

Lars Dencik

“Jewishness” in Postmodernity:
The Case of Sweden



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THE CASE OF SWEDEN



The Rappaport Center for Assimilation
Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality
Bar Ilan University – Faculty of Jewish Studies

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**“Jewishness” in Postmodernity:
The Case of Sweden**

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to the author and

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The Faculty of Jewish Studies

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2005

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Preface

The rise of nationalism was an important feature of European modernity. This posed a challenge to the Jews of Europe: are you French/German/English – or are you Jewish? A very characteristic response of European Jews to that challenge was, to define themselves as members of the nation in whose state they resided, and as adherents of the Jewish religion, e.g., as Germans of the Mosaic faith. Under such a construction of identity, broad aspects of Jewish life and culture became formally beyond the pale (!) to modern European Jews. Simultaneously, the deepening of secularization in 20th century Europe made the specifically religious realms of human existence less and less meaningful for most Europeans – including the great majority of Jews, who were frequently in the vanguard of cultural processes in Europe. Thus, the specific rubric that had been allocated to Jewish identity in modern Europe became increasingly irrelevant to most Jews; understandably, their Jewishness became more and more residual.

Post-modern trends in Europe – reflected in and affected by

the creation and growth of the European Union – are characterized *inter alia* by a lessened stress on nationalism. At the same time, religion has not rebounded to fill the identity gap. Rather, it seems that a range of other cultural, moral and ethnic concerns are becoming increasingly salient. Where does this leave the Jews? How do they perceive themselves today? What implications might that have for the future of Jewish life and vitality in Europe?

Prof. Lars Dencik, Professor of Social Psychology at Roskilde University, Denmark, is one of the important scholars who have put their finger on these questions, and have devoted groundbreaking research to answering them. His decision to focus on Swedish Jewry also enables the reader to get to know the history and current reality of a Jewish community that is less in the limelight than many others. It gives us great pleasure to be able to present his findings both to a Hebrew readership here in Israel and to an English readership worldwide.

The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality was founded in Bar Ilan University in the spring of 2001 at the initiative of Ruth and Baruch Rappaport, who identified assimilation as the primary danger to the future of the Jewish people.

A central working hypothesis of the Center is that assimilation is not an inexorable force of nature, but the result of human choices. In the past, Jews chose assimilation in order to avoid persecution and social stigmatization. Today, however, this is rarely the case. In our times, assimilation stems from the fact that for many Jews, maintaining Jewish involvements and affiliations seems less attractive than pursuing the alternatives open to them in the pluralistic societies of contemporary Europe and America. A working hypothesis of the Rappaport Center is that the tendency

of many Jews to disassociate from Jewishness is a reflection of real flaws and weaknesses that exist in various areas and institutions of Jewish life today.

However, since assimilation is not a force of nature, it should be possible to move beyond analysis, towards mending and repair. This is the second stage of our activities, and these two aspects are reflected in our name: The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research and Strengthening Jewish Vitality.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those whose efforts have enabled the publication of this important paper by Prof. Dencik: Ms. Iris Aharon, organizational coordinator of the Rappaport center; Ms. Ruhi Avital (text editor); Mr. Ya’akov Hasson (proofreading and coordinating with press); the Ben Gassner studio (cover graphics), and Art Plus press.

For all of us involved in the activities of the Rappaport Center, and indeed for all Jews and people of good will concerned with the vitality of the Jewish people, the publication of this paper is an opportunity to acknowledge once again the vision and commitment of Ruth and Baruch Rappaport. It is their initiative and continued generosity that enable the manifold activities of the Rappaport Center – thus making an important contribution to ensuring the future well-being of the Jewish people. May they continue to enjoy together many years of health, activity, satisfaction and happiness.

Zvi Zohar, Director
The Rappaport Center for Assimilation Research
and Strengthening Jewish Vitality



Introduction

The conditions of human existence change continuously. A process of *postmodernisation* today follows the modernisation of Western societies – a concept aiming at capturing the continuous process of social transformations in the highly developed Western societies – among them the Scandinavian welfare states.

The assumption is that as the conditions of social life change, so do the conditions for the individual's identity formation. How does European Jewry today cope with the challenges of these ongoing transformations? How do the identities of Jews, regarded both as a minority group and as individuals living in these societies, transform? How do they live as Jews in contemporary Modernity? In other words: How – if at all – does their “Jewishness” appear? These are the questions addressed in this article.

The main empirical basis for this paper is a study conducted between 1999 and 2001 entitled *Jewish Life in Contemporary Modernity*. The data are based on a questionnaire sent to members

* A shortened version of this paper was published in: Zvi Gitelman, Barry Kosmin, Andras Kovacs (Eds.). *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003, pp. 75–104.

of the Jewish communities in Sweden. The questionnaire comprises 72 general questions, many of them with several subquestions, plus 12–22 questions of particular local relevance, that focus on Jewish life and attitudes towards Jewish issues.¹

The data show that most Swedish Jews² today identify strongly as Jews. A vast majority of them also consider the Jewish group in the country a “part of the Jewish people” rather than a “religious group”. Most of the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden do not object to being considered an official Swedish “national minority”. “Feeling Jewish inside”, “loyalty to the Jewish heritage” and “a sense of belonging to the Jewish people” are the main pillars of their Jewish identity, whereas religious activities play a minor role in their personal sense of Jewishness.

Large-scale tendencies in contemporary Western societies seem to have had strong repercussions on the life-style and attitudes of the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden. Thus, a majority of the Swedish Jews agreed with the proposition that women should be given a role equal to men in Jewish life, including the different functions in synagogal life. Most reported holding an

1 An English version of the questionnaire called “*Questions about Jewish life*” can be obtained from lade@ruc.dk

Together with my colleague and co-worker the sociologist *Karl Marosi* in Denmark we have used the same questionnaire in studies of the members of the Jewish Communities in Finland and Norway.

Parallel studies have recently also been carried out in other countries such as Great Britain, Hungary, the Netherlands and South Africa. The Jewish Policy Research Institute in London is coordinating some of these studies.

2 In this context the notion “the Swedish Jews” for the sake of brevity is used as a synonym to those Jews in Sweden that are tax-paying members of a Jewish community there. It should however be noted that most Jews in Sweden (or Swedes of a Jewish descent) have not enrolled as members in any Jewish community. Cf. Section 2 of this paper.

open and tolerant attitude towards “mixed” marriages. A majority of the members of the Jewish communities also agreed with the statement that the Jewish Diaspora and Israel are moving towards two different types of Jewry. Only a small minority agreed with the proposition that only by being orthodox can Jewry survive. Further, a majority of respondents *disagreed* with the proposition that “in the long run Jewry has a chance only in Israel”. On the contrary, a vast majority of the members of the Jewish community stated that the future of Jewish life lies in supporting Jewish cultural and social activities in the country where they reside, *in casu*, Sweden.

These and related results of the study are analysed in terms of the impact of postmodernisation on the Western societies. Additional explanations are sought in the demographic, political, social and cultural changes – among these a recent rise in post-*Shoah* (Holocaust)³ European Jewish cultural self-awareness – that have taken place in Europe in the wake of the collapse of communism.

This essay is divided into the following sections:

1. Postmodernisation: Challenges to traditional Jewish identities.
2. Sweden: The history of the Swedish Jews.
3. The study: “*Jewish life in modern Sweden*”.
4. Conclusions: Enjoying the ethno-cultural smorgasbord.

3 *Shoah* is the Hebrew term for what is more often described by the Greek word “Holocaust”, that is the systematic extermination of the Jews carried out by the Nazis in Europe in the period 1933–1945. The connotations of the terms are somewhat different – for that reason I prefer to use the Hebrew term.

1. Postmodernisation: Challenges to traditional Jewish identities

The processes of globalisation and the breakthrough of new technologies – such as biotechnology and digital information technology – by mutually reinforcing each other profoundly reshape the conditions of social life and the predicaments of human existence in the highly developed part of the world. Furthermore, the pace of change is accelerating. Continuous processes of social transformation constantly challenge the individual's life situation. Whatever used to be doesn't prevail for very long. The social lifetime of almost everything – traditions, technologies, production methods, communication systems, family patterns, sex roles, scientific 'truths', normative values, customs, life-styles and so on – become shorter and shorter. More obviously than ever before, change becomes the natural order of life.⁴

4 The philosopher Stephen Toulmin in an interesting way has discussed how what appears to be "the natural order of things" make us see certain phenomena. Cf. Toulmin, 1962.

Contemporaneous modernity is constantly replaced by the changes that further modernisation brings about. Therefore modernity as we know it will soon be replaced by what comes after it. Today, social collectives, as well as individuals, have to find ways to cope with the process of ongoing *postmodernisation*. One has to become what one is not: this seems to be one of the challenges the process of postmodernisation poses to the individual. (This perspective is further elaborated in Dencik, 2001).

One of the few things one can be sure of in this situation is that there is nothing one can be really sure of. Nothing is *per se* or automatically valid just because it *used* to be so.

Leading sociologists tend to agree that contemporary Western societies can be characterized both by a “reflexive modernity” and be described as “post-traditional” societies (cf. Bauman, 1991; Beck, 1994; Castells, 1997; Giddens, 1991; 1994). This means, that in order to cope adequately with their situation, individuals cannot any longer just carry on the cultural traditions transmitted to them. Traditions are no longer automatically socially relevant when it comes to how one should lead one’s life. This, however, does not imply that all traditions have become obsolete. It implies that individuals will need to reflect upon and make their own decisions about which traditions to maintain and how to carry this out. Whereas culturally transmitted traditions previously served as clear guidelines to what people should do and when to do so, today, each and every individual has to rely more on his or her own reflections and own decisions as to what to do and when to do it. Postmodernisation (cf. Crook, Pakulski, Waters, 1992; Arvidsson, Berntson, Dencik, 1994) places people in a situation of “cultural release/freewheeling” (“*kulturelle Freisetzung*”) as the German Professor of Education Thomas Ziehe (1982; 1989) has labelled it.

Judaism, based as it is on ancient myths and codes of behaviour, is one of the oldest and most profoundly tradition-based cultures in existence.⁵ But the social predicaments of the Jews living in the Western world today have been undergoing fundamental and rapid transformation in the last century. Not only because of major events in Jewish history, such as the pogroms and *Shoah*, but also because of the immediate impact of the modernisation process itself – with all that it has brought of *rationalisation*, *secularisation* and *individuation* of social life. Rationalisation implies that effectiveness and profitability become superior considerations in all spheres of social affairs. Secularisation has opened up the opportunity for the critical questioning of established values and traditions. The idea of equal rights for all, regardless of race, sex and social background has become widely accepted across the Western world. Individuation has meant that individuals have become singled out socially, “disembedded” from their social background – as Anthony Giddens puts it (Giddens, 1990) – and nowadays, ideally are treated only as representatives of themselves (and not of any ascribed collective, be it kinships, ethnic belongings or anything of that kind). How do the adherents of one of the most traditional religions cope with the challenges of these ongoing transformations? How do members of the Jewish communities in one of the countries where this process of continuous *postmodernisation* is most pronounced – viz. Sweden – cope with these challenges? In what ways have these processes affected the

5 A frequently asked question is how come the Jews have been able to keep the Sabbath, i.e. sanctifying Saturdays as a day for rest and contemplation, throughout the millennia. A typical Jewish answer to that is: “It is not us that have kept the Sabbath, it is the Sabbath that have kept us (as Jews)!”

customs, lifestyles, the outlooks and values of Jews in the advanced Western countries?

Major events in Jewish history like the *Haskalah*,⁶ *Shoah*, and the establishment of the *State of Israel* have each also profoundly altered the existential conditions of the European Jewry. More recently, the fall of fascist dictatorships in Southern Europe, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the rise of a European Union and the *intifadas* as well as other political developments in and around Israel have also affected Jewish life in Europe. How do members of the Jewish communities in one of Europe’s most developed but also most peaceful countries – Sweden – handle this?

A basic assumption for what is presented in the following is that as the conditions of social life change, so do the conditions for individuals’ identity formation change. Therefore we ask: In the light of ongoing postmodernisation processes, do the Jews transform their way of ‘being Jewish’? Do the ways they identify as “Jews” change? If so, how? Do they give up their traditions, or do they perhaps rather attach new meanings to them? We know that modern life-patterns, including the rise in inter-ethnic and inter-

6 The Jewish Enlightenment movement. Its central figure was the German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelsohn (1729–1786) and a central step was the establishment of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and *The Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews* in Berlin 1822. The introduction to its statutes reads: “A powerful change in intellectual orientation, among Jews as well as other peoples, has engendered new [cultural and social] patterns which daily enhance the anguish generated by this contradiction. This situation necessitates a complete reform of the peculiar education and self-definition thus far prevalent among the Jews; they will have to be brought to the same point of development reached by the rest of Europe”. Cf. Mendes-Flohr, P. & Reinharz, J. (eds.) 1980, p. 188.

religious (“mixed”) marriages make it puzzling to define in a relevant way “*Who* is a Jew?”. But the impact of the post-modernisation processes on Jewish life in Europe today also makes it increasingly relevant to ask the question: “*How* do you Jew?”

So, that is what has been done. Shortly, I will report on what we discovered by asking members of the Jewish communities in Sweden about this. But first, a brief presentation of Sweden and of the history of the Jews in Sweden.

2. Sweden: The history of the Swedish Jews

Sweden is one of the so-called Scandinavian welfare states. Three significant features of these societies, relevant to the topic of this paper are:

- a) That in these states there prevails a longstanding tradition, based in a hegemonic social democratic ideology, to intervene in the civil sector of social life. Attempts on the part of official authorities to regulate (by laws and fiscal policies, for example) the lives of citizens in order to erase what are perceived as injustices and inequalities, are largely accepted policy measures in these societies;
- b) A positive, not to say an aggressive attitude towards social modernization. Social changes implicating accentuated rationalization, enhanced secularisation and increased individuation are seen as both unavoidable and appealing.
- c) A third feature, more manifest in Sweden than in the other Scandinavian states, is a rapid ethnic “pluralisation” of its population. Thus, during the last three decades the social fabric of Sweden has changed from an extraordinarily ethnic homogeneity – that served as the social basis for quite effective

collectivistic measures – towards heterogeneity comprising a majority of ethnic Swedes and a considerable number of newly arrived immigrants and refugees from many different countries and several different ethnic groups. Today, approximately 15% of the Swedish population are of non-Swedish heritage. Sweden has recently also officially proclaimed itself as being a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. In connection with ratifying the *European Council's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* in 1999, the Swedish Parliament also passed a law granting the rights of five officially acknowledged *national minorities*, among them the Swedish Jews.⁷ In connection with the simultaneous ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages, *Yiddish* was also acknowledged as a minority language in Sweden.⁸

Adopting liberal criteria as to who might be included in the group of “Jews”, according to recent estimates approximately 30 thousand Jews live in Scandinavia (including Finland).⁹ Of these, approximately two thirds may be counted as a “core” group of Jews, meaning that they were born Jewish or have converted to

7 The other groups are the Same people, the Roma people, the Finnish Swedes and the Tornedalians – a group living in the valley of the river Torne along the border of Sweden and Finland at the base of the Baltic sea. They speak the language of *meänkieli*, a variation of Finnish. Cf. *Statens Offentliga Utredningar*, 1997a & 1997b.

8 Of the other European states only the Netherlands has also done so.

9 Denmark, Norway and Sweden comprise the Scandinavian countries. The group of so-called “Nordic” countries also include Finland and Iceland. For practical purposes in this context I use the better-known term “Scandinavian” to denote the group of countries I refer to here.

Judaism and – even if not religious – to some extent observe Jewish practices.¹⁰

The history of the Jewish population differs considerably between the Scandinavian countries. In particular, the situation for the Jews in these countries during and after the Second World War has turned out very differently. The Jewry in the Scandinavian countries experienced *Shoah* in dramatically different ways. The Swedish Jewry, due to Sweden’s neutrality during the war, escaped *Shoah*. The Norwegian Jewry, on the other hand, lost close to half of its members in the Nazi death camps. Danish Jewry, in contrast, experienced the miracle of having been saved by rescue operations carried out by the Gentile Danish civilian population. In Finland, on the other hand, Jews enrolled in military units of the Finnish army that fought against the Soviet Union – in fact, on the same side as the Germans. Indeed, four very different historic fortunes can be seen here. Based on their experiences, the Jewish communities in these countries have taken on very different post-*Shoah* paths.

Not only do differences in experience play a role in shaping Jewish life. Also, the sheer differences in the number of Jews in the different countries contribute to divergences with respect to how the Jews there lead their lives. The population of Jews living in the Scandinavian countries is as follows:

10 Estimated by the demographer Prof. Sergio Della Pergola at the Dept. of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University Jerusalem.

Table 1: Number of Jews living in the Scandinavian countries today.¹¹

Denmark	6,400 – 8,000	≈	1.2 per thousand of the population	
Finland	1,100 – 1,500	≈	0.2	- ” -
Norway	1,200 – 1,500	≈	0.3	- ” -
Sweden	15,000 – 19,000	≈	1.7	- ” -

These figures should be matched up to the number of Jews that lived in these countries just before the Second World War, and the number of persons lost in *Shoah* in each of the countries:

Table 2: Number of Jews in the Scandinavian countries in 1937¹² and number of persons that perished in *Shoah*¹³

	Pre-war Jewish population	persons perished in Shoah
Denmark	7,500	60
Finland	2,000	7
Norway	1,700	762
Sweden	7,500	0

In contrast to the other countries, Sweden was kept out of the war and was never under German or Nazi rule. When the Nazis seized power in Germany in 1933, 7,044 Jews were living in Sweden.¹⁴

- 11 By the year 2000. The lower figure refers to the “core” group and the larger figure to an estimate of an “enlarged” group of Jews in each of the countries.
- 12 Source: Historisches Museum Berlin. The figure for Sweden is estimated by me.
- 13 Source: Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust, based on research at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.
- 14 According to a Swedish law not abolished until 1951 every person living in Sweden had to belong to an acknowledged religious community. That is how we now the exact number of Jews living there at the time. Jews who had formally converted to Christianity are not included in these figures – hence according to the race criteria of the Nazi Nuremberg laws the figure would be somewhat higher.

At the outbreak of the war in 1939, the number had increased by approximately 3,000, mainly due to political asylum given to refugees of Jewish descent from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Comparing the two tables presented here, one may notice some striking facts:

- a) With the exception of Sweden, the number of Jews living in the Scandinavian countries is lower today than it was before the war. This decrease, with the possible exception of Norway, cannot be explained by losses attributed to the war or *Shoah*.
- b) The case of Sweden is unique in that the Jewry there has doubled in size as compared with the pre-war period. This, on the other hand, can most likely be attributed to the effects of *Shoah*. Many of the Jews living in Sweden today are, as we shall learn soon, survivors of *Shoah* and/or their children. They, or their parents, came to Sweden shortly after the Second World War from other parts of Europe – a considerable number of them directly from the death camps.
- c) Swedish Jewry today is approximately *twice as large* in numbers as the Jewry in all the other three Scandinavian (Nordic) countries *taken together*. This fact in itself needs to be taken into account when attempting to understand the differences in Jewish life between the countries. Judaism in many respects is a social, not to say a collective, practice. Numbers as such matter when it comes to social life: a “critical mass” is often necessary to make things possible.¹⁵ The larger the number of Jews in one location, the more intra-group social interaction is possible (including the possibilities of meeting

15 The ideas of *minyan*, as well as the voluntary establishments of *ghettos* are in different ways expressions of this.

potential mating partners), the more variation in life-style, in religious orientation and cultural customs can be manifested and tolerated.

As will be documented in the sequel Jewish life in Sweden – at least in Stockholm where more than two thirds of the Swedish Jews currently live – can be characterized by vitality, self-assertiveness, openness towards society and visibility.¹⁶ The path towards this has passed through the following twelve stages:

1. 1686: The first mention of the Jews in a Swedish (church) law.
2. 1775: The first Jew was permitted to settle in Sweden, *Aaron Isaac*, is allowed to establish the first Jewish Cemetery and Synagogue in Sweden.¹⁷
3. 1782: A law, “*Judereglementet*” (“Regulations on Jews”), regulating where the Jews may settle and what professions and trades they may engage in is passed. The Jews in Sweden become what in European Jewish history has become known as *Schutzjuden* under the protection of the King.
4. 1838–1873: Laws opening up for a successive process of emancipation of the Jews are passed. In 1870, when the Jews are granted full citizenship and civil rights, there are about 3,000 Jews living in Sweden, who organize themselves in “*Mosaiska Församlingar*” (“Communities of believers in the

16 A French Jewish magazine in the year 2000 presented contemporary Jewish life in Sweden under the heading “*Vivre son judaïsme en toute liberté*” (*EuroJmagazine* N° 8, 2000). These tendencies are in sharp contrast to what was found in a study of Swedish Jewry 30 years ago. Cf. Gordon & Grosin, 1973.

17 It should be noted that this is considerably later than in most other European countries.

- Mosaic faith”). Judaism as a religion – as opposed to Jewishness as a belongingness to a peoplehood – is stressed.¹⁸
5. 1905–1917: Between the Kishinev massacre in 1905 and World War I, a few thousands Jews escaping persecution in Tsarist Russia, settle in Sweden.
 6. 1933–1939: Approximately 2,500 Jews from Europe – mainly Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia – are allowed refuge in Sweden.¹⁹
 7. 1940–1945: During the Second World War some 100 Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Norway manage to escape to Sweden. In October 1943, almost all Jews residing in Denmark were given asylum in Sweden after having been assisted by the local Danish population to cross the sea from Denmark in small fishing boats. Almost all of them returned to Denmark and their in tact homes at the end of the war.
 8. 1945: Immediately after the war, an operation lead by Count Bernadotte called “the White Buses” brings survivors from the Nazi KZ-camps to Sweden. Out of approximately 21,000 rescued approximately 5,500 were Jews. Through the Red Cross and UNRRA a further 10,000 Jews are brought to Sweden. In all, 7,000 of the survivors remained in Sweden, while the majority left for the USA or Israel.

18 Ideologically this bears resemblances to the French model of a “*Consistoire Israelite*” established in the Napoleonic period.

19 After *Kristallnacht* only 150 Jewish adults – among them my parents – and 500 unaccompanied Jewish children were allowed entry as refugees to Sweden. Together with Switzerland the Swedish authorities previously had managed to convince the German authorities to stamp the German passports carried by its Jewish citizen with a “J” so that those carrying such passports easily could be refused entry to Sweden and sent back to Germany – from where most of them were later sent to the Nazi death camps.

9. 1951: The law stating that every Swede must belong to an acknowledged religious denomination is abolished. Jews living in Sweden are no longer forced to belong either to the “The Community of believers in the Mosaic faith” or to convert to Christianity. Approximately 350 people cancel their membership of the Jewish community.
10. 1956–1970: Political events in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland lead (forced) many of the Jews in these countries to emigrate. Approximately 500 Hungarian Jews, a few hundred from Czechoslovakia and a little more than 2,000 Jews from Poland settled in Sweden during these years. By 1970, approximately 14,000 Jews – twice as many as 1933 – lived in Sweden. As strange as it may appear, one may say that contemporary Jewish life in Sweden has been ‘fed’ by Nazism and Communism.
11. 1980s: “The Communities of Mosaic believers” changed their name to become “*Jewish* communities”. This should be understood in relation to the rationale behind previously deciding to label oneself “Mosaic”: As Christians are “Christians” because they base their faith upon the teachings of Christ, Jews are “Mosaic” because they base their faith upon the teachings of Moses. But as modernity makes secularism socially more acceptable, the concept of the Jews as a mainly religiously distinct group weakens – and instead the idea that some are Jews because they belong to a certain peoplehood – the Jewish people – strengthens: hence, the change of name to “*Jewish* community”.²⁰

20 Similar tendencies at the same time surface also in other parts of Europe, i.e. in France were the previously derogative notion “*Juif*” gradually become

12. 1999: The Jews of Sweden become legally acknowledged as a Swedish *national* minority according to the *European Council’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, and Yiddish became acknowledged as Swedish national minority language.

In this context, it is noteworthy that Sweden, according to a law dating back to 1937,²¹ is the only country within the European Community (EU) that prohibits *shrita* (the slaughtering of animals according to the religious prescriptions stated in the Bible).²² In 2001, the Swedish parliament also passed a law aimed at prohibiting the circumcision of boys.

It may seem paradoxical that Swedish law on the one side one grants the resident Jews the status of an officially acknowledged national minority – including the right to autonomy and to pursue their own specific culture – and on the other hand prevents them from practicing central elements of their religion and culture. Both undertakings can however, be seen as expressions of the same, nowadays in Sweden politically favoured, basic ideological wish to uphold and strengthen human and animal rights. As stated earlier in this paper [Section 2a] in Sweden, a long-standing tradition to allow the State intervene in the civil sectors of social life prevails. This in order to protect its citizens – be it the Jewish minority from the risk of vanishing – or cows, or boys, from becoming “victims

socially accepted as a replacement for the religious category “*israelite*”. Cf. Dominique Schnapper, 1980; 1994.

21 Clearly influenced by the anti-Jewish sentiments prevailing emanating from Nazi-Germany at that time.

22 Among the European countries Norway and Switzerland also prohibits *shrita*. These two countries, however, are not members of the EU.

of barbarian practices” rooted in ancient texts and customs. Along the same lines, one may also understand the outstanding position of the public opinion in Sweden – when compared to other European countries – with respect to attitudes towards keeping the memory of the extermination of the Jews. Table 3, below reports the attitudes in some European countries towards maintaining the memory of *Shoah*:

Table 3: Attitudes in some European countries towards maintaining the memory of Shoa

“Some people say that more than 50 years after the end of World War II, it is time to put the memory of the Nazi extermination of the Jews behind us. Others say that we should keep the remembrance of the Nazi extermination of the Jews strong even after the passage of time. Which opinion is closer to your opinion?” (In percent)²³

Country	Put memory of extermination of the Jews behind us	Keep remembrance of extermination of the Jews strong	Don't know/ No answer
Czech Republic (1999)	17	74	9
Hungary (1991)	28	61	10
Poland (1995)	10	85	5
Russia (1996)	6	78	16
Slovakia (1999)	24	63	13
Sweden (1999)	4	94	2
Switzerland (2000)	21	72	7

There are three Jewish communities in Sweden today, localized in the three major cities of Sweden; Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmoe. Each of them is what in the European Jewish tradition

²³ Source: The American Jewish Committee, 2000, Table 8, p. 26. The data are based on surveys with the general public in the respective countries.

has been called an *Einheitsgemeinde*, i.e. open to membership for any Jew regardless of his or her religious or political orientation.²⁴ Today they organize an actual Jewish civil society within the larger Swedish society. This includes a wide variety of community activities such as religious services, kosher food supplies, burial societies, social work, services for the elderly, service and nursing homes, kindergartens, youth groups, summer camps, educational programs, a school, sporting activities, and outwardly directed activities such as the publication of periodicals and cultural events, and so on.

On the whole, “Jewish culture” has a high standing in today’s Sweden.²⁵ At least in part, this is due to the Swedish government’s recent involvement in and support for “Jewish issues”. In 1997, the “Living History Project”, a research and educational campaign focussing on *Shoah* and its legacy was launched. In January 2000, the Swedish government convened an International Holocaust Conference attended by top-level politicians and scholars from all over the world. This was followed up a year later by a large grant for the establishment of a *European Centre for Jewish Studies in*

24 The Stockholm Jewish community is by far the largest in Sweden. It runs three synagogues, the Great Synagogue is Masorti (“Conservative”) and the two smaller have Orthodox services. There are also regular egalitarian services held in the Community Centre. The Gothenburg Jewish community defines itself as liberal, but for the time being both of the two synagogues there are Orthodox; The Malmoe Jewish community defines itself as an Orthodox community.

25 The periodical *Judisk Krönika* (“Jewish Chronicle”) is regarded one of the leading cultural magazines in Sweden, there is a high quality institutional Jewish Theatre (“*Judiska Teatern*”), an active Jewish Museum featuring exhibitions of Jewish art, a Jewish Library, a yearly Jewish Film festival, yearly appearances at the Swedish national book fair, several *Klezmer* music bands, etc.

*Stockholm*²⁶ and by declaring the 27th of January, the day of the liberation of Auschwitz, an official “Holocaust Memorial Day against intolerance and racism”.

The high level of cultural and social activity relating to “Jewish issues” in Sweden today is not only generated by external factors. It seems that Swedish Jewry itself, after years of dwelling in the shadows of the traditional mentality of the Jewish ghetto²⁷ – and for the last 50 years also in the mental shadows of *Shoah*²⁸ – has begun to move out into the sun of shining self-awareness, and perhaps also more and more out of the grip of Jewish Nostalgia.²⁹ Therefore, many members of the Jewish communities in Sweden now stress the need for outwardly directed activities. One way this expresses itself is in the priority they attach to different issues that according to them deserve more or less attention in the future.

26 The centre is called *Paideia* and has started its first year of activities with in residence students from 10 different European countries.

27 Cf. Gordon & Grosin, 1973.

28 One may here remember that it took 40 years for Moses to take the Jews out of Egypt – according to a Jewish saying because he needed a generation “to take Egypt (i.e. the mentality of slavery) out of the Jews”.

29 In a public discussion at the Jewish Community in Stockholm on what type of Jewish culture to launch in Sweden today, a desire to be able to develop something other than “old *shtetlach*-nostalgia and modern Israeli kitsch” was expressed.

Table 4: Attitudes towards certain activities that the Jewish Community may engage in

“When you think about the Jewish congregation, you may think that too little attention is paid to certain activities, while others get too much attention. What do you think deserves more or less attention?” (In percent)

ACTIVITY LEVEL Activity ³⁰	Good as it is attention	Needs more attention	Needs less	Don't know
Campaigns against antisemitism	24	68	1	6
Participation in the public debate	31	54	2	13
Jewish cultural activities, theatre, film festivals, etc.	35	52	3	10
Information service, <i>Judisk Krönika</i> , ³¹ local radio, etc.	54	38	3	8

30 The respondents were asked to react to 17 different options. In this table only the four of them that are clearly directed to an outside audience are listed. It should however be noted that they all scored higher on “need more attention” than such options as “Religious activities”, “The Synagogue”, “Maintenance of the cemeteries” and “Support for Israel”.

31 *Judisk Krönika* (“Jewish Chronicle”) is a bi-monthly Jewish Cultural Magazine collectively subscribed to and widely read by the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden.

3. The study: “*Jewish life in modern Sweden*”

The questionnaire

I conducted this study in collaboration with the sociologist *Karl Marosi*, of Copenhagen, Denmark and the professor of social psychology *Sigvard Rubenowitz*, at Gothenburg University, Sweden. Our shared interest in discovering more about Jewish life and identities in today’s world guided our work. Our research interests coincided in a fruitful way with the interests of the communities we approached in finding out about the Jewish orientations and preferences with respect to the activities of Jewish community of their respective members. In the course of planning the investigation we contacted the Jewish Policy Research Institute in London (JPR), which at that time had already published some results of a survey of social attitudes of British Jews (Goldberg & Kosmin, 1997; Miller et al., 1997).

The questionnaire used in the JPR studies served as a starting point in shaping our own questionnaire. Several of the questions, especially those dealing with how the respondents perceive their Jewish identity and their attitudes towards current issues in the

Jewish world, such as religious practices, antisemitism and attachment to Israel, were translated and used in our Swedish questionnaire. A set of questions attempting to trace possible impacts of the ongoing postmodernisation processes on the respondents’ life-style, adherence to traditions and to the (activities of) Jewish community were worked out by our group. Therefore, the questionnaire also includes questions relating to issues such as secularisation, assimilation, gender equality, culture, ethnicity, and so forth.

We consulted the boards of the Jewish communities concerned asking them to tell us what they – as being responsible for the future of the communities – felt would be of special interest to them to investigate. They also defined what issues with respect to local matters they wanted to be informed of. On this basis, we formulated the relevant questions – including a mapping of the social composition of the group. Drafts of the final questionnaire comprising a general section of 72 questions – many of them with several sub-questions, most of them of a multiple-choice design, a few allowing for open answers – and a special section for local questions varying in number from 13 (in Gothenburg) to 22 (in Malmoe), were presented to the boards of the communities. It was then agreed that the administrations of the various Jewish communities would distribute the questionnaires, asking their members to fill them in and send them back within a fortnight.

Pre-tests indicated that it would take the respondents not less than one hour to complete the questionnaire.³²

32 In order to be used in other studies the questionnaire has later been translated into Finnish, Norwegian and English. It is easily adaptable also to other languages and other countries.

The respondents

This study is an investigation of *the registered members* of the Jewish communities in Sweden.³³ Membership in these communities is voluntary. But not anyone can become a member. Membership requires to be *halachically* Jewish, i.e. having a Jewish mother, or having converted to Judaism with an acknowledged rabbi. Recently, the entry criteria to the Stockholm Jewish community (but not to the Gothenburg and Malmoe Jewish communities) has been changed so that a person who has a Jewish father, but not a Jewish mother, may also become a member. Registered members are required to pay tax to the community – amounting on the average to about 2% of the person's yearly net income.

All registered members that had reached majority (at age 18) at the time of the investigation were sent a letter signed by the chairman of the community asking them to participate in the study. A questionnaire and a prepaid reply envelope were also sent to every individual member. In cases where several members of the same household were members, each of them was asked to respond individually to the questionnaire. The procedure assured the anonymity of the respondents.

With the members of the Gothenburg Jewish Community, data collection took place during the summer and in Stockholm in the autumn of 1999. The members of the Malmoe Jewish Community were asked to fill out the questionnaire in the spring of 2001.

In all, 5,991 questionnaires were sent to the members of the Jewish communities: 2,581 of them were completed and returned.

³³ Parallel studies have been carried out with the members of the Jewish Communities in Finland. The Jewish Community in Oslo, Norway has also decided to have the same investigation done with their members.

Thus the response rate was 43%.³⁴ A subsequent investigation of the social composition (age, sex, etc.) of the non-responders as compared to those who sent in their filled-out questionnaires did not reveal any systematic differences between the two groups. Therefore, it is likely that our data are representative of the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden.

We have analysed the social composition of the respondents in terms of their sex and age, their level of education, the type of family they live in, length of their roots in Sweden, whether they were Jews by birth or by conversion, and the degree of religious observance they indicate. The following was found:

Sex and age:

Of the respondents, 56% were women and 44% men. Their mean age was 54. Especially among the older members, there were more women than men. Close to one fourth of the members were below the age of 40, more than one third of them were between 40 and 60 years old, and more than four out of ten are 60 years old or more. 20% of the members are 75 years old or older – similar to the proportion of members being 35 years or younger.

Level of education:

In terms of education, the Jews living in Sweden have spent more years in formal education than Swedes in general – less than 10% of the Jews living in Sweden have spent 10 years or less at school, whereas 70% of them have more than 13 years of formal education, that is to say most of them are college graduates and have an academic education.

34 This figure is higher than to the percent of members that usually participate in the elections to the boards of the communities.

Family status:

Little more than one third of the members live as singles – one third of these have never been living together with a partner, one third have become single after having separated from a partner, and one third of them are widows. Of the approximately two-thirds of the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden who live in a family-relationship,³⁵ one out of three do so with a non-Jewish partner.³⁶

Length of generational roots in Sweden:

As indicated in section 2 of this paper, many of the Jews living in Sweden today have immigrated to Sweden from other countries. Those Jews living in Sweden who were either themselves not born in Sweden and/or whose parents (both of them) were not born in Sweden we label “*Immigrants*”. Those Jews who were born in Sweden and whose parents were also born in Sweden we label “*Vikings*”. Those that have one Swedish-born parent and one “immigrant” parent we label “*half-Vikings*”. According to these criteria one third of Swedish Jews are “*Vikings*”, close to one fourth are “*half-Vikings*”, and not far from every second Jew living in Sweden today, 44% of them, are “*Immigrants*”.

35 In Sweden today it is socially accepted and also quite common that a couple live together as a family without being married. Actually approximately 50% of the children born in Sweden today are born to parents that are not married. More than 90% of the children, however, in their early years live together with both of their parents.

36 While observing that one third of the married *members* of the Jewish communities cohabit with a non-Jewish partner one should remember that most Jews in Sweden are *not* members of any Jewish community. It can be expected that among those the number that are married to or cohabit with a non-Jewish partner is considerably higher.

Born Jews and converts:

Close to 90% of the present members of the Jewish communities were born Jews. Slightly over 10% of the present members of the Jewish communities in Sweden are what is sometimes called “Jews by choice”; that is, they have converted to Judaism. After closer scrutiny we found that more than 80% of those who have done so do have some kind of Jewish family background.

Religiosity:

How religious are our respondents? This is presented in Table 5:

Table 5: Religiosity of the Swedish Jews

“How would you describe your relationship to Jewish religious practice?”

Alternative options	In percent
I am non-observant	9.2
I am Jewish, but just “in general”	27.6
I am “liberal” (“reform”/“conservative”)	26.3
I am “traditional”, but not orthodox	33.9
I am orthodox	3.1

Combining those that indicate either that they are “non-observant” or “just Jewish” into one category it turns out that somewhat more than one third of the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden today are what we may label “*secular Jews*”. The group of those who say either that they are “traditional or orthodox” is equal in size – we refer to them as the “*religious Jews*”. Approximately one fourth of the Jews in Sweden define their religious position as lying between these groups – they are what we will refer to as “*moderately observant*”.

Feelings of “Jewishness”

The concept of “Jewish identity” is a perpetually debated issue. What is it? Which are its constituents? What should it mean to have one? Where does it stem from? How should it be preserved? Why is it lost?

These are but a few of the many sub-questions that are endlessly in the focus of discussions in Jewish circles. The number of books, articles, seminars and statements on these diverse issues are never ending – and still no unambiguous and definite answers are ever given.³⁷ So rather than giving another lofty contribution as to what “Jewish Identity” as such *is*, I want to elaborate on how those who have identified themselves as Jews actually *handle* their Jewishness in the postmodern world. In other words: instead of discussing “Jewish identity” I will present data on “identities of Jews” in contemporary Modernity: That is, concrete data on how Jews in Sweden actually perceive their Jewishness. A first basic question therefore is: How “Jewish” do the Swedish Jews feel they are? Tables 6a and 6b in different ways address these issues:

37 I have, like so many other Jewish intellectuals, also contributed to this. Cf. my essay “To be at home in Homelessness” in Jakubowski (red.) 1993.

Table 6a: Feelings of “Jewishness” among members of the Swedish Jewish communities

“There can be various senses of being ‘Jewish’. Which of the following alternatives best describes your feelings?”

Alternative options	In percent
Even though I have a Jewish background I don’t consider myself as a Jew	0.3
I am aware that I am a Jew but don’t think about it that frequently	9.5
I feel rather Jewish, but other aspects of my life are also important	34.2
I am very aware that I am a Jew and that is very important to me	54.7
None of these alternatives – hard to say	1.3

Table 6b: Feelings of “Jewishness” among members of the Swedish Jewish communities

“Do you feel more Jewish or Swedish?”

Alternative options	In percent
I feel more Swedish than Jewish	7.6
I feel equally Swedish and Jewish	38.9
I feel more Jewish than Swedish	49.2
Difficult to say, not sure	4.3

These data demonstrate that Jews in Sweden today identify very strongly as Jews – close to nine out of ten of them indicate that they feel quite Jewish, and more than every second say it is very important to them. Every second member also states that they feel more Jewish than Swedish and the proportion doing so is larger than the sum of those who say either that they feel more Swedish or feel equally Swedish and Jewish. Interestingly, also among the “Vikings” many more state that they rather feel Jewish than Swedish when forced to choose between these options.

This, however, does not mean that the Swedish Jews do *not* identify as Swedes. Almost all of them are Swedish citizens, Jewish children in Sweden all go to regular Swedish schools,³⁸ the young males do their military service as do all other young males in Sweden, and so on. The level of participation in public affairs and in general elections is at least as high among the Jews as that of other Swedes. The fact that their sense of “Jewishness” is strong does not prevent their sense of “Swedishness” also being strong. In fact, the classic question often put to Jews whether one is this *or* that – for instance Jewish *or* Swedish³⁹ – with increasing multiculturalism in many parts of the world appears to be increasingly obsolete. You are not “either – or”, nor “fifty – fifty”. Jews in Sweden today appear to approve fully of both their “Jewishness” and their “Swedishness” at the same time. In this they constitute an interesting example of how members of a minority group may cope with their social predicament: you don’t have to accept being defined as half this (for instance Swedish) and half that (for instance Jewish). Rather you may oscillate between the positions according to which situation you are in. In doing so you are in fact 100% of both.

How, then are they Jews? What constitutes their personal sense of “Jewishness”? How do they conceive of the Jews as group in the Swedish society? This is presented in tables 7, 8a and b:

38 There is one Jewish day-school in Stockholm comprising grades 1–7. Afterwards the children attending that school continue their studies in regular Swedish schools. The communities offer Hebrew classes and Jewish religion and Jewish history classes for children to prepare them for their *Bar-* and *Bat-mitzwas* (a religious initiation ceremony at the age of 13 for boys and 12 for girls). These classes take place outside regular school hours.

39 A question that guided a sociological investigation among Danish Jews carried out thirty years ago by the present chairman of the “Mosaik Troessamfund” (Jewish Community) in Denmark. Cf. Blum, 1973.

Table 7: Factors constituting a personal sense of “Jewishness”

“How important is each of the following aspects for your personal feeling of ‘being Jewish’?” (In percent)

	Very important	Of certain importance	Not at all important
A feeling of being Jewish in essence (e.g. as a personality, way of thinking, etc.)	80.8	16.8	2.4
Loyalty to my Jewish inheritance	78.3	19.7	1.9
A feeling of belonging with other Jews	76.1	22.5	1.4
A feeling of solidarity with Israel	61.0	31.7	7.4
Jewish culture (music, literature, arts, etc.)	57.1	37.8	5.1
The Jewish atmosphere at home (food, customs, etc.)	52.2	39.1	8.7
Religious activities, going to the Synagogue, religious customs, etc.	23.8	56.4	19.7

This data demonstrates that an individual element – for instance, a feeling of having a ‘Jewish personality’ – is the strongest factor contributing to the feeling of ‘being Jewish’ to Jews in contemporary Modernity. But this is closely connected to a certain collective orientation – viz. loyalty to one’s Jewish inheritance and a feeling of belonging with other Jews. Religious activities are of considerably lower importance to their personal sense of ‘being Jewish’. Whereas fewer than one out of four members of the Jewish communities in Sweden attribute high importance to such activities, and close to one out of five members declare that religious activities are of no importance to their ‘being Jewish’. Approximately eight

out of ten state that a feeling of being Jewish in essence, loyalty to the Jewish inheritance and a sense of belonging to the Jewish people are very important to their personal feeling of “Jewishness”. A conclusion may be that modern Swedish Jews primarily have an *ethno-cultural* conception of what it means to ‘be Jewish’.

The Jewish group as a “national minority”

When asked directly how they consider the Jewish group the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden answer as follows:

Table 8a: Conceptions of the Jewish group in Sweden

“How would you describe the Jewish community in Sweden? Mainly as a religious group or as part of the Jewish people?”

Alternative options	In percent
Mainly as a religious group	4.5
Mainly as part of the Jewish people	65.3
Both equally	24.5
Don’t know	5.7

Again we may conclude that the Jews in Sweden while identifying strongly with their “Jewishness” regard this mainly as an ethnic matter. While the Jewish communities in the First phase of Emancipation, i.e. from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, strove to become regarded as just another religious community – and in society in general, at least officially and in particular after the Second World War were also regarded as such – the Jews themselves in contemporary Modernity tend to down-play the religious and to enhance the ethno-cultural aspect of what it means to be “Jewish”.

This was manifested in a very particular way in the wake of the presentation of the European Council’s Framework Convention

for the Protection of National Minorities in 1995. The Commission appointed by the Swedish Parliament to investigate which groups should be regarded as “national minorities” in Sweden came to the conclusion that the Jews in Sweden could qualify as such. This triggered an intense debate also within the Jewish group in Sweden. The deliberations ended with the Jewish Central Council of Sweden accepting the proposal. When shortly after this debate we asked the regular members of Jewish communities how they regarded this we got the following response:

Table 8b: Conceptions of the Jewish group in Sweden

“A government report has proposed that Swedish Jewry acquire the status of ‘Swedish national minority’. The concept ‘national minority’ is here used to indicate that the group in question has existed so long in Sweden that it has become an integral part of the nation. Yet it has such an ethnic and/or cultural identity that there is a general concern for preserving it. What is your opinion about the concept ‘national minority’ being used for the Jews of Sweden?”

Alternative options	In percent
I think it is correct	22.4
I don’t mind	40.8
I don’t like it	18.4
I don’t know	18.3

There are more members who think that being defined as ‘national minority’ is correct than there are members who don’t like to be defined as such. Almost two thirds of the members either don’t mind or think it is correct that Swedish Jewry acquire the status of ‘Swedish national minority’. Among those who don’t like it there are more elderly people than in the other groups.

It therefore seems that Emancipation in Sweden has reached

what may be called a new, perhaps a *post*-emancipatory phase. While the first phase meant to strive for becoming accepted in society as equals to all other citizens, this new phase implies an ambition to go beyond that by becoming acknowledged not only as basically “equal”, but also in ones capacity of being distinctly “different” – while of course maintaining all equal rights and privileges as fully respected citizens. Therefore while being assigned a “minority status” in the first phase of Emancipation almost by definition meant discrimination, the same status in the era of post-emancipation denotes a position of fully-fledged integration.

Observance of Jewish practices

How, then, do the members of the Jewish communities live *as Jews* in Sweden? Which Jewish laws and traditions do they observe, and to what degree? The answers to our questionnaire resulted in the following:

Table 9: Degree of observance of Jewish practices

Proportion of members of the Jewish communities that	In percent ⁴⁰
Have their sons circumcised	84.7
Attend the <i>Seder</i> ⁴¹ ceremony	84.0
Celebrate <i>Hannukah</i> ⁴²	83.8
Have a <i>Mezuzah</i> ⁴³ on the door-post	79.8
Avoid work on <i>Rosh Hashanah</i> ⁴⁴	59.8
Fast on <i>Yom Kippur</i> ⁴⁵	47.6
Light <i>Shabbat</i> candles	32.4 + 40.1 ⁴⁶
Keep <i>kosher</i> at home	18.1 + 20.1 ⁴⁷
Avoid driving and travelling on <i>Shabbat</i> ⁴⁸	10.0

40 The figures in the column indicate the proportion that state that they regularly participate in the activities mentioned in the table.

One of the interesting observations that can be made here is that although more than one third of the respondents are “secular Jews” (cf. Table 5), and only 3% declare themselves orthodox, the level of observance of traditional and religiously prescribed Jewish customs is quite high. Almost three quarters of the respondents light *Shabbat* candles at least once in a while and more than one

- 41 A yearly (around Easter time) reoccurring ceremonial feast and meal during which the story of the *Exodus* – the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt is told. Usually celebrated together with one’s family members.
- 42 A yearly (around Christmas time) reoccurring ceremonial and joyful memorial of a successful Jewish rebellion against the Roman occupation of the Land of Israel and Jerusalem two millennia ago.
- 43 A *mezuzah* is a small scroll containing a blessing, enclosed in a metal or wood box and nicely decorated. According to prescriptions in the Bible, every Jew is obliged to put a *mezuzah* at the doorposts of his home.
- 44 The religious marking of the Jewish New Year. A solemn event occurring early autumn and celebrated in the synagogues
- 45 The “Day of Atonement”, usually regarded the “holiest” of the Jewish holidays. A day when Jews according to prescriptions in the Bible are obliged to fast and spend the entire day praying and contemplating their lives – usually in a synagogue. Occurs ten days after *Rosh Hashanah*.
- 46 Every Friday night in a Jewish family the housewife is supposed to introduce the Jewish Sabbath by lighting two Shabbat candles. The first figure in the row refers to the proportion of members that state that this is done “every Friday” in their home, the second figure tell how many that say that they do so “sometimes”.
- 47 To keep *kosher* means to follow the Biblical prescriptions regarding food. These state among other things that only ritually slaughtered meat products (cf. footnote 22) are permitted, that meat and milk products should not be mixed, that pork and shell-fish are prohibited nourishments, etc. The first figure in the column refers to the proportion of members that state that they at home follow these rules, the second figure tell how many that say that they “partly” do so.
- 48 *Shabbat* is the seventh day of the week, when God according to *Genesis* rested after his act of creation. The Bible prescribes to keep this day as a day of complete rest – driving and travelling on *Shabbat* is therefore prohibited for observant Jews.

third of the members maintain some level of a *kosher* household.⁴⁹ In a separate question, we have asked the members about their food habits, i.e. what rules they follow when they do not eat at home: 42% of the respondents say that they then may eat any kind of meat, including pork. Only few insist on kosher, some (12%) choose vegetarian food or fish, whereas a proportion equal in number to those that eat all types of meat, avoid pork even if they eat meat that is *not* ritually slaughtered. That is to say, a majority of the members – again one should remember that approximately one third of them can be classified as “secular” – do maintain some type of Jewish traditional and religiously inspired eating rules even when they are “outside the walls”.

We may also notice that the vast majority of the members have a *mezuzah* on their doorpost, and that close to everyone participates regularly in the yearly *Seder* and *Hannukah* celebrations. With the exception of having one’s sons circumcised, no other Jewish practices are observed to this degree. Why? These practices are certainly not religiously the most significant in Judaism – they are rather “national” in character. There is hardly anything “transcendental” to them: through them belongingness to a peoplehood rather than a relationship to a Divinity is celebrated. More than being part of synagogal life they are part of Jewish life within one’s private home. The astonishingly frequent use of *mezuzah* is interesting in this context – it seems to serve as a discrete marker of Jewish belongingness. Hardly any Gentile Swedes would know what such a small sign on the door-post signifies, if they

49 It should be remembered that this is not so easy in Sweden, where *shrita* (cf. footnote 22) is prohibited and the only place to get kosher products are at the premises of the community centres.

would notice it at all – perhaps they would regard it a kind door bell out of work – whereas all Jews are able to “read” it as a symbol indicating that behind these walls a Jewish family resides.

It may also be noticed in this context that the prescriptions relating to the “holiest” of the Jewish holidays, such as fasting on *Yom Kippur* and avoiding work on *Rosh Hashanah*, are not what the members give the highest priority in their observance of Jewish traditions.

Jews as modern Swedes

Does their way of “being Jewish” show that the Jews in Sweden are *also* Swedes – or rather, that they live in an advanced modern society like the Swedish?

Modern Sweden is a basically secular yet at the same time profoundly Lutheran society. Whereas religious practices such as attending church or religious ceremonies have a quite low standing in everyday life in Sweden, a strong work ethic, industriousness, and organising life in terms of efficiency based on dispassionate calculations, colour the way life is led and organised in Sweden. Not only *rationalism* but also *egalitarianism*, *individualism* and *tolerance* are in many respects superordinate values in contemporary Swedish society. Are these signs of postmodernity in any ways reflected in the attitudes and behaviours of the Jews in Sweden?

One way of assessing this is to look at how the members of Jewish communities cope with the quite strong tendencies towards gender equality prevailing in contemporary Swedish society. Traditional and Orthodox Judaism prescribes a different role to women than men have in religious life. According to *Halachah* – acknowledged Jewish law and traditions – women cannot sit together with men in the Synagogue, they do not count in *Minyan*

(the group of ten Jews that are required for a religious service to be held), and they may not be called to the *Torah*, i.e. as part of the service read out to the congregation from the Biblical scriptures. A woman is also not entitled to become a rabbi.⁵⁰

On the basis of this we asked the members about their attitudes to the position of women in Judaism. The answers are as follows:

Table 10a: Attitudes to the position of woman within Judaism

“The position of women is not satisfactory within Judaism” (In percent)

Agree completely	21.3
Agree by and large	31.1
Neither nor	16.5
Disagree in part	15.4
Disagree completely	42.0

A majority of the members of the Jewish communities in contemporary Sweden find the position of women in Judaism unsatisfactory. Interestingly, there are only slight differences between younger and older members, and between male and the female members with respect to this issue. The largest proportion of dissatisfied members (59%) is found among middle-aged women (the smallest proportion is found among the young male members, (47%), and the largest proportion of members who do not disagree (24%) with the present position of women in Judaism is found

50 Some so-called Reform communities accept women as rabbis and “mixed seating”, i.e. women and men are not assigned separate places in the Synagogue. The Swedish communities are not “reform”, they do not acknowledge female rabbis and only since a few years ago “mixed seating” was permitted in the major Synagogue in Stockholm – but not in any other of the synagogues in Sweden.

among the young male members (and the smallest proportion, 18%, is found among the middle-aged women). It is also remarkable that even within the subgroup of “religious Jews” there are more (42%) who find that the position of women is unsatisfactory than among the religious members who find the position of women in Judaism completely or by and large satisfactory (32%).

With respect to particular functions the picture looks like this:

Table 10b: Attitudes to the position of woman within Judaism (*In percent*)

<i>“Do you think that Jewish women should”</i>	Don’t		
	Yes	No	know
Be able to sit among the men in the Synagogue	68.7	24.8	6.5
Count in a <i>Minyan</i>	42.4	41.1	16.5
Be called to the <i>Torah</i>	49.1	35.1	15.8
Be a rabbi	50.7	33.1	16.2

There are clearly more members of the Swedish Jewish communities who want to change the synagogal life in an egalitarian direction than there are members who want to maintain the traditional rules of sex differences. It seems that the strong tendencies towards egalitarianism in modern Sweden have had strong repercussions also within the Jewish community.

Acceptance of egalitarianism in religious matters is not a singular phenomenon. As we have seen by having accepted the status of a national minority the Jews in Sweden have positively approved of their ethno-cultural particularity. This, in this perspective, can also be understood as another acceptance of equality: in a truly multicultural setting all minority groups ideally have equal rights. While in a *pre-multicultural* setting *assimilation*

(personal or clerical⁵¹) as it showed in the First phase of Emancipation⁵² in Europe, in fact often was the only road towards emancipation, in a postmodern multicultural setting *ethnification* – that is promoting the ethno-cultural particularity of the group and simultaneously being granted non-discriminatory and equal rights with other groups, including the majority group – becomes a new, viable option towards emancipation. (At the same time, assimilation tends to become obsolete as a path to emancipation: one just loses one's affiliation to one's culture without "gaining" anything socially from it.)

Let us examine whether other tendencies immanent to the social postmodernisation processes, such as increasing respect for individual choices, tolerance for deviation, and giving the subjectivity of individuals priority over ascribed formalities also show up in our data.

We have previously noted that one third of those members of the Jewish communities that are married or live together with a partner do so with a non-Jew. The relative size of this group in itself is remarkable. What are the attitudes of the members as a whole to "mixed marriages"? This is shown in tables 11a and b:

51 By this I mean such things as synagogue ceremonies taking on more and more traits of the religious practices that are dominant in the country, e.g. the use of organ music, dressing the rabbis in garments reminding of that used by the priests in the churches, etc.

52 Cf. my remarks in connection with the notion of 'national minority' in a previous section of this article.

Table 11a: Attitudes to “mixed marriages”

“A Jew should marry a Jew” (In percent)

Agree completely	20.6
Agree by and large	30.0
Neither – nor	19.2
Disagree in part	12.4
Disagree completely	17.8

Only half of the members agree with the principle that mixed marriages should be avoided. But how would they handle this in their personal life? We asked all members, including those presently married to a Jewish partner, the following question:

Table 11b: Attitudes to “mixed marriages”

(In percent)

	Yes	No	Don’t know
“Would you, as a matter of principle, consider marriage to a non-Jew?”	51.6	35.3	13.1

Slightly more than half of the members evidently could consider a “mixed marriage”. A closer analysis shows that a dividing factor is the degree of religiosity. More than two thirds of the secular members would consider marriage to a non-Jew, whereas “only” one fourth of the religious members would do so. However, the fact that even 25% of the religious members would consider doing so is perhaps the most remarkable finding in this context.

So far our questions concern the individuals we ask – how prepared would they be to intervene in the choices of their children?

Table 11c: Attitudes to “mixed marriages”

“If I had a son/daughter⁵³ who wanted to marry a non-Jew I would do all in my power to prevent it” (In percent)

Agree completely	12.3
Agree by and large	13.2
Neither – nor	16.9
Disagree in part	15.4
Disagree completely	42.3

Once again, only one out of four members say they would intervene in their child’s choice in order to prevent him or her from marrying a non-Jewish partner. The modern idea that individual choices and preferences should be respected – even within the family and even when they are in opposition to traditional values – has evidently become widely accepted by Swedish Jewry.

Individualism is not only a prominent value in postmodernity. An aspect of it that seems to be accompanying the postmodernisation of society is the increasing respect paid to the *subjectivity* of individuals as a legitimate base for action. Whereas formerly what people “objectively” *are* – e.g. noblemen, unmarried or “Jewish” – decided how they were treated in society, today how they “construct” themselves, that is *what the individual subjectively thinks of or makes of him- or herself*, increasingly appears to be what counts.

We may trace this for instance in the attitudes of the members towards who should be entitled to membership in the Jewish communities. Traditionally, membership has been open only for

53 We asked separately about sons and daughters. Only very slight differences were found in the way that the members look at possible mixed marriages of sons as compared to daughters.

those that are “objectively” meaning *halachically* Jewish, i.e. have been born by a Jewish mother or to have converted to Judaism with an authorized rabbi. But how do the members regard alternative options; for instance, those who identify “Jewish”, that is “feel Jewish” subjectively, even if they are not *halachic* Jews, should also be entitled to membership in the Jewish community?

Table 12: Attitudes towards membership of the Jewish community

“Who could be a member of the Jewish congregation in your opinion?”

Indicate which of the following options you support⁵⁴	In percent
A person who has a Jewish father should also be allowed to be a member	51.5
A person married to a Jew should also be allowed to be a member	36.0
Only a person born by a Jewish mother or who has converted	28.6
All persons who so wish should be allowed to be members, irrespective of background	27.4

We may notice that there is no marked difference in the degree of support for the most “liberal” and the most “orthodox” standpoints: little more than one quarter of the members support each of these two radical standpoints. A purely subjective criterion for membership in the Jewish community is obviously no more acceptable than a purely objective one. The relatively moderate standpoint – however still in contradiction to the established code of orthodoxy⁵⁵ – that a subjective feeling of belongingness is not

54 The respondents were instructed to mark the alternatives they support – some marked only one, some marked two or more of them. Thus the sum of the figures in the column is larger than 100.

55 Only quite recently the Stockholm Jewish community decided to accept also persons who have a Jewish father, but not a Jewish mother, to become

enough for a person to become a member; one should also have some kind of “objective”, although not necessarily an *halachic*, relationship to Judaism, e.g. in terms of kinship and marriage, is supported by approximately every second of the current members of the Jewish communities in Sweden.

In previous sections on “The Jewish group as a ‘national minority’” and “Observance of Jewish practices”, we noted that the Jews in Sweden tend to perceive of their Judaism in ethno-cultural terms. One may think that their openness to also accept non-*halachic* Jews as members of the Jewish community may contradict this attitude. In this context it should be noted, however, that the idea of “ethnic” and “cultural” affiliation does not presuppose a common genetic heritage. To consider the Jewish group as a “part of the Jewish people” (cf. Table 8a) is not equivalent to considering it as a particular “race”. A people is a unit with a common history, common cultural references, customs and often also language and religion. As we have seen, there are a considerable number of converts in the Swedish Jewish communities. We have also noted that the Jews in Sweden are officially considered part of the Swedish people. A people you can – if you really want to – in principle both enter and leave, but a race has neither an “entry” nor any “exit”.

To the Jews in the contemporary Swedish postmodern multicultural setting, *ethnification* rather than stressing genetic or racial unity means promoting what may be called “*symbolic ethnicity*”.

members: None of the other communities in Sweden accept that, nor do any of the communities accept marriage to a Jew as a sufficient criterion for membership.

From “Galut” to Diaspora

In modern Jewish history there two distinct and opposed options towards emancipation have existed. One has been what may be labelled “the nationalist solution”, opting for a “national home” for the Jewish people in the land of Israel. The other has been what may be described as “the integrationist solution”, opting for the Jews to become respected as equals to other citizens in the countries where they live. *Shoah* in many respects meant the end-point of this option, while the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 meant that the nationalist option became viable for Jews all over the world.

How do the Jews living in Sweden today relate to this? Certainly, there were Jews in Sweden who followed their Zionist conviction and settled in Israel when the state was established and in the years thereafter. Even if this option is of course still open, today only few Swedish Jews make use of it. The vast majority of Jews in Sweden have chosen to stay in Sweden. Does this mean that they have favoured the integrationist option?

*“The Biblical narrative begins with banishment. The history of humanity is coincidental with being ‘east of Eden’. In counterdistinction to this estrangement, the narrative relates that the Jewish people were born together with an awareness of being designed for existence on a certain land. As Martin Buber wrote, in his essay *On Zion*, ‘It is impossible to imagine historical Israel as existing at any time without belief...in a God leading first the Fathers and then the whole people into the promised land...’.*

Despite this intention, the vast majority of Jewish history is characterized by an absence of presence on that land, with an

accompanying sense of exile. The dual aspects of the concept of exile, the designation for a certain home, and yet a distance from it, have informed Jewish life and have made an impact upon literary, existential, theological, political and sociological dimensions of the Jewish people.”⁵⁶

This text introducing the inauguration of the new European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden (*Paideia*) places the notion of “exile” at the core of Jewish self-understanding. There are, however, several interpretations of this concept in Judaism. One Hebrew notion of it is “*Galut*” – meaning that the Jewish people have been forced to live “outside their proper homeland”. There are significant nuances distinguishing this notion from the Greek notion “*Diaspora*” – meaning that (in this case) the Jews (it could refer also to Greeks, to Palestinians or any other people) live “dispersed among the other peoples”.

Whereas *Galut* is a curse, *Diaspora* may be a choice.

In Europe, until the Second World War, the integrationist solution in reality meant a road towards assimilation – which, as we now know, ended in a catastrophe. *Galut*, indeed, was a curse. But in the new era of multiculturalism, the conditions for integration have changed: in Sweden, various ethnicities now live side by side in society to a much larger extent than before. The duality of integration – that is, on the one hand to have one’s particular cultural integrity respected, while on the other hand and at the same time be a fully integrated as member of society as such – has for the first time in history become a realistic social possibility. Thus, today

56 From the text presenting the Inaugural Academic Conference of *Paideia* – The European Institute for Jewish Studies in Stockholm, *Paideia Perspectives* No. 1/2001, p. 3.

it is possible for individuals to be “hyphen-Swedes”, e.g. “Jewish-Swedes”. Diaspora turns out as a possible choice.

Is that how the Swedish Jews perceive the current situation? If so, assimilation – rather than being looked upon as an option towards emancipation – should be regarded a threat to Judaism. And if so, Jewry should not be seen as a unity but as divided into a Diaspora Jewry and a different Israeli Jewry. Do the Jews in today’s Sweden perceive the situation in this way?

Table 13: Attitudes to assimilation

“Assimilation is a greater danger to Judaism than antisemitism”
(In percent)

Agree completely	26.3
Agree by and large	32.0
Neither – nor	16.9
Disagree in part	11.4
Disagree completely	13.4

We may recall that when asked what activities deserve more attention by the Jewish congregation among several different options “campaigns against antisemitism” scored the highest (cf. Table 4). Still, assimilation is perceived as an even greater threat: Table 13 demonstrates that a clear majority of members of the Jewish communities in Sweden today consider assimilation a greater threat to Judaism than antisemitism.

Even if there are relatively few Jews living in Sweden (cf. Table 1) and even if basic Jewish religious prescriptions like *shrita* are prohibited and it is difficult to observe several of the traditional customs, it seems that most Jews living in Sweden don’t find it too problematic to live as Jews in Sweden. One reason for this may be

that their understanding of Jewish life does not coincide with what a Jewish life would be, for instance, in Israel. Is Judaism not a unified entity from their perspective? Do they think that the Jewish Diaspora and Israel are evolving into two different kinds of Jewry?

Table 14: Attitudes to Diaspora

“The Jewish Diaspora and Israel may develop into two different kinds of Jewry” (In percent)

Agree completely	8.9
Agree by and large	30.8
Neither – nor	26.2
Disagree in part	17.3
Disagree completely	16.9

It is noteworthy that there are currently more members who agree than disagree with the proposition that two different kinds of Jewry are emerging – a Diaspora Jewry as distinct from an Israeli Jewry. This however, does *not* mean that the ties with Israel are weak. On the contrary, our data show clearly that the Jews in Sweden maintain very close contact with Israel: 95% of them have visited Israel, and 83% of them have close relatives or friends in Israel; 58% indicate that they “feel strong solidarity” and an additional 37% that they “feel some solidarity” with the state of Israel. But for many Israel is not (anymore) – not even ideally and potentially – their country, and their Judaism is a different Judaism.

How, then, do they relate to different options concerning the future of Jewry in Sweden:

Table 15: Attitudes towards the future of Jewry

“Today there is considerable discussion concerning the future of Jewry in Sweden. What is your view?” (In percent)

	Agree ⁵⁷	Doubtful	Don't agree ⁵⁸
With conscious investment in cultural and social activities Jewry can survive in Sweden	78.9	14.6	6.5
In the long run Jewry has a chance only in Israel	28.7	26.1	45.2
Only as orthodox can Jewry survive	11.1	19.1	69.9

While more than three quarters of the members see the future of Swedish Jewry in strengthening the cultural and social activities of the community, only little over one quarter of the members believe Jewry can survive only in Israel. A large majority also reject the notion that orthodoxy would be the only way to Jewish survival. Between the two options towards emancipation mentioned in the introduction – “the nationalist solution”, and “the integrationist solution” – the latter today clearly is the dominating viewpoint among the Jews in Sweden. Swedish Jews obviously don’t find themselves living in *Galut* – while, on the other hand, to live in the *Diaspora* seems to be a conscious choice of theirs – as for most Jews in the postmodern world of today.⁵⁹

57 This column sums up those who indicate that they “agree completely” and “agree by and large”.

58 This column sums up those who indicate that they “hardly agree” and “don’t agree at all”.

59 More than half a century after the establishment of the state of Israel and more then a decade after the fall of the communist empire still close to twice as many Jews live outside Israel than in Israel.

This fact is obviously in contradiction to Bernard Wasserstein's famous thesis of a "vanishing Diaspora" (Wasserstein, 1996). In this book he predicts that "On current projections the Jews will become virtually extinct as significant element in European society over the course of the twenty-first century". In his analysis, the possibility of a Jewish survival of the today considerably less than two million Jews living in Europe (as compared to ten million in 1939, just before the outbreak of *Shoah*) "who have jettisoned religious observance in the spirit of a secular Europe, and who have lost their cultural distinctiveness to such an extent that many acknowledge their heritage solely through the 'entry and exit rituals of male circumcision and Jewish burial'"⁶⁰ is indeed bleak. Could it be that our findings about the contemporary Swedish Jewry open another perspective in this respect?

Virtually Jewish or Jewish revival?

The Jews of Europe have until very recently dwelled in the dark shadows of *Shoah*. But recently, there have been signs of a new Jewish revival, spiritually and culturally, in Europe. In her book *Virtually Jewish* (2002), Ruth Ellen Gruber writes: "More than half a century after the Holocaust, in countries where Jews make up just a tiny fraction of the population, products of Jewish culture (or what is perceived as Jewish culture) have become viable components of the popular domain.... Across the continent (Europe), Jewish festivals, performances, publications, and study programs abound. Jewish museums have opened by the dozen, and synagogues and Jewish quarters are being restored, often as tourist attractions. At the beginning of the twenty-first century,

60 Quoted from the book flap.

klezmer music⁶¹ concerts, exhibitions, and cafés with Jewish themes are drawing enthusiastic – and often overwhelmingly non-Jewish crowds in Berlin, Kraków, Vienna, Rome and other cities.”⁶²

Stockholm, Sweden could certainly be added to that list.

The interest in Jewish culture is evidently very strong. Gruber describes it as a “virtual Jewish” phenomenon questioning: “Is it Jewish? Is it culture?” (p. 26). These are difficult philosophical questions that we will leave unaddressed. Instead, we ask the simpler empirical question. To which extent are the Jews themselves interested in this?

Table 16: Participation in Jewish cultural activities

In percent

“Have you during the past year:”	Yes	No
Seen a film because it had a Jewish connection	83.3	16.7
Read a book because of its Jewish content	78.6	21.4
Been to a Jewish museum/exhibition	57.9	42.1
Attended a lecture on a Jewish topic	57.5	42.5
Been on a trip or excursion with a Jewish theme	55.9	44.1
Gone to a play because it had a Jewish connection	52.9	47.1

It seems the Jews in Sweden today have a very strong interest in Jewish culture. More than three quarters have seen a film and read a book during the past year “because of its Jewish connection”, and a majority of the members have even made the effort to participate in less accessible aspects of Jewish cultural life.⁶³ Most

61 *Klezmer* music is a form of traditional East European Jewish folk music.

62 Quoted from the book flap.

63 It should be noted that there is no Jewish museum and only quite rarely exhibitions and plays with any Jewish connection in Gothenburg and Malmö where two of the three Jewish communities in Sweden are situated.

have been engaged in several of the cultural fields. Our investigations show that they perceive this activity as quite important to them and that this interest is fairly evenly distributed across different age groups as well as between religious and secular Jews.

There are those who fear that this interest in “cultural Judaism” is a substitute for involvement in Judaism as a religious practice (cf. Webber, 1994). But is it? We have registered that more than one third of the members are “secular Jews” (cf. Table 5), but we have also noted (cf. Table 13) that the members generally perceive assimilation as a major threat to Judaism. How do these tendencies mesh?

Whereas secularisation may mean to be Jewish without being religious, assimilation means to leave Judaism. Jews that do not practice religion have not necessarily become “assimilated”, and those that adhere to, or even take on, some of the traditional Jewish customs – most of which are based in the religion of Judaism – by doing so do not necessarily enrol as “religious”.

What does the strong interest in Jewish culture stand for? Is it just a sign that even the Jews themselves are becoming “virtually Jewish”? That their Judaism is merely “for exterior use only”, hardly anything but a *chic* facet of their image? Or are there signs of a Jewish revival penetrating deeper into their lives? To what extent have the Jews in Sweden abandoned the Jewish customs that they were brought up with? To what extent have they started to observe traditional Jewish customs that they did not even practice in their families as they grew up?

Table 17: Assimilation or revival?

“To which extent did your family observe Jewish customs and traditions during your childhood compared to what you do today?” (In percent)

We were more observant than I am today	41.0
There is no real difference between my parents’ home and what I do today	30.1
I am more observant of customs and traditions than we were in my parents’ home	19.5
The question is not applicable to me	9.4

Four out of ten members state they are less observant today compared to how things were in their family as they grew up. As we noted when describing the population under study also four out of ten of them are 60 years old or more. A closer scrutiny of those that say they have abandoned Jewish traditions shows that almost all of them belong to this older segment of the members. When they grew up – most of them actually before the Second World War in Poland or other parts of Eastern Europe – practicing Jewish traditional customs in many cases was just part of the conventional way of living. In Sweden of today, most of these customs are not part of the social conventions – thus they are not observed. But the fact that they are not does not necessarily indicate that those Jews that not anymore do so have become “assimilated”. In fact, our data show that many of them both feel very “Jewish” and engage in Jewish affairs – particularly in Zionist causes. Two out of ten members state that they are more observant of Jewish customs and traditions compared to their family as they grew up. A similar scrutiny shows that most of them belong to the group of middle-aged members, that is, in most cases families with children living at home. Actually, more than one third of the members

between 30 and 60 years of age say that they are *more* observant of Jewish customs and traditions in their present homes as compared to their own childhood homes. This should however not be taken as a turn towards “religiosity”; many of those we speak of here also belong to the category of “secular Jews”. Rather, what this “revival” seems to be is a manifestation of a type of “*symbolic Judaism*” consisting of partly and selectively adhering to traditional customs, but giving them new and subjective meanings.

4. Conclusions: Enjoying the ethno-cultural smorgasbord

We may summarize: The Jews of Sweden today constitute a formal and officially acknowledged national minority. As such they are a distinguishable as an ethno-cultural group in society, and at the same time quite integrated in it. This is accompanied by the members of the Jewish communities in Sweden today manifesting:

- A strong Jewish self-awareness;
- A clear-cut ethno-cultural identification as “Jews”;
- A high level of activity, especially within the field of “Jewish Culture”;
- A free choice and combination of Jewish practices;
- A tendency to attribute new meanings to those traditional Jewish practices that are observed.

This attitude to choose freely among the religiously prescribed practices – which to observe and which to refrain from observing – is accompanied by a wish that all kinds of members should have equal value within the congregations and that tolerance for differences between them should be increased. An interesting and

challenging aspect of their way of “being Jewish” is that the Jews in Sweden today tend to combine the traditions they choose to observe in a personally relevant way: for instance keeping a kosher or partly kosher household at home (38%), but consuming shrimps⁶⁴ in restaurants (67%), or within the family sometimes lightning *Shabbat* candles (73%) but also giving Christmas gifts (35%), or having a *mezuzah* at the entry door to one’s house (80%), but having a Christmas tree inside it (15%), and so forth. In this way, selectively choosing among the customs and to combine what is observed, one often attaches new subjective meanings to these practices, meanings that are socially relevant to the individual in contemporary society. With all societal changes, traditions become transformed – not just now, and not just in Europe (cf. Goldscheider & Zuckerman, 1984). Cultural transformation, and even cultural “creolisation”,⁶⁵ in a way is the opposite of assimilation. It is to live in the modern world and to make traditional cultural patterns and customs relevant to one’s contemporary social situation. To do so is certainly nothing new in Jewish history: in this respect the Jews have always been modern.

In Modernity this propensity to adapt to new conditions has become increasingly penetrated by a general tendency towards rationality, i.e. to organize one’s life and choose among alternatives according to what turns out pragmatic in the given situation. A presumption for this is that the frames allow for a considerable flexibility in the ways one holds on to what one regards as basic values in Judaism.

64 Shrimps and other shellfish are not *kosher*.

65 cf Hannerz, 1996.

Viewed from this perspective, what we have found in our study are just some particular expressions of just another phase of modernisation – more precisely of that phase of contemporary Modernity that in the introduction to this article was referred to as *postmodernisation*. In line with this, we may label the type of Jewish life that we in this study noticed as emerging in Sweden – and most likely also in other parts of the contemporary Jewish Diaspora⁶⁶ – a *postmodern “Swedish smorgasbord” Judaism*.

It is important to understand that this is not only a way of being “postmodern”, but also a new way of being *Jewish*.

Our investigation of contemporary Swedish Jewry has pointed at tendencies towards a simultaneous transformation of and revival of Jewish identities. From a previously largely negative pre-*Shoah* and *Shoah* imprinted social identity⁶⁷ there seems now to be a movement towards a more positive Jewish self-awareness accompanied by a strengthened perception of oneself as a distinct ethno-cultural group in society.

In this context it should be remembered that in a liberal democratic society such as Sweden, *all* members of a Jewish community are in fact “*Jews by choice*”. There are no institutions or significant social actors to enforce their position as “Jews”, neither from within – no sanctions accompany those who leave the Jewish group – nor from without – In Sweden there is no officially sanctioned anti-Semitism, nor any significant political

66 According to the other papers presented at the Academic Conference on *Jewish Identities in the Post-Communist Era*, held at the Central European University, Budapest in July 2001, where this paper was first presented.

67 “Social Identity Theory” is a well established theoretical approach and field of study within social psychology. Cf. Ellemers et al. 1999.

forces attempting to promote antisemitism in society⁶⁸ that would serve to “remind the Jews of who they are”. To be a member of a Jewish community today, and/or to practice anything that is in any way “Jewish” is a truly voluntary act.

So what does it mean to those who choose to do so? What does it mean to choose to live as a Jew in the Diaspora?

The French Jewish philosopher Bernard Henri Levy in the very first years of the new European Jewish revival exclaimed: “*Cette exile necessaire!*” (‘This necessary exile!’). Necessary for what? – For Judaism as a “*philosophie de la résistance*” (‘a philosophy of resistance’). In today’s world, the wish to develop a ‘philosophy of resistance’ is perhaps not at the top of the Jewish agenda, and the implications of living in a Diaspora are of course different in contemporary Postmodernity as compared to pre-Israel Modernity. Diaspora in the era of Globalisation means something different than Diaspora in the era of Nation-building. Still, there are certain common basic features and certain basic requirements to any Diaspora existence.

Living in the Diaspora always means to be an outsider and an insider of the society one lives in at the same time. This duality has often served as a source for both intellectual creativity and social criticism. As was the case in Europe in the hundred years of exceptional Jewish creativity in the fields of science, culture and industry in the wake of Jewish Emancipation from mid-19th century until *Shoah*. This has made people such as Henri Levy state “*Pour*

68 As in most countries there are however both individuals and small groups who spread antisemitic propaganda. When asked “*Have you personally been exposed to antisemitism in Sweden during the past five years?*” 76% of the members answer “No”, 20% answer “Yes, once”, and 4% “Yes, several times”.

être vraiment ‘Juif’ il faut être diasporique” (“To be truly ‘Jewish’ one has to be a diasporic person”).⁶⁹ Whether this is so is of course debatable. But in any case, it requires of the “diasporic person” (or organized diasporic group as the ‘national minority’ of Swedish Jewry) a well-developed ability to cope with ambiguity⁷⁰ and a pronounced willingness and ability to make oneself at home within a certain kind of homelessness. Sociological analyses indicate that the processes of postmodernisation remarkably enhance these requirements. Whether European Jewry will be able to handle them is an open question. In this context, the case of Swedish Jewry demonstrates a partly new, interesting and perhaps even groundbreaking possibility.

69 Uttered at the seminar *Memoire et Lois de l’homme* (Memory and the Laws of Man) during the *Mois de Judaïsme* (Month of Judaism) at l’Université Sorbonne in Paris in February 1986.

70 Cf. Bauman, 1998.



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List of Publications

The Rappaport Center publishes research and position papers, authored by outstanding scholars and experts. These papers present original and interesting findings concerning issues pertaining to assimilation and Jewish identity. Written at a high level of cultural and conceptual analysis, they are nevertheless not ‘ivory tower’ research; they bear operational implications for ameliorating and improving real-life situations. The research and position papers of the Rappaport Center are an invaluable and original series, and constitute a significant addition to the collection of any public and research library and to the bookshelves of all individuals interested in, or concerned with, the future of the Jewish people. To date, the following publications have appeared in this series:

- **Israeli Assimilation: The Absorption of Non-Jews into Israeli Society and its Influence on the Collective Identity**, by Asher Cohen (Hebrew)
- **A Critique of Jewish Identity Discourse**, by Avi Sagi (Hebrew)
- **Halakhic Responses to Assimilation**, by Ariel Picard (Hebrew)

- **Training American Orthodox Rabbis to Play a Role in Confronting Assimilation: Programs, Methodologies and Directions**, by Adam S. Ferziger
- **Making the Jewish Canon Accessible to Our Generation**, by Yedidia Z. Stern (Hebrew/English)
- **Psychological Aspects of Identity Formation and Their Implications for Understanding the Concept of Jewish Identity: A Review of the Scientific Literature**, By Michal Tur-Kaspa Shimoni, Dana Pereg and Mario Mikulincer (Hebrew)
- **“The Jewish Story”: The Meaning of Jewish Identity and the Factors Shaping it Among Jewish Youth in Mexico City and Tashkent**, by Dana Pereg, Mario Mikulincer and Maya Aksakalov (Hebrew)
- **The Quintessential Dilemma: American Jewish Responses to Inter-marriage**, by Gerald Cromer (Hebrew/English)
- **“Jewishness” in Postmodernity: The Case of Sweden**, by Lars Dencik

For more books and for further information, please contact the Rappaport Center at rjcenter@mail.biu.ac.il, by fax 972-3-6295482 or by phone 972-3-6295422.