Kata Bohus

'Hotel California'. Hungarian Jewish Refugee Experiences In Toronto After The 1956 Revolution

Introduction[1]

Following the failed revolution of 1956, about 200,000 Hungarians left their native country and about 37,000 of them landed in Canada. About 10-15 percent (20-30,000) of those leaving Hungary were Jews (Kovács, 2003), and the number of those who went to Canada has been estimated to be between 4,500 (Kage, 1962, 148) and 7,000 (Dreisziger, in: Keyserlingk, 1993, 68). Though the bare numbers might not be all that telling, if we consider that Jews constituted less than two percent of the overall population of Hungary at that time, their predominance among the immigrants is striking. Why did they leave in such high numbers? Why did they choose Canada? What identity did they assume after their arrival; did they consider themselves rather Hungarians or Jews? Or did they opt for a third way, defining themselves as Canadians? What are the main characteristics of the immigrant experiences of the Hungarian Jewish '56-ers?

Talking about his memories as a Hungarian Jewish émigré to Canada, one of my interviewees referred to the lyrics of The Eagles' hit song, Hotel California: "You can check out anytime you like but you can never leave". The cultural baggage of being a Jew in Hungary during the first part of the twentieth century weighed so heavily on the backs of émigrés that losing their heritage was not as easy as they might have hoped. After leaving their country behind, Hungarian Jews were faced with the dilemma of what their Hungarian and Jewish heritage meant to them and what the relationship between the two would be in their new environment. While previously they had opted for assimilation, after their arrival to Canada they retained elements of their Hungarian heritage while also keeping their Jewish self-consciousness. Their new environment partly facilitated and partly reinforced their choice. This paper aims at presenting the circumstances and the considerations that influenced their choices.

[1] I wish to express my wholehearted gratitude to all the people who agreed to share their memories with me. Without their sincerity, writing this paper could not have been possible; without their kindness, it would not have been so enjoyable.

Scholarly works on Hungarian immigration to Canada in general and the 1956 refugee movement in particular are quite numerous, and include valuable contributions by Nandor F. Dreisziger, Robert H. Keyserlingk and Susan M. Papp. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid so far to the Jewish component of the '56-ers, with the exception of articles by Peter I. Hidas. This study aims to fill at least part of the scholarly gap by concentrating on the emigration and early settlement experience of Jews among the '56-ers who settled in Toronto.

I do not claim to make an overarching theory about what the general experience should have been and how oral testimonies should be interpreted. Neither do I claim universality for my conclusions, as they might not be accurate for other '56-er Hungarian Jews in other Canadian cities, and may not mesh with recollections recorded at other times. What I offer here is one possible narrative of a story that has not been told yet.

The Hungarian Experience

In order to understand the motivation of Hungarian Jews to leave their country in 1956 and their integration patterns after their arrival in Canada, it is necessary to look through the general patterns of their identity formation in Hungary. T. D. Kramer's book title From *Emancipation to Catastrophe* is a sadly accurate summary of the history of Hungarian Jews from the early nineteenth century until the Second World War.

Before the First World War, the Jewry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire were living in a relatively calm environment, enjoying the benefits of full emancipation.[2] Hungarian liberal nationalism was in favour of Jewish attempts at assimilation because Hungarians did not constitute an ethnic majority on their own territories and because Jews were willing to occupy positions that Christians refused, especially in trade and commerce. However, following the First World War, the Versailles Treaties redrew the map of Central Europe, and a new and considerably smaller Hungary emerged with a population that was dominantly Hungarian. As a result, Jews were no longer needed to tip the ethnic balance and were

[2] The Act XVII. of 1867 acknowledged that the „Israelite inhabitants of the country (i.e. Hungary) have the right to exercise all civil and political rights that the Christian inhabitants do". In 1895 the Hungarian Parliament enacted the law about the religious emancipation of Jews which included the 'Israelite faith' among the established and state-supported religions. (Act XLII. of 1895) With these two laws, the civil and religious emancipation of Hungarian Jewry was implemented.

singled out as scapegoats for the economic hardships the country faced during the inter-war years.[3]

In hope of turning around some of the territorial losses inflicted upon the country by the Versailles Treaties, Hungary enlisted among the allies of the only powerful European actor that was willing to support such aspirations: Hitler's Germany. This alliance led to Hungary's entrance to WWII on the side of the Axis powers, and enacting ever harsher antisemitic laws against the country's Jews.[4] As the war unfolded and German defeat became ever more probable, Hungary's leading political circles made clumsy attempts to switch over to the Allied side. This led to Hungary's German invasion in March 1944, and the implementation of the 'final solution' against Hungarian Jewry. In May 1944, massive deportations began. By early July, over four hundred thousand Jews and other dissident Hungarians were transported to concentration camps of the Third Reich. From October 1944 until the arrival of the Red Army, the German-appointed Hungarian Nazi Arrow Cross (Nyilaskeresztes) government instituted a reign of terror, and its police units killed thousands of Jews in the capital and in death-marches towards Austria. By the time the Soviet army reached Hungary, only a minority of the country's Jews survived.

During the short-lived coalition period after the arrival of the Soviet Red Army, no social self-examination regarding responsibility for the Holocaust took place. The public perception was that "more Jews returned from Auschwitz than had been taken away" (Reuveni,1989, 48). The communists' rise to power in 1948 did nothing to change this situation. While the communist ideology's promise of egalitarianism and the abolition of religion discredited antisemitism; its condemnation of any consciousness – should it be ethnic, cultural or national – apart from class identity provided anti-Jewish arguments with some legitimacy. As far as communists were concerned, they were interested in the maintenance of a "negative, identity-

[3] As the territorial losses resulted in the formation of significant Hungarian national minority groups outside Hungary's new borders, the rhetoric of various governments under Regent Miklós Horthy's stewardship emphasized the need to preserve and positively discriminate the remaining 'authentic' Christian Hungarian population within the country. The anti-Jewish *Numerus Clausus* law of 1920 was the first of its kind in Europe, and aimed at limiting Jewish enrolment in higher education.

[4] The 1929 world economic strengthened social tensions, and brought about the resurgence of far-right and antisemitic political forces. As the country moved towards the right of the political spectrum during the 1930s, the governments increasingly sought to provide the Christian population with economic advantages against their Jewish counterparts. The first 'Jewish Law' in 1938 – which limited the access of Jews to the civil service and certain professions – was quickly followed by other antisemitic political measures.

denying social conduct" of the Jewish population (Csepeli, 1990, 93), and, in the meantime, offered a new, progressive ideological identity for them in the form of class consciousness.

Nevertheless, in stark contrast to this professed ideology, the late Stalinist era in the Soviet Union was marked by "the most explicitly antisemitic policies in Soviet history" (Gitelman, 1990, 20). The leader's final paranoiac outburst was the 'doctors plot' purge in early 1953, when Jewish physicians were accused of collaborating with the American Joint Distribution Committee[5] and planning to kill several Soviet leaders. The fact that Hungarian leader Mátyás Rákosi and his principal lieutenants were Jewish did not make them any more sympathetic to Hungarian Jews. The events in the USSR were almost repeated in Hungary with plans for a similar anti-Jewish purge. The preparations were aborted only by Stalin's death, which caused a considerable political turmoil not only in the Soviet Union but in the whole Eastern bloc. In Moscow, an intra-party struggle for power began, from which Nikita Khrushchev emerged as the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. In his famous 'Secret Speech' in early 1956, Khrushchev denounced the cult of personality of his predecessor and began a massive de-Stalinization campaign.

The turn in Soviet policies did not leave the Stalinist regimes of the satellites untouched and revived the internal party struggle between Stalinist and anti-Stalinist forces. In Hungary, "the dismal social and economic consequences of Stalinist policies produced a very tense and serious political situation" (Ekiert, 1996, 45). In the summer of 1953, Hungarian leaders were summoned to Moscow and harshly criticized for bringing the country to the verge of political and economic collapse. The Kremlin insisted on significant changes, and as a consequence, Prime Minister Rákosi was replaced by Imre Nagy. Nagy soon announced the so called 'new-course' policies, and from that moment, he became the leading figure of the anti-Stalinist offensive. Yet Nagy's failure to build a strong base of followers within the party allowed Stalinist groups to consistently sabotage the implementation his reformist policies. As a result, the situation of the population did not improve significantly in the immediate years after 1953. As historian Gregorz Ekiert (1996) notes, the partially implemented reformist policies "only served to initiate the period of protracted political crisis, internal struggle, and paralysis, which was followed by Nagy's ouster in April 1955 and finally culminated in the popular revolution" (47).

[5] The Joint Distribution Committee was an institution of American Jews to provide their Eastern European fellows with financial aid.

What started on 23 October, 1956 as a peaceful demonstration to express sympathy toward the Polish workers who had risen in Poznan earlier that year ended in a popular uprising and bloodshed. The revolution became increasingly anti-communist and the Kremlin eventually decided to use military force to prevent Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, and thus the possible dissolution of the Eastern bloc. On 4 November, 1956 Soviet troops marched into Budapest and the reform communist government that had stood on the side of the revolution was dissolved, its members including Prime Minister Imre Nagy were arrested and later executed. János Kádár assumed power while the Red Army troops stayed in Hungary until the Soviet Union had collapsed.

Until the borders were again shut and the guards reoccupied their place between Hungary and Austria, a mass immigration, which included about ten percent of the Jewish community in Hungary, took place. The motivations behind the Jews' decision to leave are going to be the main topic of the following pages.

On the Road

One of the most complex questions regarding the nature of Hungarian Jewish emigration following the 1956 revolution is the reason why they left in such high numbers. Though there were various immediate motivations for people to leave in 1956, in the case of Hungarian Jews – whose experience differed from non-Jewish Hungarians – it was the Holocaust which seems to have been at the roots of most motives for leaving. The crisis situation in 1956 brought to the fore several 'push and pull' factors for Hungary's Jews that were connected to their distinctively post-Holocaust identity.

Amidst the turmoil of the revolution, there was indeed a fear of the revival of popular antisemitism. All in all, the 1956 non-Jewish Hungarian generation was the same that had witnessed, facilitated and participated in the Holocaust. Before the Communist Party transformed the 'Jewish Question' into a taboo and erased it from the agenda, public feelings had not been favourable toward Jews. There were pogroms in 1946 in the towns of Kunmadaras and Miskolc, desecrations of cemeteries and synagogues in 1947, and even a blood libel case. Therefore, Hungarian Jews were afraid of the consequences of free-flowing popular sentiments. Neither did they expect much better from the official side. It was known

that after 1945, many former minor members of the Fascist Hungarian Arrow Cross had joined the Communist Party, so some Jews felt that the government would not do much to protect them in case of antisemitic outbursts:

> "My father comes back [from shopping] and he reports to my mother that a place where he was, there was a factory there and on the wall it was written in black paint: 'Itzig, nem jutsz el Auschwitzig.' Which translates: 'Yitzhak, you will never get to Auschwitz.' So my father said to my mother:…'this is a bad sign'…So the impetus I think to come was…it was going to be a repeat of what happened when the Germans came in, the government has fallen, the government as he said, was not going to care anyway" (Author's interview 5).

Public opinion in Hungary held many beliefs for decades regarding antisemitic occurrences during the 1956 revolution. The National Office of Hungarian Israelites (Magyar Izraeliták Országos Irodája) prepared a report in January 1957 which listed twenty-four antisemitic incidents.[6] The post-1956 communist regime's propaganda certainly exaggerated any antisemitic aspects of the uprising and tried to stigmatize it as a fascist 'counter-revolution'.[7]

Nevertheless, most scholars hold the opinion that antisemitic manifestations were rare and not characteristic of the revolution. But whether or not it was really prevalent, antisemitism remained a major factor in pushing Hungary's Jews toward emigration. Peter Kenez (1995) summarized their feelings in his memoirs as follows:

> "Although people rarely talked explicitly about their lives in camps, the Nazi experience dominated their thoughts, actions, and politics. Being Jewish did not mean a belief in a certain set of laws; it meant above all, a memory of Auschwitz. Understandably perhaps, Jews saw around themselves, whether or not it was there, anti-Semitism" (80-81).

[6] For the full text of the document see: Gadó, János, "Összegyűjtöttük és regisztráltuk – antiszemita atrocitások 1956-ban" [We Collected and Registered Them – Antisemitic Atrocities in 1956] in: *Szombat*, 1992.

[7] See: *Ellenforradalmi erők a magyar októberi eseményekben* [Counter-revolutionary Forces in the Events of October in Hungary], 1957. Magyar Népköztársaság Tájékoztatási Hivatala, Budapest, Vol. IV.

The revolution did have strong nationalist features which rang alarm bells for Jews. A lot of Hungarians saw 1956 as a "real 'Hungarian' revolution…against the oppressors"[8] and the symbols that emerged during the events (the damaged Hungarian flag, the Kossuth coat of arms, and references to the 1848-49 war of independence) all had strong nationalist connotations. But whether or not non-Jewish Hungarians wanted to exclude Jews from the nation, in the hearts and minds of the latter, Hungarian nationalism had been already linked with discrimination and persecution, and evoked the memories of the Holocaust.

There was another reason connected to the Holocaust that made Hungarian Jews more likely to emigrate than other, non-Jewish Hungarians. Almost all of them had lost several close family members during the Second World War, diminishing the anchoring effect of a large family in Hungary. In addition, previous Jewish emigration waves – especially the one of Holocaust survivors only a decade earlier – had drawn many other family members, friends and acquaintances away. Hence, Hungarians of Jewish origin were likely to have some social connections in North America, which considerably facilitated their emigration process.

When the influx of the Hungarian refugees began after 1956, the Canadian press presented the new arrivals as heroes of the revolution. In reality, few of the 37,000 Hungarians arriving to Canada took an active part in the uprising. The same seems to hold for Hungarian Jews. There were, however, certain exceptions to his pattern. Charles Gati (2006) estimated that "in the mid-1950s close to three-fourth, or 75 percent, of the active anti-Stalinist Hungarian intellectuals had Jewish ancestors" (134). Some of these were forced to leave after the Soviet army had entered Hungary in order to escape the possible retributions of the state. For instance, journalist George Egri and poet George Faludy – both intellectuals of Jewish origin, who later settled in Toronto – mentioned this kind of fear as a direct cause of emigration. Egri reported that:

> "After the Hungarian revolution, my choice was very plain: either I stay home where I would have faced either a death sentence or a life sentence, none of which was very enjoyable-looking for me; or I have to leave right away after the revolution and that's what I did. I took part in the Hungarian revolution, not with

[8] Oral testimony of Emery Tary, MHSO Personal Testimony Collection of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, M-013.

> weapons because I am very afraid of all kinds of guns but as a journalist. I edited during the revolution one of the revolution's newspapers, so it was very urgent [that I leave]".[9]

Faludy was an active member of the Hungarian Writers' Association, which was one of the main organizations promoting change. He acknowledged that his role in the revolution had placed him at risk.

> "I felt myself in danger and my wife of course much more in danger.[10] And I left Hungary therefore because I wanted to live in a certain kind of freedom… I couldn't stand any kind of pressure anymore".[11]

The remarks of Egri and Faludy suggest that they were expecting retaliations from the communist state against participants in the anti-communist uprising. Those Jews who did not take an active part in the events also expected the situation would deteriorate, bringing the return of more orthodox policies or even the Stalinist terror. Hungarians, Jews and non-Jews alike, were still suffering the consequences of such policies in 1956.

Jews were especially bitter about the forced nationalization of private businesses that had taken place in the early fifties. That policy affected Jews disproportionately because their traditional engagement in commerce and trade meant they were more likely to own both small and large private businesses. In the capital, where the overwhelming majority of post-WWII Hungary's Jews lived, "more than 35% of the gainfully employed Jews… were engaged as 'independents' in commerce and industry" (Garai, 1979, 90). One of the interviewees pointed out that she could not apply to university in Hungary because her father had owned a small factory, expropriated during Stalinization, and her family members had become qualified as 'class aliens:'

[9] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with George Egri, 28 March 1978. HUN-4121-EGR, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.

[10] Faludy's wife, Zsuzsa Szegő wrote articles in the daily *Népszava* that were highly critical of the operations of the State Security Police (*Államvédelmi Hatóság*).

[11] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with George Faludy, 11 January 1978. HUN-2594-FAL, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.

> "I always wanted to leave, there was nothing left for me there…I couldn't go to university so I had to leave…that revolution came very handy for me" (Author's interview 3).

Another source also referred to continuous economic hardships as factors forcing the family to leave:

> "It was a tough decision, starting their life over once again, after so many previous beginnings: in the 1930s as a young couple; in the 1940s, enjoying a brief moment of success, before their small business was confiscated by the Nazis; once again after the war, and losing again in 1950 to nationalization".[12]

The struggle to reach the border did not differ considerably for Hungarians of Jewish and non-Jewish origin. Most of them took trains to border towns near Austria, then crossed on foot, avoiding Soviet patrols. Hungarian Jews were very much accustomed to hiding their Jewish identities, therefore it might not have been that clear who among the refugees was or was not Jewish.

Once in Vienna, some of the Hungarian Jewish refugees managed to benefit from Jewish aid organizations. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), together with the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) made a considerable effort to help but other smaller organizations were also present. For example, Jewish organizations paid for hotels for refugees of Jewish origin. Yet, the simple presence of these organizations did not immediately make the refugees feel at ease about their Jewishness. People who were traditionally accustomed to melting into the masses - either as a result of the long-standing assimilation process or because of the requirements of the Communist society that did not acknowledge any basis for identity but class – and who had previously experienced discrimination and persecution for being Jewish did not easily expose their identities.

> "Some people walked into the barrack that we were in. And they asked if there were any Jews here…I'm not looking at my parents but I'm thinking to myself: this is not a good question. But for reasons that I don't know my father said: 'I

[12] Oral testimony of Marika Kemeny, MHSO Personal Testimony Collection of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 [no reference number available].

> am.' Anyway, it turned out that they were from a Jewish relief agency..." (Author's interview 5).

Others, however, continued to hide:

> "In Vienna, we were still Catholic. Because it seemed that when we went to this Canadian place [to obtain Canadian entry visa] we were asked: 'Are you Catholic?' And then [we said] 'yes.' Anyway, the HIAS was there but we never went to them" (Author's interview 3).

Jewish émigrés from Hungary went all over the world, though Israel and the United States were the most popular destinations. "Of the 20,000 Jewish refugees, about 3,500 emigrated to Israel; about 14,000 immigrated to various overseas countries – U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Brazil, etc.; and some still remained in various Western European countries" (Kage, 1962, 147). The choice of Canada as a destination was mostly by chance, sometimes quite literally:

> "We were met by my father's first cousin… who was here already in Toronto and by my mother's aunt who was living in New York since 1923. They both came to meet us in Vienna and they both said 'Why don't you come where we are?' They offered to set us up in Toronto or New York. A kind of an argument followed and they decided to flip a coin. Heads was Toronto and tails was New York. And it landed on heads" (Author's interview 1).

It also seems plausible, however, that the country's reputation as a tolerant, multiethnic nation did serve as a pull factor for Jews and non-Jews alike:

> "[rumors in the refugee camp held that Canada is] a beautiful country and good people, it's kind of provincial, it is not too American. It's not too overcrowded and not too much hassle".[13]

[13] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with Eva Gabori, 7 March 1978. HUN-2603-GAB, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.

Also, the fact that Canada did not put a limit on the number of refugees made many who originally desired to go to the United States turn to the North after the American quota had been filled. Nevertheless, the knowledge of both Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians of their final destination country was very limited and often based on stereotypical images that evoke the novels of Karl May:

> "I am ashamed to admit but [I knew] nothing [of Canada]… I expected to go hunting for buffalos…I sort of knew that they had cities and that they spoke English".[14]

> "We didn't know almost anything about Canada except the Great Lakes and the Northern Pole, that's all. So when we decided to come to Canada, my image was that the only thing I can do here is to go into the bush and cutting wood".[15]

Contrary to these expectations, Hungarian Jewish immigrants mostly settled in large urban centres of Canada, Toronto being the most popular destination (Dreisziger, in: Keyserlingk, 1993, 68-69). The Canadian government made a joint effort with refugee aid organizations to help the newly arrived settle and find work.

The Canadian Experience

Prior to 1956, Canada's immigration policies favoured those who were English-speaking and white. In fact, only a decade earlier, the country had refused to accept almost any Jewish refugees fleeing Europe after the horrors of the Holocaust. Central and Eastern Europeans were near the bottom of Canada's immigration hierarchy. This policy was completely reversed in 1956, when the Hungarian Revolution received widespread media coverage and "became the subject of consideration in the highest councils of government" (Dreisziger, 1982, 203).

[14] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with Agota Gabor, 3 March 1978. HUN-2839-GAB, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.
[15] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with George Egri, 28 March 1978. HUN-4121-EGR, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.

After a brief period of hesitation and as a result of substantial public pressure, the Canadian government announced that it would open doors for the Hungarian refugees. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration John Whitney (Jack) Pickersgill stated in early 1957 that "our position is, as it has been throughout this matter, that we intend to take these people as long as they want to come here and it looks as though we can find accommodation for them and, in a reasonable time, find work for them".[16] Apart from humanitarian reasons, at least two other factors contributed to Ottawa's decision. First, booming Canadian economy was in need of skilled workers and the stream of Hungarian refugees could provide Canada with a pool of labourers to employ. Second, 1957 was an election year, which meant politicians tried to please public opinion in order to gain more votes. The generally positive predisposition of the public toward Hungarian 'freedom fighters' quickly led to a welcoming turn in immigration policies.

Along with the efforts of the government, various relief organizations, churches and Hungarian-Canadian civil societies mobilized their forces. Ottawa took care of the refugees' contemporary housing in Britain, France and the Netherlands and made arrangements for the transportation of thousands of people across the Atlantic by boat and plane. Civil organizations organized demonstrations, rallies and later, fund-raising to help the newly arriving refugees' settle.

Similarly, the actual integration of the Hungarian refugees into Canadian society became a joint effort on the part of the government, welfare agencies and the Hungarian-Canadian community. The cost of the whole operation was $14 million (Kelly, Trebilcock, 1998, 341) for a country that "behaved more magnanimously than during any previous refugee emergency" (Dirks, 1977, 200). There was no discrimination on Canada's part against Jewish refugees, though there were instances when certain officials could have been accused of antisemitic remarks. For instance, Canada's Ambassador to Austria, J.S. Macdonald repeatedly warned Ottawa about the high proportion of Jews among the Hungarian refugees and advised the government to restrict their entry to Canada (Hidas, 2007, 79). Nevertheless, such suggestions were either flatly rejected, or never even considered at higher political levels.

[16] Pickersgill's speech in the House of Commons on 25 January, 1957. In: *House of Commons Debates*, 1958, Queen's Printer, Ottawa, p. 666.

The Jewish Immigrant Aid Service[17] made efforts to help the arriving Hungarian Jewish refugees and the Hungarian Jewish Association of Toronto "issued an appeal to all Canadian Jews to donate funds for the purchase of medical supplies" (Papp, 1979-1980, 63), which they later transferred to the Red Cross. The JIAS also set up a Hungarian Refugee Relief and Reception Committee, alongside other sub-committees.[18] One source reported that representatives of Canada's several religious communities participated in the welcoming committees. This open differentiation was only natural on the part of Canadians who were comfortable expressing their ethno-religious status, but some Hungarian Jews were again alarmed by the possible consequences:

> "Some people walk in, ask who the Jews are. But this time, I can see… the representative of the Church, the Catholic Church…and the Jewish Agency were handing out clothing and fruit and chocolate and other things. And the priest was handing out prayer cards. And those prayer cards didn't go down all that well… the Catholics were starting to get upset and I had this sense that here is a re-enactment of everything that I thought that the Christians thought about the Jews: the Jews have food, they don't have food; the Jews took our money, they don't have money. We have clothes, they don't have clothes…Although nothing ended up happening, it was a very disturbing experience" (Author's interview 5).

Although of the above case does not suggest religious discrimination, it seems that Jewish aid efforts were more practical, concentrating on the immediate material needs of the refugees. The main reason for that may be that, though Jewish religious communities were formed relatively late in Canada, they had to cope with several waves of sometimes massive Jewish immigration while, for the most part, other religious communities had only to deal with a trickle of their co-religionists. Jewish immigration to Canada during the 1880s – following the pogroms in Russia and especially after the Holocaust – taught the existing community how to raise funds, provide efficient help and integrate the newcomers.

Though the extent of immigrant aid efforts on the part of the Canadian Jewish community is not covered in this paper, it must be acknowledged that Peter I. Hidas (2007), the only

[17] Harold Troper (2001) points out the cooperation of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service with federal and provincial government agencies during the Hungarian refugee movement after the 1956 revolution (17).
[18] For further details about the organizational framework see *JIAS News*, June 1957 (Montreal).

source that deals with the subject in considerable detail, claims that the Canadian Jewish Congress refused to mobilize substantial resources to aid Hungarian Jews arriving to Canada (75-89). Several interviewees claimed that they did not get any kind of refugee aid from Canadian Jewish organizations, but this might also be at least partly the consequence of their own behavior, their own pride which prevented them from seeking organizational help. Not only did Hungarian Jews not integrate into the existing Jewish organizational framework in Toronto but they did not really take part in the formation of Hungarian ethnic-cultural institutions either. These have to do with the survival of older patterns of self-perception that they brought with them in their cultural baggage. That cultural baggage was considerably different in content than that of the existing Canadian Jewish community.

The latter population in the 1950s – and still today – could be broadly described as "more traditional, more unified, closer to the old country, and more culturally homogenous than in the United States… Canadian Jews could easily maintain their Jewishness in a country that had no coherent self-definition" (Irving, in: Adelman, Simpson, 1996, xiii-xiv). In metropolitan Toronto Jews formed 6.0 percent of the total population in the beginning of the 1950s (Rosenberg, 1955, 9); many were Orthodox, Conservative, and there were less Reformed congregations. According to the Canadian Jewish Year Book of 1959,

> "Differences among the three groups are mainly in ritual and observances, rather than in theology. Orthodox synagogues conduct services exclusively in Hebrew… Conservative synagogues use some English and permit the seating together of men and women. Reformed temples, also known as Liberal Houses of Worship, hold their services mainly in English and in addition to the men – women seating arrangement of the Conservatives, also use the organ during their services" (42).

Though there was no detailed information available, it was estimated that "the majority of the foreign-born Jewish population in Toronto in 1951 was born in Poland" (Rosenberg, 35) and the two most commonly known and used languages were Yiddish and English (43).

Into this environment arrived the mostly secular, and if religious, mostly Neolog (Reformed), Hungarian-speaking, assimilated urban Jews in 1956-57. No wonder that they felt that:

> "We knew about them [Orthodox Jews already living in Toronto] but my family didn't really associate with them. To me, Orthodox Jews were as different as anybody else: weird... We felt as separate from them as we did from Italians or English or whoever. Because what's peculiar to this culture is that many of the Jews who were already here were… Polish and Russian Jews… who came over in 1905 or 1908 and 1895… many of them were second or third generation Jews. Even the Jews I know today… they speak Yiddish…" (Author's interview 1).

The language barrier became very significant in separating Hungarian Jews from those already living in Toronto. The new immigrants, though most of them indeed made a huge effort to learn English as fast as possible, did not speak either of the two official languages of the country and Yiddish was just as new to most. Moreover, their predisposition to the latter was negative:

> "Not only that Hungarian Jews don't speak Yiddish they were mean about Yiddish. They thought Yiddish was lower class and Hungarian Jews were very haughty about their origin… Hungarian Jewish culture was considerably different… Polish Jews were considered uneducated and lower class and they spoke this weird language no Hungarians wanted to speak. So they [Hungarian Jews] were arrogant" (Author's interview 1).

This behavioral pattern was predetermined by the historical development of Hungarian Jewry and reflected their century-old perceptions. During the period of the formation of a distinguishable Hungarian culture during the first half of the nineteenth century, Jews opted to speak Hungarian to avoid being "pitted against Liberalism, against Jewish emancipation and against the dominant cultural nation of the lands they inhabited" (McCagg, 1972, 92). Closely linked to their embrace of Hungarian language was their self-definition as a religious entity rather than an ethnic minority. Being highly urbanized and becoming increasingly integrated into mainstream society, they reached higher social ranks than Polish and Russian Jews who were at that time confined to ghettos and restricted in socio-economic mobility.

The first significant contact between Polish and Hungarian Jews in the modern period was the result of the Russian invasion of Galicia and the Carpathians during the First World

War. Escaping from the Russians, a significant number of Orthodox Jews fled to Hungary, inducing resentment among a number of Jewish Hungarians and creating yet another excuse for growing popular antisemitism among the non-Jews. Forty years later, the situation was reversed in Canada; the rather secular, urbanized, Hungarian speaking Jews were the ones arriving and finding a very different environment than what they had left behind. But old perceptions about 'the other' seem to have been retained.

Nazi persecution and the decade of Communism experienced by Hungarian Jews added yet another aspect to previously existing differences:

> "The Jews that were here were very weird to me. For one thing, they were not hiding their Jewishness…The Jews that were here were very loudly Jewish, they were very noisy Jews. And that did not appeal to Hungarians that much" (Author's interview 1).

Hungarian Jews had learned – or so they thought – that in order to reduce the chances of being persecuted or discriminated against, they had to hide, if not to forget their Jewishness. In the nineteenth century, they sought to do this through assimilation into mainstream Hungarian culture. During the years of growing antisemitism, and especially during the 1930s, a lot of them abandoned their religion and hoped to find refuge under the disguise of Christianity. After 1945, they tried or were forced to believe that communist internationalism would eliminate antisemitism. With these experiences in mind, the '56-ers arrived to Toronto and saw that not only did a lot of Canadian Jews not speak English as a first language, but they also directly exposed their ethno-religious Jewish identity by forming Jewish neighborhoods, taking part in Jewish communal organizations, maintaining a kosher diet, and following Jewish religious practices. Coming from a monoethnic society, it took them time to understand that since "there is no single Canadian people or Canadian culture… it [is] easier for minority groups, such as the Jews, to maintain a separate identity and even a separate culture; where everyone is a hyphenated Canadian, Jews do not stand out from their fellow countrymen when they include the Jewish as well as the Canadian element in their identity" (Eleazar, Waller, 1990, 5). For the '56-ers, the hyphen had previously been 'Hungarian-Jewish' with a considerable emphasis on the first part and mostly referring to the second as something parenthetical. In Canada, they saw people who were 'Jewish-Canadian' with a very strong emphasis on the former.

If Hungarian Jews felt alienated from Canadian Jews, the latter were in turn similarly resentful toward them. Peter I. Hidas (2007) notes that, in a letter written in early 1957, Rabbi S.L. Eckerstein informed Saul Hayes[19] that "he did not consider the Hungarians Jewish at all since they intermarry, use no religious chupah, no bris and often register themselves as Roman Catholic" (84). However, the Hungarian Jewish community in Toronto tried to put pressure on the Canadian Jewish Congress, as well as other Hungarian Jewish communities in the country to allocate funds for the new immigrants. They even suggested to the CJC to work together with other non-Jewish Hungarian organizations in Canada, however, these appeals were not successful.

Naturally, there existed some tensions between earlier Hungarian Jewish immigrants and the newly arrived. One of my interviewees (2) recalled that the earlier Jewish immigrants called themselves the 'but we' Hungarians ('bezzeg magyarok') because they thought they had had a much more difficult task settling down in Canada than the '56-ers who were provided with all kinds of refugee aid. The name arises from claims like 'You had all kinds of help, but we had a much harder time.' This is not to suggest that those who had settled earlier did not go out of their way to help their brethren:

> "My husband phoned uncle Móric in New York and uncle Móric knew somebody… who knew Zimmermann and the Zimmermann, who had never ever even heard of us, guaranteed us. This is how we managed to come to Toronto… These Zimmermanns took us to the Hungarian Jewish ball and my husband met a former classmate of his who worked in Mount Sinai, the Jewish hospital…his wife was in the laundry… and she said that she would try to bring me in" (Author's interview 3).

Partly as a natural process and partly due to their differences from Canadian Jews, in the years following their arrival in 1956-57, Jews from Hungary formed a separate and eventually quite lively community with balls, card-playing parties, getaways to Lake Simcoe, a club called Horizont and even the beginnings of a religious community.

[19] Saul Hayes was the Executive Director of the Canadian Jewish Council in 1957.

> "A congregation was set up by Zágon, rabbi Zágon... Near Yonge and Eglinton there was a hockey-rink and on high holidays, Zágon took over this place and called those people together. And there were a lot of people in those early years who came to those services. And that was the only time he had services, he didn't have every Saturday. It was in Hungarian. It was an interesting community, that's for sure and of course it spread out" (Author's interview 1).

> "There was a Hungarian Rabbi: Rabbi Zágon… He kept the Hungarian Jews together, those who - like us - were not religious. When the major holidays came, he rented a place and we went there, but otherwise we didn't [go to the synagogue]…While he was alive, he kept these [people] together" (Author's interview 4).

Another important cultural entity that was formed after 1956 was the journal *Menorah-Egyenlőség* [Menorah-Equality] which appeared in 1962 and served not only Toronto's Hungarian Jewish community but also had columns from New York and Tel Aviv. Apart from a growing number of advertisements for typically smaller Hungarian Jewish businesses in Canada and the US, the journal featured literary pieces, memoires, and a wide variety of political commentaries. This structure probably reflected the needs of the newcomers, as the editor of the paper, George Egri noted:

> "There were two of them [i.e. Hungarian newspapers] at that time but none of them were suitable for the newcomers. These newspapers at that time looked to us absolutely obsolete, it was another world… They were so old-style, so backward in political leanings, in political opinion that people who spent years and years in Middle-Europe (sic) during Communist regime, which with all the shortcomings had some good points as well, namely the education of the average people were much higher than it was before WWII in Hungary. So, our feeling was that these newcomers need a new newspaper and so it was".[20]

Menorah-Egyenlőség started as a monthly paper but soon it became a weekly with more pages. It is still being published in Toronto to this day.

[20] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with George Egri, 28 March 1978. HUN-4121-EGR, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.

One feature particular to the 1956 wave of Hungarian immigration to Canada was that "they were predominantly young people…thousands were university students…(and) professional and intellectual elements were over-represented among the refugees" (Dreisziger, in: Keyserlingk, 1993, 68-69).Though there are no similar statistics available regarding the Jewish component of this emigration movement, one can still speculate on its features. After the Second World War, the class structure of Hungarian Jewry was very different than prior to 1944 inasmuch as, due to the selectivity of the Holocaust, middle and upper classes became overrepresented. After 1948, Jews became frequently employed in all levels of the bureaucratic state apparatus partly because they were considered 'ideologically reliable' and partly because, due to their social position, they possessed many urban, middle-class competences required for such jobs. Based on these features of the post-war Jewish population of Hungary, it is probable that Jews were also over-represented among the middle and upper classes of the '56-ers.

Nevertheless, Hungarian Jews (like all immigrants) had to face the problems posed by their lack of language knowledge and the inapplicability of certain professional skills. This problem was especially grave for certain intellectuals such as journalists, actors or writers, whose professions required the mastering of the language they used. For example, theatre director and writer András Erőss had to start working in a factory upon his arrival to Canada[21] and journalist George Egri worked as a mover and then as a cleaner.[22] Most Jewish '56-ers reported some degree of status loss right after arrival but they seemed to accept it and they also climbed quite quickly up the social ladder. Some went back to school sooner or later and attained a Canadian degree.

Hungarian Jewish '56-ers were satisfied with their new country. The most important positive features about Canada that the interviewees mentioned was freedom, multi-ethnic environment, people's respect of the others' privacy and a wide range of possibilities. That Hungarian Jews felt at ease and secure in Toronto was illustrated by the decision of a number

[21] 'Erőss András meséli – szakmát cseréljen az, ki hazát cserél' (András Erőss recalls – one who changes the homeland, has to change profession too), in: *Menorah-Egyenlőség*, 8 January 1977, 13.
[22] MHSO Oral History Collection, Interview with George Egri, 28 March 1978. HUN-4121-EGR, Interviewer: Magda Zalan.

of them to invite their parents to live with them in Canada. For these financially burdensome operations, they could count on each other:

> "There was a kind of camaraderie among Jewish Hungarians. We had to submit the papers…for bringing the parents here… It was about proving that we had enough money in the bank. Well, we did not have enough money in the bank…somebody whom somebody else knew lent us a thousand dollars….and we put that in the bank" (Author's interview 3).

Conclusions

Exactly one hundred years after the first synagogue was erected in the City of Toronto, a few thousand Jews arrived to Canada from Hungary, escaping the consequences – real or imagined – of the popular uprising of 1956. In their country of origin, they had felt that they had to be more Hungarian and less Jewish to be accepted; in their new country they were surprised to find that they were actually perceived as more Hungarian than Jewish. In Hungary and on their long journey to Canada, they were still afraid to reveal their Jewish identity; upon arrival they found it strange that they could, and were expected to, express it freely. The tension between these historical pressures is the essence of the Hungarian Jewish refugee experience of 1956-57.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century and the dawn of nationalism, the Jews of Hungary opted for assimilation into mainstream society. The situation changed following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, when Hungary was reborn as a monoethnic nation. Because assimilated Jews no longer served the interests of Hungarian ethnic hegemony, they found themselves increasingly isolated and frequently targets of antisemitism. The country, previously safe for Jews, turned against them very quickly and Hungarians eventually assisted in their annihilation by the Nazis during the Second World War.

The 191,000 Jews who survived the Holocaust and stayed in Hungary would experience another kind of oppression by the Stalinist state. Deprived of most human rights and the possibility of maintaining their Jewish identity, a good proportion of the Jews of Hungary

(about 20 percent) would leave the country the very next moment it was possible to do so. That moment arrived in 1956.

Fear of the revival of antisemitism; the lack of extended family ties as a result of the decimating effect of the Holocaust; economic hardships resulting from the nationalization carried out in the late forties and early fifties; and the anticipation of severe retaliations by the communist state following the revolution were among the major push factors that contributed to the decision of Hungary's Jews to leave. Connections in North-America, mostly as a result of the post-Holocaust Jewish emigration wave from Europe, combined with the promise of freedom and economic development, presented a major draw toward the American continent. Though the choice of Canada over the United States was mostly haphazard, the Canadian government's 'doors-open' policy and the effective refugee aid it provided shortly after the revolution did influence decisions.

Upon arrival, Hungarian Jews faced the same challenges as any other immigrants. They had to learn the language, find accommodation and employment, and integrate into their new environment. Though the Canadian government, refugee organizations (particularly the Red Cross), and Canadian Jewish aid societies did provide them with some minor material help, in terms of social integration, they were largely left to fend for themselves. The official representatives of the Canadian Jewish community considered their Hungarian brethren too secular, and in turn, Hungarian Jews thought that the mostly Orthodox Canadian Jews were odd and too loudly Jewish. The fact that the majority of Hungarian Jews did not speak Yiddish and had only just started to learn English (the two major languages of the Canadian Jewish community) presented a real language barrier that only made the integration process more difficult.

As immigrants of a very different national, linguistic, and cultural heritage, '56-er Hungarian Jews eventually formed an enclave community in Canada. By the early 1960s, they had their own religious gatherings (though only on major Jewish holidays), a newspaper, social clubs, and other organizations. The continuous fading of this enclave is partly the result of the fact that they have never managed to form a coherent religious community due to their secular orientation, or to join the non-Jewish Hungarian cultural community organizations that seemed to be too nationalistic for Hungarian Jews who have felt that their mother-country had betrayed them several times throughout history.

Hungary had offered assimilation but never really embraced its Jews as fellow nationals, a contradiction that culminated in the Holocaust and the destruction of about sixty percent of Hungarian Jewry. Then, it offered the elimination of antisemitism through the ideal of Communism but, charged a high price for that safety – Jews would have to deny their Jewish identities – and at any rate, Communism never did manage to eradicate antisemitism.

"Jewish unity is in the main a myth", wrote Morton Weinfeld (2001, 349) and this case illustrates it clearly. Yet the experiences of Soviet-Jewish immigrants arriving to Canada in the 1970s as described by Markus & Schwartz (1984) and Glickman (1996), were strikingly similar to those of the Jewish '56-ers from Hungary. These authors found that former Soviet Jews in Canada attributed great importance to their Soviet/Russian heritage, showed little interest in joining the established Jewish communal organizations and seemed to "suffer from a sense of alienation in the Jewish community" (Markus, Schwartz, 1993, 417). At times the words of this later wave of immigrants echoed almost perfectly those of Hungarian Jews: "In the Soviet Union we were considered Jews. Here we are seen as Russians" (417).

Perhaps future research should not examine Hungarian Jewish experience in isolation but investigate the possibility of a new and distinctive kind of Jewish immigrant experience. Characterized by long decades of forced assimilation, neither Hungarian Jews in the late fifties, nor Soviet Jews in the seventies met the expectations of the existing Canadian Jewish community in terms of religious observance, cultural character and integration. Moreover, both communities felt that the framework of the established Canadian Jewish community was inadequate to their needs and formed their own organizations. It seems that both these late waves of Jewish immigration to Canada constituted of Jews who were very much attached to certain secular and/or non-Jewish elements of their culture of origin and wanted to retain these features in their identification. Broader Canadian society as a whole permitted and facilitated their several levels of identification but the established Jewish communal framework was too rigid to accommodate such needs.

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