

Navigating Identities: The Jews of Kolozsvár (Cluj) and the Hungarian Administration 1940–1944¹

In April of 1942, the Royal Hungarian Ministry of the Interior received a request from a certain Márton Friedmann in Kolozsvár². Friedmann – a day laborer and member of Kolozsvár’s Orthodox Jewish community – rented a place in one of the less desirable parts of town near the railroad tracks³. His reason for writing to the ministry was that he wanted to change his last name to something more Hungarian-sounding. Perhaps he wanted to be called Márton Ferencz or Fülöp: the request does not say exactly. Indeed, as far as the Ministry was concerned, the question was moot – Friedmann would not be allowed to change his name⁴. The state would not permit him to *become* Hungarian, as, in its eyes, he was primarily Jewish and his name should reflect his Jewishness.

The Hungarian administration was not always so rigid in its definition of who was a Jew and who was a Hungarian. Just one year earlier, Friedmann had been given a census form on which he was asked to identify himself in terms of his mother tongue, nationality, and religion. Friedmann’s responses were likely as follows: mother tongue – Hungarian, nationality – Hungarian, religion – Jewish⁵. Hungary’s prime minister at the

¹ Special thanks to Professors Aron Rodrigue and Norman Naimark of Stanford University, Prof. László Karsai of Szeged University in Hungary, and Dr. Dániel Lőwy for their comments, suggestions and encouragement.

² The city is now known by its Romanian name Cluj or Cluj-Napoca. For the purposes of this paper, however, I have opted to use the city’s official name at the time.

³ Ödön Boga, Aurél Zámbó, Ernő Gál, Kolozsvári lak-és címjegyzék [Registry of residences and addresses for the city of Kolozsvár] (Kolozsvár 1943) 81, 292; Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger, Hitközségek. Az Orthodox Hitközség és tagjainak névsora [Congregations. Register of the Orthodox congregation and its members], in: Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve [Memory book of the Jews of Kolozsvár] (New York 1970) 31–56 here 46. Although the request form has his name spelled as “Fridmann”, the tax office of the town of Kolozsvár spelled it “Friedmann”. I have opted to use the latter spelling as it appears more frequently on the records.

⁴ Arhivele Județului Cluj [Cluj District Archives], Primăria mun. Cluj, Reg. de intrare, Inv. 386/1942, Nr. 19276.

⁵ It is, of course, impossible to know for certain what he answered, but we do know, based on available evidence, that he spoke Hungarian (in this he did not differ from most of

time, Count Pál Teleki – himself a native of the region of which Kolozsvár was the capital –, had done some research before agreeing to the format of the census. It was very much in the interest of the Hungarian state that Hungarians have a clear majority in areas where other nationalities lived, like Kolozsvár. This clear majority could only be achieved if the Jews were counted as Hungarians for the purpose of the census. Although Teleki admitted that “in Hungary, as in Eastern and Central Europe in general, the sense of nationality is not always the same as the mother tongue for a significant portion of the population,” individuals like Friedmann generally declared themselves to be Hungarians on the 1941 census⁶. In fact, only about 11 percent of Kolozsvár’s Hungarian-speaking Jews (by religion) did not declare themselves Hungarian by nationality⁷.

The case of Friedmann was not unique. He was not the only Jew of Kolozsvár to try to change his name, nor was he the only one allowed to call himself a Hungarian for the purposes of the 1941 census. Some aspects of his story are less representative than others, however. Not all Jews were day laborers with no property of their own, and certainly not all of them wanted to change their names. But Friedmann’s experience during the early war years, paralleled as it was by a few similar ones, reveals much about the means sought by individuals and the state to keep identities fluid well into the war years. Such efforts are visible both in official government correspondence relating to Jews, as well as in the Jews’ own responses to domestic and international pressures.

This paper represents an attempt to take a large-scale phenomenon (Nazi racial policy) and explore how it was variously foreshadowed, re-

the Jews of Kolozsvár), and that almost everyone who declared him-/herself to be a native speaker of Hungarian answered the nationality question with “Hungarian”. Furthermore, we can guess what Friedmann answered to the religion question based on the fact that his application for a name change was denied – Christians requesting name changes were categorically granted them, regardless of their denominational affiliation or mother tongue, as long as they were not Jewish. *Ibid.*, Nr. 19275, 19635, 24578, 29178, 29534, 33016, 34157.

⁶ Árpád E. Varga, *Fejezetek a jelenkori Erdély népesedéstörténetéből* [Chapters from the contemporary demographic history of Transylvania] (Budapest 1998) 38.

⁷ This is evident from a critical comparison between the number of native speakers of Hungarian (97,698) and the number of Hungarians by nationality (96,002). The difference of 1,696 is very close to the figure we get when we subtract the number of native speakers of Yiddish (831) from the number of individuals who declared themselves to be of Jewish nationality (2,661), that is 1,830, or about eleven percent of the total number of Jews by religion (16,763). Dr. Zoltan Fogarasi, *A népesség anyanyelvi, nemzetiségi és vallási megoszlása törvényhatóságunkint 1941-ben* [Populations distribution within districts by mother tongue, nationality, and religion in 1941], in: *Magyar statisztikai szemle XXII (1944)* 1–20.

ceived, absorbed, adapted, rejected, or ignored both by those called upon to implement and enforce it in Hungary (i.e. state and local administrators, the army, police, and “patriotic” civilians), as well as by the Jews of the Hungarian town of Kolozsvár. Closely examining a particular micro-context in this way gives the historian a privileged view of the mechanisms that create and deconstruct identities, oftentimes simultaneously. This approach also helps us to differentiate between *flexible* identities, that allow individuals to maintain a personal hierarchy of loyalties, and *inflexible* identities, wherein neither the individual nor the state official handling a given case has a say in determining a person’s nationality or race.

My objective in this essay is to combat two commonly held assumptions regarding Jewish identity during World War II. The first is that, following the implementation of Nazi racial policies in Axis-allied countries such as Hungary, the spectrum of options open to Jews in terms of self-identification essentially collapsed, i.e. that a Jew could under no circumstances be anything but a Jew. The second, related assumption is that administrations were left very little room to maneuver within the framework of these policies. The documents and analysis presented here will show that, in the case of Hungary in particular, such assumptions oversimplify the variety of interactions between Jews and the central and local administrations that typified the early war years through the beginning of 1943.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first provides the historical background and contextual details necessary to make sense of the Kolozsvár case. In a central and relatively large section, I lay out how the war years were experienced by the Jews of Kolozsvár, giving special emphasis to the way in which their actions and reactions pointed to contradictions and paradoxes within and between racial policies and their enforcement. Finally, in a section devoted to analysis, I draw some conclusions based on the scenarios presented in the middle section.

KOLOZSVÁR AND ITS JEWS BEFORE WORLD WAR II

The city of Kolozsvár does not lend itself to description easily. It has long been many things to many people, not to mention states. It is the historical capital of the province of Transylvania, and home to a variety of religious and linguistic groups. In 1867, in the wake of the famous *Ausgleich* between Austria and Hungary, Kolozsvár was absorbed along with the rest of Transylvania into the Hungarian Kingdom⁸. Already at this

⁸ Zoltán Szász, *Politikai élet és nemzetségi kérdés a dualizmus korában, 1867–1918* [Political life and the nationalities question during the dualist period, 1867–1918], in: Zoltán Szász (ed.), *Erdély története, 1830-tól napjainkig* (Budapest 1987) 1624–1700 here 1624f.

time, however, the groups who were to play key roles in the town's twentieth-century history were present and active. Among these were the native speakers of Hungarian, divided between adherents of the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Unitarian, and Jewish (Orthodox and Neolog⁹) faiths. German speakers were mostly Lutheran, while Romanian speakers were either Romanian Orthodox or Greek Catholic. There was also an assortment of Armenians and Roma, some of whom spoke their own languages while others assimilated into one or the other group, mainly with the Hungarian speakers¹⁰.

At the turn of the century, Kolozsvár was still very much a Hungarian-speaking town. The countryside and villages surrounding Kolozsvár, however, were not. Romanian speakers were in the majority in most parts of the province, despite the Hungarian administration's efforts to assimilate them. In the wake of World War I, this disgruntled section of the population favored integration with Romania. Hungary, having been one of the primary losers of the war, was in no position to negotiate. Transylvania, and with it Kolozsvár, became part of Romania. The name of the town was now rendered in Romanian: Cluj.

Many of the Jews of this new Cluj – constituting between 13 and 15 percent of the town's population¹¹ – were as upset by these developments as the other Hungarian speakers. The *Ausgleich* had brought emancipation to those Jews who made the Hungarian language and culture their own, and many seized on this opportunity gratefully. In Romania, Jews were never permitted to assimilate to the extent the Hungarian Jews had. As a result, their new situation was that of a so-called “double minority”, whereby they were seen as Jews by the Christian Hungarian speakers and as Hungarians by the Romanian administration¹². Since the latter provided very few incentives for the Jews to assimilate into their ranks, most remained culturally and linguistically Hungarian throughout the interwar

⁹ It should be noted here that the Neolog Jewish community in Hungary did not officially come into being until the spring of 1869.

¹⁰ There were also 831 Yiddish speakers living in Kolozsvár, according to the Hungarian census of 1941. Fogarasi, A népesség 7.

¹¹ Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger, Statisztikai adatok Kolozsvár zsidóságáról az 1919–1936-os években [Statistical data on the Jews of Kolozsvár 1919–1936], in: Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve (New York 1970) 105–113 here 105.

¹² “The Romanians resented them because of their proclivity to Hungarian culture and, by implication, to Hungarian revisionism and irredentism; the Hungarians, and especially the Right radicals, accused them of being ‘renegades’ in the service of the Left.” Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *Genocide and Retribution. The Holocaust in Hungarian-Ruled Northern Transylvania* (Boston/The Hague/Dordrecht/Lancaster 1983) 5f.

period. In the thirties, as right-wing radicalism was on the rise among the Christian representatives of the Romanian and Hungarian speakers, Zionism and Leftist ideologies also gained popularity amongst the Jews who felt increasingly threatened by extremist groups such as the Romanian Iron Guard¹³.

THE SECOND VIENNA AWARD AND THE JEWS OF KOLOZSVÁR

By the late thirties, Hungary's leadership, which had long courted Britain, France, and to a lesser extent the United States for support in regaining the territories it lost to Romania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Austria following World War I, found the instant, if partial, gratification offered by the Axis more appealing. At the end of August 1940, the Second Vienna Award¹⁴ gave Northern Transylvania (including Kolozsvár) back to Hungary, causing a mass exodus of Romanian speakers and employees of the Romanian state and an instant inversion of the municipal power spectrum in Kolozsvár and elsewhere in the re-annexed territories. The change also resulted in an influx of refugees – mostly Hungarian speakers, some of whom were Jewish – from Southern Transylvania.

Initially, many of the Jews of the re-annexed territories rejoiced, going out into the streets and waving Hungarian flags at the Hungarian Army as it rolled across the province and into the cities¹⁵. Some were more cautious, having watched from afar as the Jews of Trianon Hungary suffered a series of restrictions and humiliations in the form of anti-Jewish legislation. In Hungary proper, anti-Jewish legislation had begun with the *numerus clau-*

¹³ Ibid. Although the Zionist movement in Trianon Hungary was relatively weak, many of its leaders (including Otto Komoly, Rudolf Kasztner) were Transylvanian Jews. This phenomenon is most readily explicable in terms of the Transylvanian Jews' "double minority" status, being stigmatized both as Hungarians and as Jews, assimilation to the Romanians was made all the more difficult. As a result, many found the Zionist solution appealing. Dr. György Neufeuld, a Jew who lived in Kolozsvár/Cluj during the late interwar years and the first years of the war, recalled in an interview (prepared on 9 May 2001 in Cluj) that throughout the thirties, "the Romanian Right wing gradually gained ground, the Iron Guard became ever more popular, and naturally anti-Semitism increased as well". Jews were not allowed to sit in the first three rows at the university and sometimes students from the law school would come and beat up the Jews.

¹⁴ The First Vienna Award, part of the Nazi dissection of Czechoslovakia in 1938, had given parts of Slovakia (with an 86.5 percent Hungarian population, including many Hungarian Jews) back to Hungary. Péter Sipos, István Ravasz (eds.), *Magyarország a második világháborúban. Lexikon A-Zs* [Hungary during World War II. Encyclopaedia] (Budapest 1997) 93f.

¹⁵ Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Greenshirts and Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania* (Stanford 1970) 309; Braham, *Genocide* 8.

sus Act of 1920, which limited the number of students who could be admitted to institutions for higher education to a number corresponding to the percentage of that student's "nationality"¹⁶ in the population as a whole¹⁷. During this immediate postwar period, many Jews were also victimized by Regent Miklós Horthy's "White Terror", which resulted in a series of local massacres and the imprisonment of some 70,000 individuals, a disproportionate number of whom were Jews¹⁸. The next decade and a half saw a lull in governmental initiatives against the Jews. In the spring of 1938 a new wave of anti-Jewish legislation began with the implementation of the First Jewish Law. Designed to "restrict the number of Jewish lawyers, physicians, engineers, journalists, and actors" to 20 percent of the total of these professions, the First Jewish Law, unlike the *numerus clausus*, defined Jewishness in terms of *religion* as opposed to *nationality* as determined by religion. The Second Jewish Law of 1939, however, introduced a racial definition of Jewishness, this time following the Nazi German model. The law, which effectively banned Jews from the public sector altogether, resulted in as many as 250,000 Jews losing their jobs¹⁹.

Shortly after Regent Miklós Horthy paraded through the streets of Kolozsvár on a white horse, the Jewish Laws were implemented and enforced in the newly annexed territory.²⁰ Among the first victims of the Laws was a writer who used the pen name Benő Karácsony. A prominent Jewish figure on the Kolozsvár cultural scene, known mainly for his novels and

¹⁶ Determined by religion as opposed to mother tongue, thus Jews by religion could not claim to be Hungarians by nationality.

¹⁷ The law effectively limited the number of Jewish students to about six percent of the total student body. Kálmán Benda (ed.), *Magyarország történeti kronológiája, 1848–1944* [Chronology of Hungarian history] III (Budapest 1983) 876f. The law, however, was applied rather loosely after the first few years. The new premier as of October 1921, Count István Bethlen, opposed anti-Semitic legislation.

¹⁸ The White Terror was Hungarian Regent Miklós Horthy's response to the Communist revolution of 1919 led by a Hungarian Jew, Béla Kun. During the period from August 1919 through May of 1920, it is reported that "bands of officers and units of the Hungarian army staged pogroms and committed mass murders at about fifty localities" across Trianon Hungary. Nathaniel Katzburg, *Hungarian Jewry in Modern Times. Political and Social Aspects*, in: Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *Hungarian-Jewish Studies* (1966) 137–170 here 153–155. For the most part, however, those killed and imprisoned were not persecuted for being Jews, but for being communist Jews.

¹⁹ Yehuda Don, *Anti-Semitic Legislations in Hungary and their Implementation in Budapest – An Economic Analysis*, in: Randolph L. Braham (ed.), *The Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry. Essays, Documents, Depositions* (New York 1986) 49–53. Economist Pál Fellner places the number closer to 200,000 – cited in: Maria M. Kovács, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics. Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (Washington 1994) 105.

²⁰ Braham, *Genocide* 12.

short fiction, Karácsony's real name was Dr. Bernát Klärmann²¹. He was trained as a lawyer, and indeed practiced law as his primary occupation until 1941, when the Jews of northern Transylvania were banned from the profession. Even prior to that, the literary magazine that had formerly published Karácsony's work had turned him away. Friends noticed his dejection in the face of these humiliations. One recalled that, in 1942, the chief rabbi of the small Neolog Jewish community of Kolozsvár, Dr. Mózes Weinberger, approached Karácsony and advised him to "break with his Hungarian literary connections and declare himself a Jewish writer, since the Hungarians spurned him and do not consider him a Hungarian". Karácsony's response was reported to be as follows: "[He said] he does not value Jewish nationalism any more than Hungarian: both are products of inhumanity and stupidity. The individual must decide to which nation he belongs, and just because the Hungarian fascists and nationalists preach anti-Semitism does not mean that he would turn against the people of Kossuth, Rákóczi, Petőfi and Ady. Neither is he denying his Jewish origin by doing so."²²

From his reaction to the rabbi's suggestion, we can see that Karácsony's loyalties were divided between a cultural Hungarianism and an ethnic Judaism. He did not find it necessary to deny one in order to embrace the other. Like Friedmann, he changed his name in order to identify himself with the Hungarian literary tradition of which he felt himself to be a part, but unlike Friedmann he desired to do so only as a writer. As a lawyer he remained Dr. Bernát Klärmann. For him there was still a space the two identities could share, even if that space was limited to the person of Karácsony himself.

Another principal victim of the Jewish Laws was Kolozsvár's Hungarian-Jewish newspaper, "Új Kelet" [New East]. The paper's editor, Ernő Márton, had been elected to the position of deputy mayor of Kolozsvár in 1919, and later represented the Jewish Party in the Romanian parliament²³. Although "Új Kelet" was known for its Zionist leanings, it was published in Hungarian²⁴. Its articles had never revealed an anti-Hungarian bias, which might explain why Márton was so incredulous when the paper was banned. Almost immediately he set about trying to publish a similar paper

²¹ From Vezér and Balogh cited in: Dániel Lőwy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig. Kolozsvár zsidó lakosságának története* [From the brick factory to the cattle car. The history of the Jewish population of Kolozsvár] (Kolozsvár 1998) 41–45. It is ironic that he should have chosen the name Karácsony, meaning literally Christmas, as his pen name.

²² *Ibid.* 44.

²³ Lőwy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig* 34.

²⁴ The paper continued to be published in Hungarian even in exile in Tel Aviv, where it was revived after the war by Márton himself. Lőwy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig* 53.

under a different title and with a different editor. The request for permission to begin publication of the “Erdélyi Zsidó Szemle” [The Transylvanian Jewish Review] was officially submitted to the Press Division of the Prime Minister’s Office by the new would-be editor, Ferenc Niedermann. The Press Division, however, was not fooled by the presence of Niedermann’s name on the request and devoted its attention to Márton’s past career as politician and journalist. Although it could find no fault in the request itself, and despite the fact that the prefect of Kolozsvár recommended approval, the Press Division was not inclined to grant the request. The problem was with Márton.

“For the past ten years, it is true, he has not held an anti-Hungarian platform, but both within and beyond the Zionist ‘Új Kelet’ he promoted a militant Jewish Party platform. This platform [...] stood on a Jewish national base and considered the Jews to be a separate national group.”²⁵ This statement by the Press Division, used to justify its denial of Márton’s request, is revealing on a number of levels. Firstly, we learn from it that the *local* administration in Kolozsvár, represented by the person of the prefect, has nothing against the idea of someone publishing a Jewish newspaper in his town. The *central* administration, however, in this case the Press Division, though admitting that the request was legal and that Márton was not an anti-Hungarian agitator, denied the request because Márton “considered the Jews to be a separate national group”. Their complaint, simply stated, was that Márton did not see Jews as Hungarians.

Although many requests put forth by Jews and Jewish groups during this period were denied, not all of them were. Immediately following the announcement of the Second Vienna Award in 1940, the Orthodox Jewish community requested permission from the Minister of Religion and Education, Bálint Hóman, to establish separate high schools for boys and girls of Jewish origin. Hóman approved the request and the schools were opened already in November of that year²⁶.

Among the students who attended the new Jewish High School for boys was a youth by the name of Egon Blatt. Like many Hungarian-speaking Jews of his age, Blatt was not particularly religious, was a good student,

²⁵ Magyar Országos Levéltár [Hungarian State Archives, Budapest] (MOL), K28 (Miniszterelnökség), 70. csomó, 147. tétel, 1941-O-17835, lapok 1–3. All translations are by the author.

²⁶ Dr. Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger, A kolozsvári zsidó gimnáziumok története [A history of the Jewish high schools in Kolozsvár], in: Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve (New York 1970) 14–16. Under the Romanian administration, the Jewish community had been forced to close its high schools in 1927. Jews were nevertheless allowed, even encouraged, to attend Romanian high schools, which was not the case under the Hungarian administration during World War II.

and loved to play Ping-Pong. In the last days of the war he would narrowly escape death by unofficially changing his name to the more Hungarian-sounding Hegedüs (without asking permission from the Ministry of the Interior)²⁷. Denied the right to attend a Hungarian high school by the *numerus clausus*, Blatt attended the new Jewish high school, where his teachers were mostly Jews from Budapest who would have been qualified to teach at the university level had it not been for the Jewish Laws. The language of instruction at the school was Hungarian. Blatt was particularly impressed by the lessons in Hungarian literature²⁸.

While Blatt's professors were assigning him readings from the masterpieces of Hungarian literature, he also began reading pamphlets and books on Marxism and communism. He was immediately attracted to the Marxist interpretation of history, through which "sensations of isolation, abandonment, and desperate hopelessness, were being replaced with a feeling of belonging, of some sort of community with the progressive forces of mankind, whose ultimate victory – in spite of any temporary reversals – was assured by the inexorable forward march of history"²⁹.

Upon graduation in 1941, Blatt – a gifted student of math and physics – was offered the chance to attend the Technical University in Budapest on the condition that he allow himself to be baptized. "Although I was an atheist and religion meant nothing to me, my Jewishness apparently still had enough meaning to make me reject this offer (with due thanks). [...] I viewed getting baptized for material advantage as deeply humiliating."³⁰

In lieu of attending the university, Blatt and a few other talented young Jews took courses in calculus from a disenfranchised Romanian-speaking professor³¹. Meanwhile, he took up contacts with the communist underground and shortly became an activist in its ranks.

Blatt's experiences during the first two years of the Hungarian administration are in many ways comparable to those of Friedmann and Márton. Like Friedmann, Blatt was later brought into a situation where his name hindered or endangered his chances for success and survival. Like Márton,

²⁷ Egon Balas, *Will to Freedom. A Perilous Journey Through Fascism and Communism* (Syracuse 2000) 1–30. Blatt was in prison for his activities in the communist party. At one point during one of several evacuations, he assumed the identity of a dead inmate in order to avoid almost certain death should the guards discover he was a Jew.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 32. The play to which Blatt is referring here is an allegory of the fall, comparable not only to Goethe's "Faust", but also to Milton's "Paradise Lost".

³⁰ *Ibid.* 39–41.

³¹ Among his classmates was György (George) Ligeti who became a world famous composer and achieved popular recognition for his compositions featured in Stanley Kubrick's "2001. A Space Odyssey". Ligeti died in Vienna on 12 June 2006.

he was limited by the Jewish Laws (in his case by the *numerus clausus*), but nevertheless did not allow himself to be defined by these laws. His acts of resistance were, on the one hand, joining the (atheist) communist movement, and on the other refusing to be baptized. Similarly, Blatt's professors at the Jewish High School, despite being excluded from academia by the Jewish Laws, nevertheless instilled in many of their students a love of Hungarian literature.

Kolozsvár's Concordia Club, an all-Jewish theater society, had three things in common with Blatt's school: both provided Jews who had become unemployed or lacked opportunities as a result of the laws against Jews with something to occupy their time; both shared a number of members; and, the existence of both had been sanctioned by the Hungarian administration. In 1940, the club was dissolved by order of the military command on the grounds that it "showed signs of Free Masonic activity, and it can be presumed that it will remain a hidden nest of Free Masonry in the future, as well"³². The Ministry of the Interior's report on the club nevertheless noted that many of its members had belonged to the Hungarian Party during the interwar period. As in the case of Márton's "Erdélyi Zsidó Szemle", the prefect of Kolozsvár recommended approval of the request "[since there is] no proof of the club's purported Free Masonic activity, and that with its closing an entire army of employees lost their source of bread and became unemployed. [...] [T]he reopening of the club cannot be considered harmful from the standpoint of national security – on the contrary, the club's activities can be better monitored by means of intensive supervision."³³

The prefect's arguments this time apparently convinced the Ministry of the Interior, as the club resumed its activities in February of 1941. Tibor Lustig, who was also a student at the Jewish High School for boys during this period, took part in some of the club's organized performances. In his memoirs, he wrote of his experiences with the school and the Concordia Club. "The school's standards and bearing protected us from the ever more pointed [kiéleződő] and threatening persecutions. We took part in debating societies, musical auditions, theater and opera performances, and all of this sheltered us from the 'external evil'. As a result, our years spent at the Jewish High School stayed in our memory as the best years of our youth. It is true that during the days when the Nazis destroyed Lidice in Czechoslovakia, while the surviving Jews of Bessarabia and Bucovina were being deported to their deaths in Transnistria, we were graduating from high

³² MOL, K28 (Miniszterelnökség). 64. csomó, 133. tétel. Alapszám: 1941-O-15798.

³³ Ibid.

school and I was arguing with my classmates over which one of us could recite more Hungarian poems by heart.”³⁴

Here again we have evidence of the love of Hungarian literature preached by the professors of the Jewish High School to which Blatt alluded. Also worth noting is the prefect’s apparent sympathy with the Jews who had lost their livelihood following the shut-down of the Concordia Club, while at the same time he commented on the necessity of legalizing the organization so its activities can be subjected to more “intensive supervision”. These same, seemingly incompatible, perspectives were echoed in a completely different case around the same time: that of Löbl and the cotton swimming trunks.

The case involved a number of characters, Jews and non-Jews alike. The main protagonist was an Orthodox Jew by the name of Imre Izsák Löbl, who owned a shop on a street recently re-named for the Hungarian Regent, Miklós Horthy. On July 22, 1941, Löbl sold a cotton men’s bathing suit to a Mrs. Oszkár Rosmann for 6 pengő and 40 fillér. The next day, he sold the same style of suit to Ernő Grünwald, a member of the Neolog Jewish community, for 12 pengő and 90 fillér³⁵. Shortly thereafter, Grünwald found out from Mrs. Rosmann how much she had paid for her suit and reported Löbl to the police for price inflation. When detectives arrived to investigate his shop, they found a number of cotton swimming trunks with various prices on them and asked Löbl to produce the receipts. Löbl did not have them and asked a friend, Nándor Albert, to falsify some receipts using old Romanian-administration-era stamps and forms. This he did and Löbl handed over the receipts to the detectives. The falsifications were uncovered, however, and the charges against Löbl became graver.

In his own defense, Löbl argued that swimming trunks are not essential, but rather luxury items, and can therefore be sold for any price. The judge did not agree with Löbl’s definition of swimming trunks as “non-essential”. He declared that “nowadays swimming and sunbathing in public places is a means of maintaining health and fitness even among the lowest social classes, and for this swimming trunks are an indispensable item”. The judge went on to extol the health and economic benefits derived from the use of *cotton* swimming trunks in particular. Later on in his statement, however, the judge acknowledged that, according to “expert testimony”, 12 pengő

³⁴ Lustig cited in: Dániel Lőwy, A kolozsvári Concordia zsidó színház története [History of the Kolozsvár Jewish Concordia Theater], in: *Múlt és jövő. Zsidó kulturális folyóirat* XI (2000) 1, 75–79 here 76.

³⁵ Carmilly-Weinberger, *Hitközségek* 50, 65. The details of the case are to be found in: *Arhivele Statului, Filiala Județului Cluj, Curtea de Apel Regală, Fond 740, Inv. 286, 314, Decizii penale și civile 1–2/1942, B.I. 47/1942.*

and 90 fillér³⁶ was a fair price for men's cotton swimming trunks. As a further "mitigating circumstance", he mentioned that "the 22-year-long occupation and Romanian administration had a powerfully ruinous effect on civic morality". The harsh sentence given to Löbl was thus meant to symbolize the Hungarian administration's commitment to restoring high standards for "civic morality"³⁷.

Most significant are the judge's comments regarding Löbl's employee and accused accomplice, who was a Jew by the name of Károly Kerpner. The judge argued that Kerpner would have endangered his job and the livelihood of his entire family had he not done as his boss instructed and deceived the police and detectives. "Due to the fact that he is of the Jewish race, he would have been without income had he lost his present job." Thus the judge acknowledged the difficulty faced by Jews as a result of the implementation of the Jewish Laws and let Kerpner off the hook. He nevertheless sentenced Löbl to a fine of 5,000 pengő or 500 days in prison³⁸ for selling a pair of cotton swimming trunks at an admittedly fair price. It is similarly worth noting that the plaintiffs in the case were Jews, whose gesture of turning Löbl over to the police indicates both that they saw the court as a body representing their own interests and that they did not feel the need to solve the matter privately out of solidarity with their fellow Jews.

IDENTITIES IN RETROSPECT

The cases outlined above all speak to the conclusion that during the first few years of the war neither the Jews of Kolozsvár themselves nor the Hungarian administration wanted to commit to a specific, inflexibly defined and stable identity as far as the Jews were concerned. At times it was clearly in the best interests of the administration to consider the Jews to be Hungar-

³⁶ This corresponded approximately to the price of around 30 kilograms of bread or a little over 2 kg. of butter. This figure was calculated on the basis of prices given in other price inflation trials: *Ibid.*, B.I. 125/1942, and B.I. 36/1942.

³⁷ The belief that the 22 years of Romanian administration had corrupted the people of Northern Transylvania was widely held in Trianon Hungary, particularly by its leadership. Only a short time earlier, Regent Horthy had written a letter to Hitler which included the following comments on the Transylvanian Jews "The Transylvanian Jews [...] were all satisfied with the Romanian regime, because they all figured out soon enough how much bribe money was needed, how much will be won in the course of a transaction, and whether it's worth it to make the trip to Bucharest. Our administration has always been incorruptible." Miklós Horthy Nagybányai, *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai [The secret writings of Miklós Horthy]* (Budapest 1972) 221f.

³⁸ The appeals lawyer was quick to point out that this was far beyond the maximum sentence that could be legally handed down for the "crime" Löbl committed.

ians. During the 1941 census, for example, taken just as the Jews of Kolozsvár were trying to acclimate themselves to the restrictions imposed by the new regime, Premier Teleki cleverly left a window open for opportunistic definitions when formulating the census questions. In the case of the Concordia Club, too, the administration tolerated its existence in order to be in a better position to monitor and control its activities. The state also allowed a Jewish high school to operate so as to be able to enforce the *numerus clausus*, while being sure that Jews were receiving a *Hungarian* education.

Above all, the administration wanted to maintain control over the Jewish population and to have the final say in the matter of who was who. Nevertheless, at least initially, the cases examined here show that there were differing opinions and approaches regarding the “how” and “to what end”. Interestingly, very few official forms asked for an individual to declare his/her *nationality*. Instead, there were blanks for occupation, citizenship, and *religion*. Although this may seem paradoxical in light of the 1941 census, it points to a rather sly ingenuity on the part of the administration. In this way, the state was able to set up a mechanism that allowed desirable elements to pass through at opportune times, while always retaining the right to keep them out altogether. The Hungarian administration was out to win (or force) national converts from amongst the German, Romanian, Armenian, even Roma populations³⁹. The Jews were either conveniently integrated (when it came to paying taxes or doing “military service”⁴⁰, for example), or conveniently excluded (from attending public schools or the university, from practicing various professions, from owning certain kinds of property), depending on what the needs and concerns of the state were at the time⁴¹. During the period between the Second Vienna Award (1940) and the defeat at Stalingrad (1943), however, the door was inherently imperfect. Its effectiveness was often undermined by the contradictory nature of the administration’s own policies and enforcement mechanisms, by humane intervention on the part of judges or local administrators⁴², such as the prefect, or by the determination of individual Jews themselves.

³⁹ See footnote 5.

⁴⁰ This was the euphemism applied to the practice of drafting Jews into labor battalions on the front. Though the conditions under which laborers worked varied, casualties were between 50,000 and 70,000. Randolph L. Braham, *The Hungarian Labor Service System, 1939–1945* (East European Monographs XXXI, New York 1977) 120; László Karsai, *Holokauszt* ([Budapest] 2001) 226.

⁴¹ Until 1942, for example, land was not taken away from Jewish landowners, and even thereafter Jews continued to own apartment houses and other forms of real estate. The administration feared that if certain forms of capital were requisitioned, it might precipitate an economic crisis. Karsai, *Holokauszt* 218f.

⁴² The power of individual administrators to soften anti-Jewish legislation is further evidenced by the case of the Minister of the Interior, Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, who inter-

As the above scenarios prove, many Jews possessed such determined individualism. They navigated across and between identities, seeking and creating contexts in which they could make their own decisions about who they were, and who their enemies and friends were. To be sure, they did not all make the same choices. Some chose communism where others chose Zionism. Still others, like Karácsony, created hybrid identities, composed of bits and pieces of various loyalties and affinities. Just as the administration's goal was to *maximize* its control over the population as a whole and the Jews in particular, so was it the goal of the Jews to *minimize* the range of that control by exploring alternatives to victimization. Some tried to disappear by changing their names; others married or had relations with non-Jews; others converted⁴³; and still others joined movements that could not be effectively controlled by the state (communists, Zionists). Of course the state still managed to limit their options and drain away many of their livelihoods, but was not able, up until the Nazi occupation in 1944, to establish and enforce a stable identity for them.

In the later years of the war, from about mid 1943 on, the gray areas and unguarded spaces of the early war years became fewer and eventually disappeared entirely. The Nazi occupation of Hungary on 19 March 1944 effectively set up a wall where the two-way door had once been.

For Friedmann, if he was between the ages of 18 and 48, the shift probably meant assignment to a labor battalion and perhaps death on the Eastern Front⁴⁴. For Karácsony, the door closed for good when he was taken in the late spring of 1944 to the Kolozsvár ghetto whence he was deported to Auschwitz. He did not return⁴⁵. Márton served as a member of the short-lived local Jewish Council (*Judenrat*). Shortly before the establishment of the Kolozsvár ghetto, the Council decided to send him to Bucharest, where

vened to keep Transylvanian Jewish doctors employed. His activities resulted in the resignation of the chairman of the Chamber of Doctors in Kolozsvár, Ernő Novák. Kovács, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics* 122–127.

⁴³ Carmilly-Weinberger, *Statisztikai adatok Kolozsvár zsidóságáról az 1919–1936-os években*.

⁴⁴ Of the eight Márton Friedmanns who were reported to have disappeared or died during their service term on the Eastern Front (according to Hungarian military records cited below), our Márton Friedmann might have been one of the two for whom no birthplace is listed. Both were listed as missing in 1943. Dr. Gavriel Bar Shaked (ed.), *Nevek. Munkaszázadok veszteségei a keleti magyar hadműveleti területeken* [Names. Labor service battalion losses on the eastern front of Hungarian military action] II (New York 1992) 301.

⁴⁵ Zoltán Tibori Szabó, *Élet és halál mezsgyéjén. Zsidók menekülése és mentése a magyar-román határon 1940–1944 között* [Between life and death. The flights and rescue of Jews across the Hungarian-Romanian border between 1940 and 1944] (Kolozsvár 2001) 93; Lówy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig* 41–45.

he was to make arrangements for the escape of a number of other Transylvanian Jews⁴⁶. He later emigrated to Palestine where, following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, he resumed editorship of the “Új Kelet” in Tel Aviv⁴⁷. Blatt was called up for labor service in 1942, but instead of showing up for his assignment, he went into hiding and joined the communist underground. Towards the end of the war he was arrested, tortured, and imprisoned as a communist, and only survived by assuming the identity of a fellow inmate, András Hegedüs, who had escaped⁴⁸. Tibor Lustig was conscripted into a labor battalion. Through an uncanny coincidence, he was able to see his family members through the one grated window of a cattle car that had stopped near where he was working. His parents and three of his brothers and sisters were killed in Auschwitz⁴⁹. Lustig survived the war and returned to Kolozsvár where he became a pediatrician and university professor⁵⁰. Imre Löbl, who was over fifty and therefore legally ineligible for conscription into a labor battalion, could have survived the war years in any number of ways⁵¹. What we do know is that he returned to Kolozsvár after the war, where his name appears on two plaques honoring those who took part in and made donations for the reestablishment of the Jewish community of Cluj, now part of Romania again.

⁴⁶ Dr. Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger, *Versenyfutás a halállal* [Race with death], in: Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), *A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve* (New York 1970) 213–235 here 223–225.

⁴⁷ Lówy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig* 279; K. Kahán, *Az erdélyi zsidó sajtó története* [History of the Transylvanian Jewish press], in: Mózes Carmilly-Weinberger (ed.), *A kolozsvári zsidóság emlékkönyve* (New York 1970) 185–201 here 196.

⁴⁸ Balas, *Will to Freedom* 116f. Later, after the war, he took the name Balázs, which was then rendered as Balaú in Romanian.

⁴⁹ Oliver Lustig, *Lágerszótár* [Camp dictionary] (Kolozsvár/Napoca 1984) 9f.

⁵⁰ Lówy, *A téglagyártól a tehervonatig* 278f.

⁵¹ He may have fled into Romania, gone into hiding, or been one of the 388 Kolozsvár Jews who were “ransomed” by the Zionist leader, Rezső Kasztner. Israel Gutman (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust I* (New York 1990) 302f.

