup> Jones and Taylor interviews, IWM.
- <sup>70</sup> From a meeting with Suzanne Bardgett before the opening of the IWM Holocaust exhibition, May, 2000.
- <sup>71</sup> *The Jewish Museum of Budapest*, ed. by Ilona Benoschovsky and Alexander Scheiber (Budapest: Corvina Kiado, 1987), pp. 7-26.
- <sup>72</sup> *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*, ed. by Peter Meyer and others (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953), pp. 451-470.
- <sup>73</sup> Interview with Robert Turan, Director of the Budapest Jewish Museum, 7 August, 2001, Budapest, Hungary.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>76</sup> Interview with Stella Banki, Holocaust survivor, 12 August, 2001, Budapest, Hungary.
- <sup>77</sup> Andras Kovacs, 'The Holocaust, the Persecution of Jews and Historical Responsibility: Findings of a Survey in Hungary', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 28, 1, (Summer 1998).
- <sup>78</sup> See Gusztav Megyesi, 'Sieg Heil!', *Elet es Iradalom*, 3 August, 2001, p. 1. Tamas Meszaros, 'Egy No Meg A Futball', *168 Ora*, 2 August, 2001, p. 5. Tamas Kiss, 'MP Slurs Soccer Sale', *The Budapest Sun*, 2-8 August, 2001, p. 1.
- <sup>79</sup> Robert Turan interview, BJM.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>82</sup> Observations made by the author, the BJM, August, 2001.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Robert Turan interview, BJM.

<sup>85</sup> Observations by the author, BJM, August, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Gaby Porter, 'Seeing through Solidity', pp. 110-114.

<sup>87</sup> From interviews and observations made by the author at the IWM and the BJM, as well as observations undertaken at the Spertus Jewish Museum in Chicago, the Frankfurt Jewish Museum in Germany and the Jewish Museum of Vienna.

<sup>88</sup> Gaby Porter, 'Seeing Through Solidity', pp. 114-125. Elizabeth Carnegie, 'Trying to Be an Honest Woman: Making Women's Histories', in *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. by Gaynor Kavanagh (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 54-65.

<sup>89</sup> Porter, 'Seeing Through Solidity', pp. 114-125. Carnegie, 'Trying to Be an Honest Woman'.

<sup>90</sup> These observations were made by the author at the IWM's Holocaust exhibition, 13 July, 2001. The construction and use of space gives the entire exhibition a feeling of ominous, sombre restraint and darkness. The beginning and end of the exhibition feel like a memorial both to victims and survivors.

<sup>91</sup> Katherine Jones interview, IWM.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Including information on pre-war Jewish family and community life is important because it provides insight into women's life experiences and gender differences in general before the war. Museum audiences gain a better understanding of Holocaust victims and survivors as real people. They are able to see how defined gender roles may have influenced men and women's experiences and choices during the Holocaust.

<sup>94</sup> Observations made by the author, the IWM, July, 2001.

<sup>95</sup> Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

<sup>96</sup> Observations at the IWM.

<sup>97</sup> Observations at the BJM.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Meyer, *The Jews in the Soviet Satellites*.

<sup>99</sup> *The Jewish Museum of Budapest*, ed. by Ilona Benoschofsky and Alexander Scheiber (Budapest: Corvina, 1987).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>101</sup> The number of collections donated to the BJM is increasing, however. For their next temporary exhibition, for example, several personal objects have already been accessioned, including the original diary of a young girl living in Budapest during WWII.

<sup>102</sup> Observations at the BJM.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Turan interview, BJM.

<sup>104</sup> Again, exploring these topics offers a better understanding of gender differences within men and women's lives leading up to the war and how these differences affected wartime experiences.

<sup>105</sup> Elliot Mishler, *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 1-7.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Interviews with curators at the IWM and BJM.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> The visitor questionnaire surveys were designed and conducted by the author.

<sup>110</sup> Interviews with the curators at the IWM and BJM.

<sup>111</sup> Open-ended questions were used in order to allow respondents to feel they could explain their opinions and provide more detailed answers. They demonstrated to visitors

that the questionnaire was not meant to rigidly define them, but hoped to learn what they thought and felt as individuals.

<sup>112</sup> These were included simply to contextualise respondents and provide a background to their responses. They were not intended to be used for any quantitative study.

<sup>113</sup> This was not initially the plan, but due to the lack of space at the BJM and the difficulty of standing there and writing, visitors requested the questions be posed to them. This, of course, may have influenced the responses they gave. At the same time, some visitors felt more comfortable treating the questionnaire as a conversation or informal discourse with the interviewer and therefore provided more insight into their feelings regarding the exhibition.

<sup>114</sup> This research was always meant to be an introductory study into an area so far untouched by both museums and academics. In the long term, a more detailed study would be needed, but this is more suited to an in-depth research project or a Ph.D.

<sup>115</sup> This questionnaire was approved by the IWM.

<sup>116</sup> Questionnaire 3, 26, 38.

<sup>117</sup> Questionnaire 12.

<sup>118</sup> Questionnaires 32, 47, 24.

<sup>119</sup> Questionnaire 18.

<sup>120</sup> Questionnaire 29.

<sup>121</sup> James Taylor interview, IWM.

<sup>122</sup> In response to question 8a 'Did you know that men and women had different experiences during the Holocaust before coming to this exhibition?'

<sup>123</sup> Curator interviews.

<sup>124</sup> Question 11b asks 'If you answered yes to 11a, how do you think the museum should do this?' after 11a asked, 'Do you think this exhibition should explore the differences between men and women during the Holocaust?'

<sup>125</sup> Curator interviews.

<sup>126</sup> Question 9a asks, 'Do you think differences between men and women are examined in this exhibition?'

<sup>127</sup> Curator interviews.

<sup>128</sup> Unlike the IWM, Robert Turan, the Director of the BJM, did not like the subject matter of the visitor questionnaires and would not let the survey be conducted within the museum. However, because the author felt that an understanding of the opinions of the BJM visitors was necessary in order to gather a complete picture of the situation at the museum, the questionnaire was conducted outside the museum in a less sensitive environment. Every effort was made on the part of the interviewer and the translator to treat the survey with the seriousness, respect and understanding it deserved.

<sup>129</sup> Questionnaire 1.

<sup>130</sup> Questionnaire 17.

<sup>131</sup> Questionnaire 5.

<sup>132</sup> This was confirmed by the Hungarian translator who felt that Hungarians were either very interested in questionnaires or afraid of them. She was also worried about the level of anti-Semitism we encountered on the street, but felt that it was not unusual.

<sup>133</sup> Question 8a.

<sup>134</sup> Robert Turan interview.



## CONCLUSION

This dissertation provided the reader with three distinct studies of modern Hungarian Jewry. Chapter one focused on the history and contemporary experiences of the Hungarian Jewish community. It provided a detailed study of the relationship between urban and regional Jewry and the effects of anti-Semitism on everyday Jewish life. Chapter two assessed the significance of women's history within Jewish studies. It also analysed the inclusion of women within Hungarian Jewry's community structures and communal life. Finally, Chapter three looked at the use of gender within exhibitions on the Holocaust at both the Budapest Jewish Museum and the Imperial War Museum in London, England. Examining the perspectives of both museum curators and visitors, this chapter considered whether gendered analysis provided a more honest, balanced account of Holocaust history and gave these museums the opportunity to effectively reach out to their audiences and provide their communities with an accurate view of the past.

What conclusions can be drawn from these three aspects of Hungarian Jewry? Can any links be formed? Though the primary intent of the author was not to offer any vast correlating assessments between these three, unique facets, but rather to provide an overview into the issues facing the contemporary Hungarian Jewish community, some connections can still be made. At the same time, it is interesting to note that through this undertaking, more questions than answers are raised.

To begin with, it remains uncertain whether or not Hungarian Jewry will have the capacity to modernise their institutions and outlook effectively to keep their community structures interesting and challenging enough for younger generations to want to become involved and carry on a Jewish way of life. Will Hungarian Jewry be willing to

open up to all types of Jews, including those coming from mixed backgrounds? Will they be able to incorporate them into all levels of communal life? Will women be welcome into all aspects of community organisation as well? And will Hungarian Jewry be able to present their past to both Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians in such a way that allows for an honest, open dialogue on the Holocaust and the Jewish question in Hungary to finally begin? Will this help every part of Hungarian society put the past behind and move forward?

Secondly, will Hungarian Jewry be able to create a community that is theirs alone and not dictated by the desires and demands of Jewish bodies in America and Israel? For many Jews living in Europe today, there is the danger of becoming satellites to these larger international bodies. However, most Jews living in America and Israel do not understand the unique situation of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. They cannot understand why Jews living in these regions did not emigrate long ago. However, many Jews in Hungary remain closely tied to their country. They feel their Hungarian identities are just as important as their Jewish ones. Though agencies and non-governmental organisations in America, Western Europe and Israel have taken an active role in subsidising and assisting the rehabilitation of many aspects of Jewish communal life, there is now the sense that communal organisations in Hungary should stand on their own and create their agendas for the future. Whether these will be heavily influenced by the political, cultural and social wishes of external powers will be interesting to see. How will the Hungarian Jewish community respond to future Arab-Israeli conflicts? How do they feel about the current political leanings of American Jewry? How will future inclusion in the European Union effect them? Will they be able to find their own voice

in an era that is increasingly directed by large states and institutions existing outside of their own sphere?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is clear through these studies that one of the greatest challenges facing Hungarian Jewry is the debate over their community status. It is interesting to note that these chapters illustrate a people who are as equally diverse and splintered as they are connected. Perhaps more than any other Jewish population in Europe, Hungarian Jewry's complex history of social, religious and economic disparity has contributed both to their dynamism and their disintegration as a cohesive community. Those interviewed speak of the importance and necessity of the community when trying to preserve Jewish life and culture. At the same time, they point to significant differences that make it increasingly difficult for Jews to interact and integrate as a communal body. This is not a new occurrence. Hungarian Jewry has always placed high importance on mutual understanding and support while at the same time allowing critical fractures to occur between large segments of Jewish society. Georgette Spertus, a Holocaust survivor who grew up within an upper-middle class Jewish family in Budapest, spoke about the desire of her parents' generation to socialise and depend upon Jews living within the same social setting as themselves. However, they felt little connection to those Jews who followed a more orthodox lifestyle, were working class and lived outside of a cosmopolitan, urban setting.<sup>1</sup> Janos Vanderstein, a survivor from Hodmezovasarhely, speaks of the way Jews in Budapest have never understood the way of life for Jews living in Hungary's regions.<sup>2</sup> Hungarian Jewry has permitted their varying disagreements and misunderstandings to colour their interactions and acceptance of each other. It will be interesting to see whether they will be able to move

beyond these historic prejudices to firmly create a community for the future.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Georgette Spertus interview, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>2</sup> Janos Vanderstein interview, Hodmezovasarhely, Hungary.

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Swarthmore College Peace Collection, [www.swarthmore.edu/library](http://www.swarthmore.edu/library)

Selection of the letters of Jane Addams and Carrie Chapman Catt, [www.wmhis.binghamton.edu](http://www.wmhis.binghamton.edu)

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