7. THE NATURE OF POST-YUGOSLAV JEWRY

Although this thesis is not a sociological study, the attempt will be made to describe some socio-demographic features of the post-Yugoslav Jewish community and population in order to evaluate these features in relation to the transition from the Yugoslav to the post-Yugoslav period. The demographic developments in the post-war period and among post-Yugoslav Jewry will be discussed briefly, and an effort will be made to analyse the process of acculturation and/or assimilation of the Jewish minority. Finally, the process of identification among Jews, and how it was affected by the unfortunate events in the former Yugoslavia, will be reviewed. On the basis of the findings of this chapter, the transformation in the nature of former Yugoslav Jewry which has taken place as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia will be illustrated by surveying post-war and post-Yugoslav Jewry with the help of the chart presented by Daniel Elazar to illuminate the shape of contemporary Diaspora Jewish communities. In this chart the Jewish communities are portrayed as a series of concentric circles radiating outward from the hard core of committed Jews towards areas of semi-Jewishness in the outer circles and on to the fringes, where the community phases into society in general. The circles from the hard core outwards are as follows: (1) Integral Jews (living according to a Jewish rhythm); (2) Participants (involved in Jewish life on a regular basis); (3) Associated Jews (affiliated with Jewish institutions in a concrete way); (4) Contributors and Consumers (giving money and/or utilising the services of Jewish institutions from time to time); (5) Peripherals (recognisably Jewish in some way but completely uninvolved in Jewish life); (6) Repudiators (seeking to deny or repudiate their Jewishness) and (7) Quasi-Jews (Jewish status unclear as a result of intermarriage or assimilation in some other form).[476]

7.1. NOTES ON THE DEMOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT

A demographic picture of post-war Yugoslav Jewry is not easy to obtain. The actual size of the Jewish population can be established neither from the official censuses of Yugoslavia nor from the censuses of Jewish Federation. The number of members in the Jewish communities did not reflect the actual number of Jews since

476 Elazar 1997–98, 124, 126.

membership was voluntary and many Jews opted not to be listed as members.[477] Further, not all members of the Jewish communities were Jews, since non-Jewish members of a Jewish household were registered as members of Jewish communities, irrespective of their religion, if they so wished. Moreover, no individual's religion was registered in official documents, and personal identity cards in Yugoslavia mentioned neither nationality nor religion.[478] Because the criterion of being a member of the Jewish community was not a *halachic* one and membership was voluntary, the size of the Jewish community naturally fails to correspond to the real size of the Jewish population in post-war Yugoslavia. In general, as Rebecca Golbert points out in her article on the study of Post-Soviet Jewish identities, Jewish population estimates cannot be taken too seriously, given the total uncertainty about who is being counted and which method of distinction between Jews and non-Jews is being applied.[479] This must be taken into account in all Jewish demographic studies of former Communist countries, and is certainly the case with the demography of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav Jewry.

With regard to the former Yugoslavia, the classification of the Jewish population into a *core* and an *enlarged* Jewish population, introduced by Sergio Dellapergola, is helpful even though its adaptation to the post-Yugoslav period is certainly a complicated matter. The *core* consists of people who consider themselves Jewish; while the *enlarged* population also includes people who previously considered themselves Jewish, other persons of recent Jewish descent, and non-Jewish household members associated with any of these categories.[480] Thus belonging to the *core* group is largely a matter of self-definition, and not of a clear-cut *halachic* ruling, which makes it difficult to determine who should be counted as belonging to this group in the former Yugoslavia. In any case, both these categories must be taken into account in determining demographically the Jewish population in the former Yugoslavia, which also, in fact, illustrates the distinctive nature of Yugoslav Jewry. The borderline between the *core* and *enlarged* Jewish population in the

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477 Singer, Aća 6.6.1996. One reason for this was that the community records were misused during the Holocaust period, for example.

478 Perić 1977, 269, 274. Thus the practice in Yugoslavia was different from that in the USSR, for example. In the four general population censuses after World War II up to 1971 in Yugoslavia, the question of religion was only included in the 1953 census questionnaire; the censuses of 1948, 1961 and 1971 inquired only after 'nationality', and in addition, in the census of 1971 response to the question on 'nationality' was voluntary.

479 Golbert, Rebecca: "In search of a meaningful framework for the study of post-Soviet Jewish identities, with special emphasis on the case of Ukraine". *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 1998, 16.

480 Dellapergola, Sergio: "An overview of the demographic trends of European Jewry". In Jonathan Webber (ed.): *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*. (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.) London – Washington: Littman 1994, 57.

former Yugoslavia was certainly a vague one, although estimates can be made on the basis of different censuses which serve as indicators.

There exists a remarkably wide discrepancy between the Jewish censuses and the official Yugoslav censuses on the Jewish population of Yugoslavia. The general population census of 1953 gives the figure of only 4,872 persons for the Jewish population, of whom 2,307 were registered by religion and 2,565 by nationality. Of the general population censuses held since World War II, only this census can be said to be at all reliable as an indicator of the size of the *core* Jewish population, since respondents were given the possibility of defining their Jewish identification on the basis of either religion or nationality, a choice that was lacking in the later censuses which only inquired after nationality. The 1953 census presumably excluded non-Jewish members of Jewish households, and identification as Jews, whether on the basis of religion or nationality, required self-definition, which resulted in a figure of about 4,900 belonging to the *core* Jewish population. Fewer than half as many, only 2,110, identified themselves as Jews in the general census of 1961.[481]

The reason for this dramatic decrease is clear, as those who had defined their Jewishness by religion in 1953 lacked this option in the census of 1961 and obviously declared themselves to be Yugoslavs, Serbs, Croats etc. according to their nationality. An increase to close to the numbers of the 1953 census is recorded in the census of 1971 in which 4,811 Jews were recorded. In his otherwise informative study, Perić gives a mistaken explanation for this striking discrepancy in numbers within only 10 years. According to Perić the higher number is due to a computing error in the processing of the data, and the correct figure should be about 3,800 in 1971 census.[482] This explanation is implausible as the census gives a certain population of Jews for every locality where they lived, and these figures support the higher, official figures;[483] also, the official census of 1971 corresponds quite closely with the demographic survey conducted by the Jewish Federation as to numbers. The Federation of Jewish Communities organised a country-wide survey

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481 Perić 1977, 269.

482 Perić 1977, 286. Perić argues that in many localities where Jews were registered in the official census of 1971, there were hardly any Jews left, and then he assumes that the number of Jews in about 30 different localities, 1,157 should be corrected to be 157! Retrospectively, however, it is evident that the official census was not distorted by computing error, but rather that most of the Jews registered in their census were not members of the Jewish communities. This can be shown by comparing the official census and the Jewish population study and noting the discrepancy with regard to Croatia. The official census gives the number of Jews as 2,845 while the Jewish population study only gives 1,733 (Perić 1977, 284). The discrepancy is easily explained by the considerable number of Jews outside the Jewish community orbit, a fact which came to light as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia (see page 178).

483 Perić 1977, 286.

of members of Jewish communities and Jewish households between 1971–72, the results of which indicate that the *core* Jewish population had stabilised since the end of emigration. In this demographic study a questionnaire was distributed to 4,702 individuals in 2,577 Jewish households containing altogether 6,457 persons. The demographic survey was based on 4,702 individuals, and even more precisely, the 4,414 adults among them, of whom 4,199 declared themselves to be Jews. 68 per cent of the persons enumerated were of Jewish parentage from both sides.[484] The results show that the *core* Jewish population was about 4,000, of whom at least 75 per cent were Jews according to the *halachic* order; in precise terms, of these 4,702 individuals 3,521 were Jews i.e. children of a Jewish mother,[485] while the total membership of the Jewish communities was then 5,696.[486]

The only acceptable explanation of the discrepancy between the 1961 and 1971 censuses is that many Jews did not identify themselves as Jews in 1961 for the simple reason that they faced a restricted choice, as religious identification was no longer an option. This does not imply that the 'missing' part of the Jewish population were religious; they were simply used to defining themselves as Jews by their faith, in the same way as Croats were Catholic by faith and Serbs Orthodox in general. The general attitude towards religion had, however, been oppressive since the end of World War II, and especially for Jews it was convenient to blend with the majority nationalities, and represent themselves above all as Yugoslavs. This was a natural identification for many Jews who had previously, especially during the inter-war period, identified themselves as Jews by faith, but nationally as belonging to the South-Slav nations, i.e. Serb of Mosaic faith, for example. Consequently the official censuses of 1953 and 1971 are more reliable indicators than the census of 1961 in the attempt to determine the approximate number of Jews in the former Yugoslavia.

With some hesitation it can be concluded that the general censuses reflected the number of *core* Jews as in these censuses a self-definition was required. By contrast, the number of Jewish community members reflects the *enlarged* Jewish population better, as it includes many non-Jewish members of Jewish households. Moreover, as Marko Perić has noted, there were a number of Jews who had no contact whatsoever with the Jewish communities, but who declared themselves to be Jews,[487] and were thus, technically at least, a part of the *core* group, but nevertheless fell outside the Federation's surveys. What this shows is that not all those who identified themselves as Jews were registered members of the Jewish communities.

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484 Perić 1977, 275, 278.

485 Perić 1977, 277.

486 *Jevrejski Kalendar* 5735 *(1974–1975).*

487 Perić 1977, 270.

It can be established with a certain probability that after the Second World War and the waves of emigration in the years 1948–52, the *core* Jewish population, which lasted relatively unchanged until the disintegration of Yugoslavia, was about 4,000. The *enlarged* Jewish population was naturally considerably larger, as it also included many people of Jewish origin who were not registered in the communities. The 1971–72 demographic survey of the Jewish community also indicates the level of participation in Jewish activities in the post-war Yugoslavia. About 25 per cent of Jews who were 15 years or older, numbering about 1,000 persons, took part in Jewish activities, and Jewish holidays and customs were observed or not entirely neglected by about 2,000 respondents.[488]

An unfavourable age structure and an exceptionally high rate of intermarriage were seen as the main threats to the post-war Yugoslav Jewish community.[489] As the previous chapter indicated, according to some estimates the rate of intermarriage was over 90 per cent, and it was considered an exception for two Jews to marry each other.[490] In this context it must be remembered that 68 per cent of the Jews recorded in the Federation census in 1971–72 were still of Jewish parentage from both sides, as observed earlier. This means that these children of Jewish parents were the first generation with a large number of mixed marriages. So it can be seen that this trend increased considerably in the 1950s and 1960s. The reasons for this are not too difficult to comprehend: Tito's Yugoslavia favoured 'mixing' of ethnic groups in general, and in the case of the Jewish population, the availability of Jewish partners was understandably very limited. Thus intermarriage was an approved option in Yugoslav society in general, and often the only available option for the Jews. From the Jewish point of view, however, intermarriage is considered to be part of the process defined as assimilation, which results in a reduced individual Jewish identification and diminishing intensity of attachment to Jewish community life.[491] Interestingly enough, in the Yugoslav context a relatively high number of children from mixed marriages remained within the sphere of the Jewish communities irrespective of whether their mother or father was Jewish.[492] In fact, non-Jews who married Jews in the former Yugoslavia married into the community, and so intermarriage increased the number of members of the Jewish communities, as the former coordinator of the Skopje Jewish community indicated in an interview with the Jerusalem Post.[493] The former long-serving President of the Federation, Lavoslav Kadelburg, said that the non-Jewish partner in intermarriage, though not a

488 Perić 1977, 284.

489 Freidenreich 1984, 58.

490 Hostein 1990, 32.

491 Dellapergola 1997, 1.

492 Kadelburg 1969, 117; Steiner 1971, 234.

493 *Jerusalem Post* 18.6.1999.

convert, often identifies with Jews and the parents together raise their children as Jews.[494] It was generally observed in the former Yugoslavia that non-Jewish spouses of Jews were very active in Jewish community activities, often more 'Jewish' than their spouses of Jewish origin.[495] As many as 12 per cent of Jewish community members were of non-Jewish origin according to the 1985 Jewish community demographic survey.[496] These members can, if the definition given by Dellapergola is strictly followed, be perceived as belonging to the *core* group, since they define themselves as Jews in spite of their non-Jewish origin, and not as officially recognised *giyyur*. This trend can certainly considered as a specific feature of Yugoslav Jewry, in marked contrast to the normal pattern in Diaspora Jewish communities. Consequently intermarriage had a positive effect on the demography of the Yugoslav Jewish population, as far as the number of Jews in the communities is concerned. Intermarriage served, in fact, as a counter force against other factors threatening the future of the Jewish population i.e. the unfavourable age structure and low birth-rate.[497] All in all, in post-war Yugoslavia, attachment to the Jewish community was not diminished because of the high rate of intermarriage. Although the unfavourable age structure and low birth-rate were the real threats to Jewish existence, this development was countered to some extent by non-Jews marrying into the Jewish community and having children who also usually remained within the sphere of the community.

Not surprisingly, the transition from Yugoslav to post-Yugoslav Jewry also altered the demographic situation. The *enlarged* Jewish population, as indicated by the number of members in the Jewish communities in the post-war years, had been relatively stable after the emigration of 1948–52 at about 6,000. According to the Jewish Agency, the number of Jews in the Jewish communities immediately before the collapse of Yugoslavia was 5,758.[498] As already observed in the chapter dealing with emigration, the number of Jews increased despite emigration. In 1995 the Jewish Agency gives 6,119 as the number of Jews.[499] Now, if the number of about 2,500 Jews who left the former Yugoslavia is added to this number, the sum total is more than 8,500. The inevitable conclusion is that the number of crypto-Jews in the former Yugoslavia was higher than previously estimated, being in fact close to 3,000. Freidenreich assumed in her study that about 90 per cent of

494 Cited in Lungen 1990b.

495 Asiel 14.6.2000; Ajzinberg 14.6.2000.

496 Cited in Sekelj, Laslo: *Anti-Semitism and Jewish Identity in Serbia after the 1991 Collapse of the Yugoslav State*. (The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism, Acta No. 12.) Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1998, 4.

497 Perić 1977, 279, 282.

498 Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

499 Sikkum Šenat pe'ilut 1995, Yugoslavia.

Yugoslavia's Jews belonged to the Jewish communities,[500] but developments after the break-up of Yugoslavia have shown that only about 70 per cent of Jews were affiliated with the communities. In consequence the *enlarged* Jewish population after World War II must have consisted of almost 9,000 individuals.

It can be assumed that the continuation of the revival of the latter part of 1980s would have resulted in the emergence of some of these 'crypto-Jews'[501] even if Yugoslavia had remained as it was, but they would probably not have emerged in such numbers as happened as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which compelled them to seek physical security and humanitarian aid in the community of their ancestors. Some people of Jewish origin had understandably kept their Jewish origins hidden during the totalitarian period and now, because of the circumstances, it became safer to be publicly identified as a Jew. Safety precautions together with access to humanitarian aid brought crypto-Jews to redefine their relationship with the Jewish community.

The existence of crypto-Jews was known, although there were only estimates of their numbers. For example, whereas in 1990 the Sarajevo Jewish community had about 1,000 actual members, it was estimated that there might be at least as many more who were not registered with the community, usually hiding behind non-Jewish names.[502] The developments following the disintegration of Yugoslavia show that there were crypto-Jews everywhere in the former Yugoslavia. The largest influx of crypto-Jews, in terms of an individual community, naturally took place in Sarajevo and its surroundings, but surprisingly a relatively high number were also found in Novi Sad, where about 400 crypto-Jews emerged, as earlier observed. Those Jews who had converted to Catholicism before or during World War II, as well as their children, and had remained Catholic in Croatia, can be classified as belonging to the outer fringe of the definition of crypto-Jews. According to a local survey initiated by a Jewish demographer, there may be as many as 3,000–4,000 individuals who belong to this category.[503] Though their connection to Jewry is extremely thin, they are eligible to be members of the Jewish community if they so wish. If this group is considered as a part of the *enlarged* Jewish population, the total of the Jewish population increases even further.

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500 Freidenreich 1979, 202. Rotem's estimate was that about 85 per cent of Yugoslavia's Jews were affiliated, in one way or another, with the Jewish community (Rotem, Zvi: "Yehude yugoslavija be-yamenu". *Gesher* 3 (40), September 1964, 46).

501 Traditionally 'crypto-Jews' are those who have converted to a religion other than Judaism, and in Yugoslavia there were also some converted Jews. However, in the Yugoslav context 'crypto-Jews' are mainly those people of Jewish origin who did not affiliate with the Jewish community and did not belong to any other religion, either.

502 *Nedelja* July 22, 1990; Schwartz, Stephen: "Yo soy una Rosa: I am a Rose. Bosnia's Jewry's present and past". *Journal of Croatian Studies* 1990, 152.

503 Barth 1999, 213, 235.

According to Eliezer Schweid's definition, people who are only potentially Jewish, not generally identified as Jews by their environment but still bearing in their consciousness a faded memory of having a partial Jewish ancestry, can be called crypto-Jews. As he points out with regard to potential Jews in Russia, in certain conditions, whether negative (antisemitism) or positive (an opportunity to leave), or more realistically in a combination of both, the rediscovery of their Jewish roots contributes to their reconstruction of a formal, organisational, sense of Jewish belonging.[504] Both these factors operated on the Yugoslav scene, and a negative factor, war in the Yugoslav case, especially affected Bosnia-Herzegovina, while a positive factor, the emigration option and humanitarian aid, brought these potential Jews (crypto-Jews) to the rediscovery of their Jewish ancestry.

The following is a summary of the overall demographic situation of Jews in the former Yugoslavia several years after the disintegration. Demographic developments in individual communities were given in the chapter dealing with post-Yugoslav Jewish communities.

In rump-Yugoslavia, i.e. Serbia and Montenegro, there were altogether about 3,400 Jews in 1996 in comparison with about 2,500 before the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The Kosovo War with all of its consequences brought numbers down slightly, to 3,211 in June 2000. The influx of crypto-Jews in Serbia, however, amounts to almost 1,500 as about 500 Serbian Jews emigrated between 1991 and 1996. In Croatia, about 1,700 Jews are currently affiliated with the Jewish communities. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, about 1,000 Jews are registered in the Jewish communities. Slovenia has a Jewish population of about 100 and Macedonia of about 200.

Thus the total of the Jewish population affiliated with the Jewish communities in the region of former Yugoslavia is today about 6,200. This number is certainly higher than before the disintegration of Yugoslavia and before the emigration which took about 2,500 Jews from the former Yugoslavia. In conclusion, the war brought about 2,500 crypto-Jews into the community, which would not have happened on this scale without the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. Still, it must be assumed that not all crypto-Jews have revealed their origins during the last decade, in spite of the war and distress. Therefore the current *enlarged* Jewish population in the area of former Yugoslavia is certainly greater than the above-mentioned 6,200. As shown above, it was possible to estimate the numbers of the *core* and *enlarged* Jewish populations before the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In the current situation, however, it is impossible to make any reliable distinction between the *core* and the *enlarged* Jewish population in the post-Yugoslav context, as no criterion has yet

504 Schweid, Eliezer: "Changing Jewish identities in the new Europe and the consequences for Israel". In Jonathan Webber (ed.): *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*. (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.) London – Washington: Littman 1994, 48.

been found to give this distinction a solid foundation. Only a demographic questionnaire similar to that of 1971–72 would make it possible to draw more detailed demographic conclusions. Therefore the safest way for demographers to determine the size of the Jewish population in the countries of the former Yugoslavia is to continue to make use of the number of Jews affiliated with the Jewish communities.[505] All in all, because many non-Jews by *halachic* standards consider themselves Jews, and are recognised as Jews by the post-Yugoslav Jewish institutions, the borderline between the *core* and *enlarged* population can hardly be determined, and so the criterion for post-Yugoslav Jewish demography must, for the time being, be based on affiliation to the community.

7.2. THE PROCESSES OF ACCULTURATION AND/OR ASSIMILATION

Post-war Yugoslav Jewry was widely perceived as an assimilated community, as noted earlier. This description derived mainly from a low level of participation in the Jewish community activities, a high rate of intermarriage and a scarcity of religious Jews. Of course, circumstances in the post-war Yugoslavia favoured assimilation, and the Jews, like other small minorities, were especially vulnerable to their social and cultural environment. Their geographical distribution all over the former Yugoslavia also promoted mixing. The process of general integration in Yugoslav society was directed by the totalitarian rule of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, whose grip over the whole country was especially harsh at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s. During this period the Jewish community and minority went through a process of adaptation, integrating deeply into the new Yugoslav society and system. Whether this process of adaptation was a process of acculturation or assimilation, is a question worthy of closer investigation.

Both acculturation and assimilation are processes, found in different degrees, which can take place either on individual or group level. They are processes of adaptation, interpenetration and fusion to the new conditions of life. As sociologists point out, however, they are not identical processes, and neither are they interdependent. Acculturation and assimilation are separate processes.[506] The following

505 As a matter of fact, Yugoslav Jewry, as well as the post-Yugoslav Jewry, was and still is by nature very close to modern Reform Jewry which, in addition to traditional Jewish law, has proposed to make it possible for Jewish males to confer Jewish status on their children, irrespective of the religion of the mother. Moreover, Reform Jews have pointed out that since Jewishness in the West is a voluntary and private matter for the individual, *affiliation to the Jewish community should be a more decisive criterion than descent alone* (author's italics); see Webber, Jonathan: "Modern Jewish identities: The ethnographic complexities". *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43:2, 1992, 261.

506 Teske, Raymond H. C, Jr. & Bardin H. Nelson: "Acculturation and assimilation: a clarification". *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1974, 351–352, 358–363.

are the basic differences between them: (i) acculturation does not require the out-group acceptance which assimilation requires; and (ii) acculturation does not require the positive orientation and identification with the out-group which assimilation requires.[507] What follows from this is that assimilation is not an end-product of acculturation, but rather a separate and distinct process.[508]

Keeping this in mind, some assessments of the nature of post-war Jewry, and its transition to post-Yugoslav Jewry, can be made. Looking back at the history of Yugoslav Jewry, it is easy to determine that during the inter-war period Jews in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia underwent a process of acculturation. In the first chapter of this study it was made clear that they were able to develop a multi-organisational Jewry with a rich variety of activities according to their own wishes. This bears witness to acculturation, in which a change of reference group is required on neither the group nor the individual level, but for example Serbo-Croat came to be used as the first language by the majority of Jews, intermarriage was regular and the process of secularisation was taking hold. This process ended in World War II and the Holocaust.

The new beginning with the rebuilding of the Jewish communities after the Second World War marks the beginning of a new process, which cannot be regarded as a continuation of the process of acculturation of the inter-war years. The reason for this is the overall change in the setting of the Yugoslav Jewry. Now they were living under a totally different regime from before the war, and a majority of them had been wiped out by the tragic events of the Holocaust. Reality during the Tito period, in which the Communist Party dominated all aspects of life in Yugoslav society, required the regime's acceptance for the activities of any group, and consequently the Jewish community was compelled to undertake a process of adaptation in order to secure its legitimate place in society. Acceptance by the regime was actively sought by the Jewish leadership because in those conditions there was no choice. This led to a situation, at least during the first period of the post-war transition from 1944 to 1953, in which the remnants of the Yugoslav Jewry came very close to something that can only be described as assimilation. Due to the particular external circumstances, however, much caution should be observed about labelling them outright as an assimilated community. Assimilation was a precondition for a successful adaptation into the communist society of Yugoslavia, and therefore can be defined as *imposed assimilation*, not the result of any gradual development within the Yugoslav Jewry. We can assume that without the war, the former process of acculturation would have continued. Consequently, in this respect post-war Jewry marks the beginning of a new process brought about by purely

507 Teske & Nelson 1974, 359–360.

508 Teske & Nelson 1974, 364.

external factors i.e. the Holocaust experience and the new totalitarian rule. It can be suggested that because of the requirements of the political context, a process of assimilation was adopted in order to fulfil the expectations of the regime. Owing to these specific circumstances, however, this process was an artificial one. Genuine assimilation takes place over a longer period of time, and is more the result of natural development, as is the case with some strata of American Jewry, not the result of sudden changes in the surrounding realities. Similarly, in the former Yugoslavia, the post-war apathy of Jews is to be connected with external factors, not seen as the result of an integral development called assimilation.

After the death of Tito, Yugoslav society began to change, and at the same time, especially in Zagreb, Jews began to express more assertiveness than before, which subsequently led to the beginning of the revival in the Jewish communities prior to the collapse of Yugoslavia. The reawakening supports the hypothesis that the nature of Yugoslav Jewry was directly linked to the extent of political control in Yugoslavia.

To sum up, the post-war Yugoslav Jewish community meets the criteria of an assimilated community by socio-psychological definition. More significant, however, is the fact that this was exclusively due to external political conditions, and therefore cannot in truth be classified as a genuine process of assimilation. Again, the proper state of the surrounding context is crucial in determining the nature of the post-war Yugoslav Jewry.

The assimilation process, termed *imposed assimilation* in this study, came to an end with the end of Yugoslavia in 1991. As Yugoslavia fragmented the Federation of Jewish Communities in the former Yugoslavia also fragmented. The former framework, structurally under the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities, ceased to play a part, except for the Jewish communities in Serbia. The change in the political setting also affected the nature and position of Jewish communities. The successor states were to some extent more democratic, with a multi-party system, than the regime of the former Yugoslavia. The totalitarian period was irreversibly over, although understandably it took time before this change was realised to the full extent in the Jewish communities. Within the successor states of Yugoslavia the multi-organisational structure of Jewry became legally accepted, and religious activities became public and made up an integral part of community activities, first in Serbia and later in Croatia, too. Perhaps the best indication of the change was the emergence of the former crypto-Jews.

All in all, the disintegration of Yugoslavia set in motion a new process among its Jewish population, which, as in the situation of inter-war period, must be defined as a process of acculturation rather than assimilation. The Jews' legal position was no longer dependent on the requirement of identification with the out-group i.e. the regime, nor was the acceptance of this out-group required. This is exemplified by

the criticism the Jewish communities have expressed towards the post-Yugoslav regimes, especially in Croatia under the Tudjman presidency. This is behaviour an acculturated group can show, but not an assimilated one. This highlights the fundamental re-positioning of Jewry in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. There was certainly no process from acculturation to assimilation and back again, but there were separate eras with different processes, mainly due to the changes in the surrounding political context and not in continuity from one to the other.

It must also be noted that the Jewish communities did not allow the process of *imposed assimilation* during the post-war period to go unhindered. A mild policy to counter this process was applied by the leadership in a form of voluntary socialisation within the community, sports clubs and the Jewish summer camps on the Adriatic Coast. As a result, a link, albeit a weak one, which marked their distinctiveness as Jews, naturally in a much more flexible way than traditionally understood, survived during the Communist regime.

So far acculturation and assimilation have been dealt with on the group level. On the individual level, it can only be generally assumed that there were both acculturated and assimilated Jews. Perhaps the most distinctive group of assimilated Jews is the group of about 3,000, or even more, crypto-Jews who carefully hid their Jewishness. The awareness of their original reference group was, however, sufficient to enable them to redefine their relationship with the community of their ancestors in the new, changed situation after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Perhaps the most distinctive unassimilated group was the group which was in charge of organised Jewish activity and the organisational structure in the former Yugoslavia. They were acculturated, and well integrated into society, but held in esteem their own reference group, making an effort to preserve a knowledge of Jewish history and culture even during the most oppressive years of marginalisation.

7.3. FROM YUGOSLAVISM TO JEWISHNESS – A NEW QUEST FOR IDENTIFICATION

An introduction to the identification of Jews during the inter-war period in Yugoslavia was given in the first chapter. There, as a basic model for different spheres of identification, a three-fold division of *religion*, *ethnicity/community* and *cultural residue* was utilised. Here the purpose is to determine the identification process during the transition from Yugoslavia to the post-Yugoslav period. During the inter-war period, the main mode of Jewish identification was found to be in the sphere of *ethnicity/community*, while the *religious* sphere was already clearly in decline.

The Holocaust, post-war emigration and a new political order in Yugoslavia undoubtedly weakened the Jewish identification of the remaining Jewish population. Albert Vajs as the president of the Federation categorised the Jews remaining

in Yugoslavia into five different varieties: (1) Jews by nationality, who do not belong to any religious community; (2) Jews by nationality, who consider themselves as members because of their Mosaic (Jewish) faith; (3) Jews of the Mosaic faith who consider themselves Serbs, Croats etc. by nationality; (4) Jews by descent who consider themselves members of another nationality and who belonged to no religious community but still showed an interest in Jewish life and participate in some activities; and (5) Jews by descent who do not consider themselves Jews by religion or by nationality and who do not maintain ties with Jewry or show interest in community life. Categories one to three formed the most important element of Yugoslav Jewry and members of the communities.[509]

This study proposes following a simpler classification for the post-war Jewish community than that given by Vajs, which illustrates, at least partially, the identification of Jews. The first group consists of the Jewish leadership and elite, a group of active participants who held leadership positions in the Jewish community and/or were active in the community activities. Usually they were well positioned in society, often being members of the League of Communists, and by many standards they were true representatives of the upper social strata of the new Yugoslavia. To give some estimation of the participation of this group in community activities, the percentage given by Perić certainly indicates the realities of the post-war period in general. 24.2 per cent (1,069) of the total of 4,414 respondents, who were 15 years old and over in 1970, had taken part in Jewish organisational life after 1944.[510]

The second and the largest group consisted of those who were members of the community but had not participated actively or expressed interest in community life. Again, according to Perić, Jewish holidays and customs were observed, or not entirely neglected, by 45 per cent (1,982) of the adult respondents.[511] For most Jews of these two groups the mode of identification was *ethnicity/community*, the focus of Jewish identification being on the community. This formed the identification framework for its members: in fact, being a Jew meant being affiliated with the Jewish community.

Lastly the third group consisted of Jews by descent who opted to stay outside the sphere of Jewish communities. These crypto-Jews, as Vajs called them,[512] formed perhaps as much as one third of the *enlarged* Jewish population, as already seen in this study. To use the terms introduced by Gordiejew this last group could be called a submerged group, or by others, an assimilated group. To be precise, however, this does not necessarily imply a lack of Jewish identity, but only that Jewish identification is not publicly manifested. In terms of identification category

509 Vajs 1954, 43.

510 Perić 1977, 284.

511 Perić 1977, 284.

512 Vajs 1954, 44.

this last group represents the mode of *cultural residue*, a mode appropriate for those who decided to stay outside the community affiliation. As Perić has noted, the memory of World War II and the Holocaust was a crucial reason for many Jewish survivors to stay outside the Jewish community orbit[513] although it can certainly be assumed that a general anti-religious atmosphere was also a factor discouraging affiliation with any of the organisations associated with religion.

With some hesitation numbers can be given for these groups. The first, elite group numbered about 1,000 Jews. They were the very nucleus which carried post-war Yugoslav Jewry onwards until the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The second, basically non-active but occasionally participating group consists of about 3,000 Jews. The first and the second group formed the *core* Jewish population as earlier indicated. The rest, about 3,000 or even more, were to different degrees crypto-Jews showing no public identification with the Jewish community, even though some of them were registered as members of the communities. The *core* Jewish population, consisting of the first two groups according to the classification of this study, roughly corresponds to the first three categories put forward by Vajs, whereas his last two categories correspond with the third group referred to above i.e. in many cases they were the so-called crypto-Jews.

The *ethnicity/community* mode of Jewish identification, in the classification of Vajs, strengthened during the first ten years of the post-war period. Likewise, the *cultural residue* came to have significance, bearing in mind the number of Jews by origin who were not affiliated with the communities. Naturally the *religious* mode of identification, which had already been declining during the inter-war period, almost disappeared. Thus *ethnicity* was the main mode of identification for the post-war Jewish population, the practical expression of which was demonstrated by affiliation in the Jewish community. An ethnic identification suited well the reality of a multi-ethnic state, in which different nationalities had gained formal recognition. This mode of identification was also supported by the Jewish leadership, who increasingly emphasised the Jews' position as a national minority.

Paul Gordiejew correctly observes that the post-war Jewish community and many Jewish individuals continued to be Yugoslavs in orientation, and even in identity. This orientation was made particularly attractive because the Jews were dispersed throughout the country.[514] Jews were well integrated into the surrounding society of the former Yugoslavia and felt themselves to be first *Yugoslavs* and only then *Jews*. As Slavko Goldstein expressed it, Jews felt solidarity towards Yugoslavia, a feeling based very much on the shared Partisan experience during the war.[515] Jakob Finci recalls the Yugoslav time as 'comfortable for Jews',[516] and

513 Perić 1977, 270.

514 Gordiejew 1999, 113.

515 S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

Mirjam Steiner-Aviezer remembers liking Tito and being proud of him, while basing her Jewish identity on being a part of Jewish tradition and culture.[517] Mirko Mirković reports that Jews identified in the post-war Yugoslavia as Yugoslavs of Jewish faith.[518] 'The majority of Jews were first Yugoslavs, only then Jews', remembers Ivan Čerešnješ.[519] A general Yugoslav identification was a convenient solution for the Jews living under a socialist regime where 'socialism exceeded the boundaries of nationalities and religion', as Isak Papo put it.[520] These Jewish interviewees express the general tone among the Jews of the former Yugoslavia, who were first of all Yugoslavs, which in the post-war context was a very appropriate mode of identification for them, and secondly Jews according to a self-defined category of faith or nationality. As one outside observer put it, Jewishness in the former Yugoslavia was defined primarily in national and ethnic, and not in religious terms.[521] During that period, Jewish identification in general was strengthened by the same means employed to counter the trend towards assimilation, i.e. the summer camps on the Adriatic Coast, the annual *Maccabi* games, socialising in the community clubs, and the study of Hebrew.

The policy of Jewish *adaptation* during the transition period after World War II in Yugoslavia also transformed the pattern of Jewish identification. They became, first and foremost, equal and loyal citizens of the new Yugoslavia and its Communist regime. They were as much Yugoslavs as any other citizens of this multi-ethnic state. The secular components of Jewish identification were in the foreground, with Jews forming one national group among others in Yugoslavia, whose identification in many cases amounted to little more than mere affiliation with the Jewish community.

Transition and the Shift in Identification

The Yugoslav identification began to crumble as Yugoslavia did. It has been noted that the quest for identity is typical of periods of social and political transition, when the need arises to identify oneself with what lies outside, as well as the need to find roots and establish connections to the past, for example.[522] The case of Yugoslavia supports this idea well. As the collapse of the Soviet Union contributed to the quest

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516 Finci 13.3.2000.

517 Steiner-Aviezer 3.5.1999.

518 Mirković 9.3.2000.

519 Čerešnješ 23.5.1999.

520 Papo 14.6.1996.

521 Lungen 1990b.

522 Tamir 1996, 21–22.

for a new identity among its Jews,[523] exactly the same process began in Yugoslavia.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia caused Yugoslav Jews to reconsider their identification in the new national states. As a result, a reawakening of Jewish identification occurred. Growing nationalistic ambiguities in both Croatia and Serbia excluded Jews from the possibility of identifying themselves with the Croats and the Serbs in the same manner as they had previously as Yugoslavs,[524] although a certain shift took place towards identification with a particular nation, Serb, Croatian or Bosnian, of the former Yugoslavia, as a reflection of the ongoing process of disintegration of the Yugoslav political community, as Laslo Sekelj has noted. This finding was based on his survey conducted in 1990–91 among 300 mostly young, active Jewish community members.[525]

The disintegration into new national states made the *Yugoslav* identification impossible; especially in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former identification was out of the question. Identification with Croats, Muslims or Serbs was also felt to be unnatural, and so there was only one way forward – a rediscovery of Jewish roots and a renewal[526] of Jewish identification. The deeply integrated Jews who had remained for decades without any contact with the Jewish communities started to return. This is well demonstrated by the number of former crypto-Jews who have gradually revealed themselves to the Jewish communities. The revival of Jewish identification has rarely or never been connected with a religious revival or Zionist ideology. A new Jewish identification has found its expression in the domains of Jewish history, tradition and culture in the former Yugoslavia i.e. in the fields which have traditionally been the strongholds of Yugoslav Jewry. As the people of Yugoslavia, and especially those of its most multi-national republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, were in a state of confusion because of the war, and consequently searching for their identity, and seeking protection by joining national groups,[527] so Jews, too, remembered their original reference-group and their past and thus began to rethink their identification. Jewish communities provided a shelter amid the growing nationalism, and Jews, who in fact were left with only one logical option, to be Jews, became as a result much more *Jewish* after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, as Slavko Goldstein later formulated.[528]

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523 Tamir 1996, 22.

524 I. Goldstein 14.6.1996.

525 Sekelj 1998, 5.

526 This 'renewal' almost never means that individual Jews return to an identity or identification possessed earlier, but as Tamir has noted, an individual renews an option, a potential identity offered by their Jewish ancestry (Tamir 1996, 25–26).

527 Čerešnješ Papers: Report about activities from 1991–1995, Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo, 25.12.1995.

528 S. Goldstein 16.3.2000.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia has strengthened the Jewish identification of the Croatian Jews. The times of uncertainty have resulted in the need to seek security in the community of one's ancestors. This strengthening has not meant a revival of religious or Zionist experience[529] but rather a renewal of consciousness of their own distinct background, and of being part of the Jewish nation which has contributed so much to civilisation.[530] Croatian Jewish identity is being crystallised through participation in Jewish communal life. Not only the community, but also individual Jews needed to search for their new identity because of the dramatic historical changes. There was a need to find a social group to which they could belong. Identification as a Yugoslav was naturally no longer possible after the collapse of the state, and many Jews found it difficult to identify with the nationalistically inclined Croatians. The material, psychological and social aid provided by the Jewish community during the difficult times of uncertainty after the collapse of Yugoslavia also resulted in an increasing motivation to strengthen Jewish identity, as Dunja Šprajc recalled.[531] This newly-found Jewish identification was reinforced and expressed through the Jewish community.

The same phenomenon of a revival of Jewish identification which was observed in Croatia also occurred in Serbia. Many Jews were returning to their roots. Rabbi Isak Asiel commented that the situation was better than before the disintegration of Yugoslavia and that 'the war caused Jews to wake up'. This was in his view the paradox of the otherwise regrettable disintegration.[532] The reawakening of Jewish identification did not mean Jewish religious revival in Serbia, any more than in Croatia. The Jewish community was already a secular community before World War II and the same secular tradition continues.[533] The President of the Federation, Aća Singer, says that his Jewishness, for example, is based on feelings, origin and national identity rather than on religion. The most important matter of identity is the feeling of being a Jew, supported by a Jewish education at home and by the Jewish tradition. Personally, as he said, he cannot call himself a Serb.[534]

The Sarajevo Jewish community was described according to Harriet Freidenreich as the most active of the Jewish communities in the former Yugoslavia.[535] Perhaps this is reflected in the opinion of Jakob Finci, who explains that it was easier to remain a Jew living in the middle of three ethnic groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina than living among one dominant ethnic group in Serbia and Croatia,

529 *'Al ham-mišmar* 2.7.1991.

530 Fischer 15.6.1996.

531 Šprajc 1996, 11.

532 Asiel 6.6.1996.

533 Singer 6.6.1996.

534 Singer 6.6.1996.

535 Freidenreich 1984, 33.

for example.[536] There seems to be some truth in this, since naturally in Bosnia it would have been more difficult to decide which side they should identify with.

Community-centred Identification

If anything can be held to characterise Jewish identification in the former Yugoslavia, it is the centrality of the organised Jewish community in forming a feeling of belonging. In general, when the quest for identity has been analysed, the importance is highlighted of being a member of the group one would like to join.[537] For the Jews of the former Yugoslavia, the organised community and *membership* of it was the focus of Jewish identification, through which Jewishness was conceptualised. This idea was so strong that the former head of the Sarajevo Jewish community, Ivan Čerešnješ, after years of living in Jerusalem, still explicitly feels a sense of belonging to the Sarajevo Jewish community.[538] Ivo Goldstein from Zagreb also expressed his personal feeling that his Jewish identification is above all with the Jewish community of Zagreb, and not with Jewish religion, culture or Hebrew language. He shares this identity with the people of the community.[539] This characteristic feature has even been reinforced as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, when the desirability of being a member of the Jewish community has increased, as shown by the emergence of the so-called crypto-Jews.

The organised community structure had a special significance in post-war Yugoslavia in that this structure kept the Jewish community, although diminished, still alive. This structure inherited from the Yugoslav period provided the setting for the continuation of Jewish life in the post-Yugoslav context and received fresh significance through providing an identification framework for those who found their Jewish identification as a result of Yugoslavia's demise.

Despite these observations, however, the personal domain of Jewish identification remains largely unexplored. It would require a study of its own with extensive fieldwork.[540] Certainly there exists among post-Yugoslav Jews a great variety of modes of identification. It still remains the case that only a relatively small minority of Jewish community members are actual participants in community life. This suggests that for a majority of the Jewish population, Jewish identification is

536 Finci 13.3.2000.

537 Tamir 1996, 48.

538 Čerešnješ 26.5.1999.

539 I. Goldstein 11.3.2000.

540 It is impossible within the framework of this study to explore in depth the Jewish identity/identification problem in the former Yugoslavia. My findings presented in this research are suggestive in nature, and may provide some clues for further study, which should follow, at least partially, the lines Rebecca Golbert has set out in her article (Golbert 1998).

still a matter of secondary importance. On the group level, the Jewish communities, as strange as this might sound, have become more Jewish in their orientation and activities than before, of which perhaps the most striking example is the introduction of *kashrut* into the Jewish community centre in Zagreb.

Though Jewries in the former Communist countries are not identical, many similarities can still be found in the processes the various Jewish communities have undergone after the collapse of Communism. Ukrainian Jewry is going through a very similar process to Croatian Jewry, for example, in its attempt to marginalise a former common Russian framework, and emphasise relations with a major nationality.[541] Croatian Jewry minimises the Yugoslav framework by trying to foster Jewish-Croatian relations. Successor Jewries of the former Yugoslavia are identifying with their new national state context, transforming themselves into an integral part of its present reality, and forming links with its national historical past vis-à-vis its relations with Jews. Thus particular Croatian and Bosnian Jewries, for example, have come into being.

Rather indefinite concepts of a 'common historical past' and 'feeling' are often put forward in response to questions about Jewish identity in the former Yugoslavia; it is also described as a 'deep inner knowledge' of one's own Jewish origin and of belonging to something other than the majority population.[542] For some, like Darko Fischer, the feeling of Jewish identity also involves a task, which in his case is to leave behind a permanent trace of the history and activity of Jews in the particular geographical region of Osijek and Slavonia in Croatia.[543]

More measurable concepts such as language and/or religion play no part in post-Yugoslav Jewish identification, although religion is strengthening its position, albeit not in a significant way. In collective terms the professional Jewish culture, to use the term of Marina Kogan,[544] plays the greatest role, being manifested especially in cultural events such as art exhibitions and extensive publishing activity. This development of Jewish ethnic consciousness, predominantly in cultural issues, is also witnessed among other post-Communist Jewries, for example among the Jews of St. Petersburg.[545]

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541 Golbert 1998, 23.

542 Fischer 15.6.1996.

543 Fischer 15.6.1996.

544 Kogan, Marina: "The identity of St. Petersburg Jews in the early 1990s: A time of mass emigration". *Jews in Eastern Europe*, No. 3 (28), 1995, 11.

545 Kogan 1995, 11.

On the basis of this chapter some preliminary conclusions can be drawn about the domains of Jewish demography, acculturation/assimilation and identification in the transition from Yugoslav to the post-Yugoslav Jewry. As already observed, the mode of *ethnicity/community* formed the main identification domain of post-war Yugoslav Jewry, while *religious* identification was almost absent, and the domain of *cultural residue* was the most appropriate definition for a significant number of Jews by descent who failed to affiliate with the Jewish community, but nevertheless still showed a certain interest in Jewish life. Nowadays, in the transition from Yugoslav to post-Yugoslav Jewry, the domain of *ethnicity/community* prevails, but a certain development can be observed towards strengthening the domain of *religion* and weakening the domain of *cultural residue*. The main bulk of Jews are therefore still to be found in the same identification mode as before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but the emergence of crypto-Jews indicates that the *cultural residue* is less significant than the identification mode, and at the opposite end of the line, the *religious* domain is gaining more significance, largely thanks to the contribution of two young and active rabbis in Belgrade and Zagreb.

Reviewing the nature of post-war Jewry, and its transition to the post-Yugoslav period, Elazar's concentric circles introduced at the beginning of this chapter illustrate clearly the transformation which took place largely as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The majority of post-war Yugoslav Jews were to be found in the outer circles, somewhere between 'Peripherals' and 'Quasi-Jews', with a minority belonging to the group of 'Associated Jews', and an even smaller minority to the group of active 'Participants'. Perhaps only a few individuals could have claimed to be living according to a Jewish rhythm and thus to belong to the innermost circle. Here the change is even more easily observed than in the domains of identification discussed above. The centre of gravity has shifted towards the hard core of 'Integral Jews', even though the core itself is still lacking. Nowadays, after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the renewal of Jewish community life and the emergence of the crypto-Jews, the majority of Jews are to be found somewhere between 'Participants' and 'Contributors and Consumers'. The number of participants in regular community activities throughout the former Yugoslavia has increased, affiliation with the Jewish community has generally been reinforced, and the services of the Jewish institutions are more regularly offered and utilised than during the Communist period. This witnesses to the fact that the changes in the Jewish community during this transition were not merely structural and organisational, but rather deeper changes in the nature of the former Yugoslav Jewry took place at the same time. Therefore it can be argued that the disintegration of Yugoslavia was a turning point in many ways, and marks the beginning of new processes which will shape Jewish communities in post-Yugoslav countries in the years to come. Above all, this shift towards a hard core promises the continuity of Jewish life in this part

of Eastern Europe and Balkans, a region in which Jewish life has usually been regarded as doomed. This shift has also repositioned the post-Yugoslav Jewish communities in line with other Diaspora Jewish communities in the world, in which a majority of Jews are to be found in the groups of 'Associated Jews' and 'Contributors and Consumers'.[546]

Branko Polić hit the nail on the head when he characterised Jewish identity in the former Yugoslavia by saying that it 'does not depend so much on us'.[547] Transformations which have taken place in the post-war and post-Yugoslav Jewry are undeniably connected to the changes in the political setting. The political climate sets limits within which the formation of Jewish identification also moves. It can, for example, be argued that a strongly acculturated community, as is the case with the former Yugoslav Jewry, is more affected by the realities of its environment than a primarily religiously orientated community (i.e. in the Jewish case, an Orthodox one).

546 Elazar 1997-98, 126–27.

547 Polić 8.3.2000.