

Jewish self-conceptions in fin-de-siècle Hungary: the Eastern "Other"

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Submitted to

Central European University  
Department of Nationalism Studies  
Jewish Studies Specialization

*In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Nationalism Studies*

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Budapest, Hungary  
2010

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## Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to research the figure of the 'Ostjude' in the discourse of the mainstream assimilated Jewish public in Hungary from the 1880's until the First World War. The research is inspired by Steven Aschheim's, already classic, book: "Brothers and Strangers"<sup>1</sup>, an investigation in the field of cultural-ideological history. Aschheim elaborates on the critical rule that the image of the 'Eastern' Jew played in the self-image of the 'Western' assimilated Jew. The image of the 'Ostjude', as Aschheim claims, indeed was mainly not the reflection of the socio-cultural reality of the 'Jews in the "Ghetto"', rather a negative archetype to that of the assimilated Jew.

The 'Ostjude' was a cultural idea constructed as a counter-type to the Jew who left behind the traditional socio-cultural surroundings of the 'Ghetto' and strived to integrate to the German middle class according to the tenets of the ideology of the Bildung and with a deep belief in the meritocratic nature of the gentile bourgeois society.

One of the essential ideas of Aschheim's investigation is the argument that the integration of Jews in Europe into national frameworks caused the severing of the relationship of the assimilating Jews and the traditional Jewish frameworks of solidarity. This severing developed, on the level of the imagery at least, into a seemingly unbridgeable gap between the 'enlightened' western Jews and their eastern Jewish brethren.

The 'Ostjude' in the German context had a highly relevant case, inter alia because of the vicinity of Germany to areas, which had large populations of Eastern Jews and the closeness of Yiddish to German. According to Aschheim, the image of the 'Ostjude', and as a consequence the relationship to the Jews of the East, changed in a very significant

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers, The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*, (Madison, Wisconsin, London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

way, mainly during the Great War. Jewish solidarity and longing for 'an authentic Jewish nationhood' challenged decisively the middle class ideal of assimilation.

I believe that the issue of the 'Ostjude' is not less relevant to the Hungarian case. Not only that Hungary constituted a similar border area between the central areas of Europe and the eastern regions resided by Jews living according to more traditional customs, but also there was a considerable Jewish population, mainly on the North-Eastern parts of Hungary, which corresponded to the socio-cultural criteria of the 'Eastern Jew' in the German context.

Next to significant differences, we can assert, that the discourse around Jewish integration into the Hungarian gentile society had a common cultural background to that of the German case. In my thesis I'd like to research whether the results of Steven Aschheim's investigation in the German context are valid in the Hungarian case as well. However, the validity, or non validity, of his thesis can be attributed to various conditions in the Hungarian context, which I would like to examine. The key factor to the understanding of the assimilated Jewry in Hungary of the notion of the 'Ostjude' would be the essential parameters of the assimilation model for Jews in Hungary in comparison with the German case. To what extent the Jewish discourse on the 'Ostjude' in Hungary was a reflection and a reaction to the antisemitic discourse of the era? Was there an attempt on the 'assimilated' side to differentiate themselves from the negative image of the 'Ostjude'?

Similarly to the German milieu, the image of the Jew was a highly essential element in the cultural and the political discourse of 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungary, when in the Hungarian case, the percentage of the Jewish population in Hungary was much higher than in

Germany, the Jewish population arriving at the outbreak of the First World War to about a million souls. The legal emancipation of the Jewry in Hungary happened in basically two steps, in 1867 with granting equal political rights, and in 1895 with the so-called Reception, granting the Jewish religion an equal status to the historical churches in Hungary. In contrast to the legal emancipation of the Jews in Hungary, their social emancipation, naturally, has been a more gradual process. The images of the "cravat Jews" and the "caftan Jews", their dichotomy and their conflation were central elements of the antisemitic as well as the Jewish discourse of the period in Hungary.

Furthermore, the case of Hungary is especially interesting due to its internal division. Following the tripartite division suggested by Jacob Katz and Michael Silber, Hungarian Jewry can be classified into three main populations: the Orthodox in the North Western part of pre-Trianon Hungary – the western part of today Slovakia –; the Hassidic population in the North Eastern regions – the eastern counties of Slovakia, Carpathorus and the north eastern region of today's Hungary; and the central territory of the country with Budapest at its centre which was dominated mainly by a Neolog assimilationist Jewish current. The link between this internal division inside Hungarian Jewry and Jewish immigration will be discussed in the paper.<sup>2</sup>

I intend to research the Jewish discourse of the era through two main press organs: *Egyenlőség*- the central press organ of mainstream Neolog Jewry in Hungary from the beginning of the 1880's till the Holocaust-, and a satirical press organ *Borsszem Jankó*- established by the governmental political forces in 1868, directed by and aimed at the Jewish liberal middle class and its urban liberal gentile environment. (If not told otherwise the translations of the press articles are mine.)

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<sup>2</sup> I thank Prof. Carsten Wilke for reminding me of this context.

I'd like to research these two press organs mainly around three constitutive events in pre-war Jewish history in Hungary: The Tiszaeszlár Affair, one of the mayor modern blood libels, the reaction to the first Zionist Congress in Basel and the refugee question around the Great War.

I believe that my research will contribute in a significant way to the understanding of the discourse around the question of Jewish integration in Hungary and the vital role of the 'Ostjude' in it.

I would like to thank Prof. Michael Miller for the idea of the present project and his guide throughout the process of its elaboration and writing. I'd like to thank Prof. Carlsten Wilke, as well, for his valuable insights. However, the responsibility for any possible negative aspects of this thesis is entirely mine.

## Literary review

There are numerous works touching upon the phenomenon of Eastern Jews in the Hungarian context<sup>3</sup>, however I believe, that a paper dedicated entirely to the idea of the 'Ostjude' in the Hungarian Jewish milieu can grant valuable insights. Indeed, there is no explicit effort, which deals with the image of the 'Eastern Jew' in the socio-cultural arena of Hungarian Jewry. The existing literature, which is highly relevant to our topic, stresses, mainly, on the sociological aspects of Jewish immigration to Hungary, and it is discussed in a separated chapter.

The sources discussed below deal with the issue of the 'Ostjude' mainly in the German-speaking socio-cultural context of Central Europe. They are essential for my thesis in terms of situating Aschheim's work against a broader academic background and to envisage possible ways of analysis of the topic.

Sander Gilman's psychological theory on (Jewish) self-hatred, in his volume "Jewish Self-Hatred, Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews"<sup>4</sup>, published in 1986, might be an enlightening explanation as for the apprehension of assimilated German Jews in the face of the immigration of Eastern Jews to Germany. Gilman describes the creation of the "Other" in the discourse of the hegemonic society, as the projection of its fears onto the "Other's" created image. The "Other" in turn, striving to live up to the criteria of the reference society, projects the negative elements of the projected image further, onto

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<sup>3</sup> Katzburg, Nathaniel, *Antisemitism in Hungary, 1867-1914*, (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1969); Peter Haber, *Die Anfänge des Zionismus in Ungarn (1897-1904)*, (Köln: Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, 2001); Walter Pietsch, "Der jüdische Einwanderung aus Galizien und das Judentum in Ungarn", *Juden in Ostmitteleuropa*, (1989): 271-293; János Gyurgyák, *A Zsidókérdés Magyarországon* [The Jewish-question in Hungary], (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2001); Péter Hanák, *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus, Tanulmányok a zsidókérdésről a huszadik századi Magyarországon* [Jewish-question, assimilation, antisemitism, Studies on the Jewish-question in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hungary], (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred, Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986).

a subgroup. The image transferred to the subgroup embodies the fears of the primal "Other" in the process of integration to the dominant society. In this sense, according to Gilman, the image of the 'Ostjude' created by the assimilated German Jewish discourse is no other than the epithet of Jewish self-hatred. The hatred versed towards the 'real' 'Ostjude' is at the same time the fear and hatred from the 'Ostjude' "inside" the assimilated Jew.

David A. Brenner's study, "Marketing Identities, The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in *Ost und West*"<sup>5</sup>, published in 1998, investigates an opposite understanding to that of Aschheim's, at least in the eyes of the author, through the Berlin based magazine "Ost und West" – published between the years 1901-1923. The magazine centered around the personage of Leo Winz (1876-1952), an *Ostjude* himself, coined by Brenner as "something of a Robert Maxwell of the German-Jewish press." In contrast with the tendency of aiming at "regenerating" the Jewish masses of the East, the intellectual circle around *Ost und West* designed the magazine rather to "reeducate" the assimilated German Jewish population. The essential endeavor of the "nationalist avant-guard" around the magazine was the legitimization of a Jewish ethnicity in Western Europe encompassing Western as well as Eastern elements. The "glorification" of Eastern Jewry was not sufficient however to reformulate the self-conception of Western Jewry, so the magazine adapted a harsh criticism – in an anti-Western, anti-capitalist spirit - of the assimilated Jewry itself, by adapting negative stereotypes meant previously to pass judgment on Eastern Jews and diverted them on Western Jews. Brenner argues for a more "multiple",

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<sup>5</sup> David A. Brenner, *Marketing Identities, The Invention of Jewish Ethnicity in Ost und West*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

hyphenated Jewish self-identification around 1900, which was much more tolerant for differences than it could be assumed.

An additional important study on Eastern Jews in the German Empire from its establishment till the Great War is Jack Wertheimer's "Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany"<sup>6</sup>, published in 1987. In contrast with Aschheim's research in the field of cultural-ideological history, Wertheimer book deals with the actual demographic and economical parameters of the *Ostjude* and with the socio-cultural environment in Imperial Germany the immigrating Jews from the East were supposed to integrate into. In addition to challenge the conventional understanding of the negative view on the Eastern Jews, Wertheimer intends to represent the gentile public discourse and the concrete German political environment i.e. the state legislation and administration policies regarding Jewish immigrants. Since the immigrants had no German citizenship necessarily, the attitude of the German authorities towards them might enlighten us on existing antisemitic tendencies in Germany well before the 1920's. Similarly to the research in general, the participation of the Eastern Jews in the First World War signifies a vital issue. Next to examining the German socio-political environment, Wertheimer endeavors to revision the existing picture on the Western Jewish attitude towards the Ostjuden by studying the "tangible" social contacts between assimilated Jews and their immigrant counterparts. Based on the activity of Jewish community organizations Wertheimer claims that the overall attitude of Western Jewry towards the immigrants was much more positive and much more conscious of its Jewish solidarity than it is usually depicted.

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Though Aschheim's research was conducted in the German Imperial milieu, I believe that studies in the context of Viennese Jewry could contribute significantly to my research on Hungarian Jewry. Indeed, Marsha L. Rozenblit's study "The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914, Assimilation and Identity"<sup>7</sup>, has numerous issues that are in common with the Hungarian environment. Rozenblit's study covers the social history of the Jewish population of Vienna between 1867 and 1914. Rozenblit investigates the period from the legal emancipation of the Jews in the newly established Austro-Hungarian Empire until the outbreak of the Great War. Though the author is aware of the numerous Jewish intellectuals and artists who were part and parcel of the Viennese fin-de-siècle, she does argue that the social separateness never came to an end between the gentile and the Jewish habitants of Vienna. Rozenblit demonstrates the above claim in terms of occupational, educational and housing patterns; constructing on David Sorkin's term "Jewish subculture", the Jews of Vienna formed their Jewish 'sub-society'. Though the aspiration of Jews in Vienna to integrate into the gentile society did not come to their fulfillment, the cleavage between 'Western' Jews and 'Eastern Jews' was very harsh. Even though, to quote Steven Aschheim, "today's German Jews were frequently the East European Jews of yesterday", there was a significant division between integrated Viennese Jews and Jews immigrated from the Eastern regions of the Empire which become translated even into divisions in organizational terms.

Marsha Rozenblit in her study "Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I"<sup>8</sup>, published in 2001, portrays the relationship

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<sup>7</sup> Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914, Assimilation and Identity*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity: The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I*, (New York: Oxford, 2001).

between Viennese Jews and Eastern Jewish refugees during the Great War in a comparative manner. Rozenblit deals in her volume with the way Jews understood their own group identification in the midst of the disintegrating Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The author argues that the multinational character of the empire enabled the adaptation of a Jewish "tripartite-identity": a political one towards the state apparatus, a cultural sympathy with the dominant national group and "a sense of Jewish ethnicity". According to Rozenblit, Jews in Vienna and in Prague saw the Monarchy as the guarantee for the possibility of the existence of such a hyphenated identity. Rozenblit deals explicitly with the issue of the Jewish refugee question from Galicia in the Western regions of the empire. Though Viennese Jews are criticized for occasional negative attitude towards the refugees, the Viennese Jewish organizational reference to the expatriates is much praised in contrast with the case of Prague specifically and Moravia and Bohemia in general. Whereas in Prague the antisemitic reaction aroused by the Eastern Jewish masses caused the Jewish community to urge the central authorities to expulse the refugees from the city, in Vienna individuals as well as the community felt much sympathy and solidarity towards them. The Jewish organizations could address the central authorities during the war, who acted on their part for the sake of the refugees against the will of the local authorities often displaying antisemitic attitudes. This tendency confirmed, argues Rozenblit, the belief of the Jews in the Austrian half of the empire regarding the Monarchy as the solitary safeguard of their "tripartite-identity".

David Rechter's study "The Jews of Vienna and the First World War"<sup>9</sup>, depicts first and foremost the political- organizational aspects of Jewish existence in Vienna during the

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<sup>9</sup> David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War*, (London, Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001).

Great War. Rechter emphasizes the parallels between political developments in the gentile and the Jewish political arena. One of these political developments was the growing connectedness between the ethnical and the political in the last decades of the Monarchy. The refugee question during the war demonstrates this claim in an eloquent way. From the very beginning of the war Vienna became the main aim of the refugees from Galicia. Ten of thousands of refugees flooded the capital, amongst them the percentage of Jews was by far the highest. Their appearance in Vienna aroused strong antisemitic feelings on the side of the gentile population, while Viennese Jews exhibited a mixture of contempt, fear and solidarity in the face of the Jewish masses from the East. The representatives of the various segments of the community cooperated with the Austrian state – as the representatives of the 'non-existent' Jewish ethnic minority- to provide aid to the refugees. Evidently, we cannot speak about a homogeneous reaction on the Jewish side, from B'nai Brith in the direction of the Zionists the expressed sympathy and the efficiency of the aid provision grew accordingly. The fear of Viennese Jewry was not unjustified, the masses of Jewish refugees served as a pretext to intensify antisemitic agitation in the capital. The refugee situation in Vienna, according to Rechter, demonstrated the deep divisions between the various fractions inside Viennese Jewry.

Ismar Schorsch's volume, "Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914"<sup>10</sup>, published in 1972, discusses Jewish argumentation against growing antisemitism from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on. According to Schorsch's understanding, the notion of an association representing Jewish collective-interests was against the inherent logic of German Jewish emancipation. The process of Jewish emancipation in the German

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<sup>10</sup> Ismar Schorsch, *Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914*, (New York, London: Columbia University Press, 1972).

cultural realm was perceived as a development of *quid pro quo*, during which the German state(s) were supposed to grant in a measured way German citizenship for its Jewish subjects, while, in return, the Jews were supposed to give up gradually those Jewish peculiarities which differentiated them from their German gentile environment. However, it became clear to those ready to undertake the project - especially those belonging to Reform Judaism, who were the most committed to narrow the differences between Jews and Germans – that the ultimate test was non other than giving up one's own Jewishness and to become a Christian. In contrast with Hannah Arendt, Schorsch considers projects like the Centralverein Deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens a venture, which bears testimony of the sense of political reality of German Jewry. Furthermore, the Centralverein's public struggle against antisemitic agitation in Germany constituted for numerous assimilated Jews in Germany the only intellectual message, which could actually amount to a defined sort of Jewish identification. The Centralverein's protest in the face of the deportation of Eastern Jews from Berlin, and its criticism of the situation of Jews in the Posen region between German and Polish nationalistic claims bears witness, according to Schorsch, to public Jewish self-confirmation in the face of the failure of Jewish emancipation in Germany.

As an additional viewpoint on the question of the Ostjude might serve the extended understanding of the term "Orientalism", described in the collection "Orientalism and the Jews" edited by Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar published in 2005.<sup>11</sup> The authors suggest an alternative understanding of the notion "Orientalism" from that of Edward Said. They suggest conceiving the idea of "Orientalism" not as a discourse,

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<sup>11</sup> Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews*, (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2005).

rather as a language- both of the terms borrowed from Michel Foucault. As a result, the "language of Orientalism" can be applied to various Orientalistic discourses, in terms of historical and geographical variety, and the idea of "Orientalism" can be viewed as a cultural form changing its content throughout history. Indeed, in this spirit, Noah Isenberg's article in the same volume "To Pray Like a Dervish: Orientalist Discourse in Arnold Zweig's *The Face of East European Jewry*"<sup>12</sup> embodies the comprehension of the Western European Jewish glance on the Ostjude as an essentially Orientalist one.

An additional concept, that I would like to introduce, and reflect on later in the paper, is the concept of "double consciousness". The idea appeared in a 1903 article of W.E.B. Bois. This understanding stands for the double view with which Jewish communities saw themselves, 'through their own eyes' and through the perception of the non-Jewish environment at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Noah Isenberg, "To Pray Like a Dervish: Orientalist Discourse in Arnold Zweig's *The Face of East European Jewry*", in Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews*, (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2005, 94-108.

<sup>13</sup> Olga Bush, "The Architecture of Jewish Identity: The Neo-Islamic Central Synagogue of New York" *JSAH* 63, 2 (June, 2004): 182.

## **The sociological data on Jewish immigration to Hungary, and its academic development in the Jewish and the non-Jewish sphere**

Before providing some additional information about the sources that constitutes the basis of my research, however, I would like to sketch briefly some sociological data on the actual figures on Jewish immigration to Hungary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The myth of a massive Jewish immigration from Galicia around 1900 was an accepted theory in the circle of Hungarian historians like Gyula Szekfű and others. According to the accumulated data and theories by János Gyurgyák, the actual number of the Jewish population in Hungary, in fact, grew from 542,279 in 1869 to 909,531 in 1910, from 3.9% to 5% of the overall population of Hungary. The actual growth of the Jewish population, though, was only from 4.6% to 5% between the 1880s and 1910, the period in which the antisemitic fervor about Jewish immigration arrived at its highest point. Furthermore, the growth in the Jewish population around 1900 was basically the result of natural increase. At this period, in fact, the emigration of Jews from Hungary exceeded their immigration. If so, why was a substantial Jewish immigration considered real around 1900? There are five main reasons for it. There was a minor immigration wave even in this period, though, as said before, it did not surpass the wave of emigration, mainly to the new world. There were indeed a significant wave of Jews who passed through Hungary on their way westward, and to differentiate between these migrants and the immigrants was not easy. There was internal migration as well, primarily from the Northeastern territories of Hungary to Budapest and the larger urban centers, and though residing in Hungary for decades, the appearance, behavior and linguistic skills of these

Jews were not necessarily different from those who'd just arrived from Eastern Europe. In addition to that, Jewish migration was to urban centers, primarily to Budapest. Between 1891 and 1910 some 50000 Jews moved to Budapest, and the dissimilarity between them and their assimilated brethren was very significant. Finally, in terms of urban settlement patterns, Jews tended to concentrate in certain areas of the city, mainly in Terézváros and Lipótváros, and also when leaving a given settlement area it happened in a collective manner, “when a Jew departed, the others wanted to leave as well.”<sup>14</sup>

The article of Walter Pietsch, “The immigration of Jews from Galicia and the Jewry in Hungary”, offers a complex analysis of the sociological aspects of Hungarian Jewry. Pietsch opens his article with the German context and points out the anxiety of assimilated German Jews in the face of Jewish immigration from the East, in the second half of the 19th century. The author then moves on to the Hungarian scene, and describes an in-between sociological situation amid Western and Eastern European Jewish sociological patterns - urbanization of the integrationist Jewry and, at the same time, “nucleation” of traditional Jewish masses in the North-Eastern areas of Hungary. Pietsch’s major interest is in the gentile critic of Galician Jewish immigration to Hungary at the beginning of the 1920’s- he refers mainly to Pál Teleki and Gyula Szekfü. Pietsch shows the development of the historiography and sociological writing about Jews in Hungary on the Jewish as well as on the gentile side. On the gentile side, Pietsch cites Miklós Bartha’s volume from 1901, “On the Khazar Land”, where Bartha calls on the public not to confuse the ‘Galician-question’ with the ‘Jewish question’. The Jewish response was very defensive, Lajos Venetianer referred to the ‘Khazar-legend’, even in

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<sup>14</sup> János Gyurgyák, *A Zsidókérdés Magyarországon, Politikai Eszmetörténet, [The Jewish-question in Hungary, A Political History of Ideas]*, (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2001), 76-79.

1922, as to establish a blood community between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians. The volume of Ernő Márton, from 1941, “The family-tree of Hungarian Jewry”, was revolutionary in two aspects. First, this was the first historical work on the Jewish side which considered Hungarian Jewry not in denominational but in an ethnical sense. Secondly, Márton engaged in a scholarly analysis of the *Conscriptio Judeorum*, from the years 1735-1738. Pietsch’s conclusion is, that in the sociological sense, after the appearance of the research of Alajos Kovács, there was no significant difference between Jewish and non-Jewish sociological works on Jewish immigration to Hungary. The results of these researches are summed up in the above section. If so, the author than asks, how is it possible, that in the 1920’s the antisemitic propaganda got no serious response neither on the liberal gentile noble Hungarian side, nor on the Jewish side. On the one hand, Pietsch argues, Hungarian nobility could not assume the defense of Hungarian Jewry after the Great War, being itself occupied with stabilizing its own position in the Hungarian society after Trianon. On the other hand, there were sharp contrasts inside Hungarian Jewry, and the assimilated Hungarian Jewish elite was highly critical about the Galician Jewish immigrants. It could simply not engage in a sincere discussion about “Galician barbarity” because it would have caused an even deeper cleavage in Hungarian Jewry than the 1868 Congress caused on a denominational ground.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Walter Pietsch, “A zsidók bevándorlása Galíciából és a magyarországi zsidóság” [The Jewish immigration from Galicia and the Jewry in Hungary], *Valóság*, (1988), 11, 46-59.

The term 'assimilation' in a historiographical perspective

Since the present paper deals, mainly, with the section of Hungarian Jewry, which engaged in the integrationist discourse, I'd like to problematize the notions: 'assimilation', 'acculturation' and similar concepts in the field of historical studies and social sciences.

Rogers Brubaker argues that a return to the notion of assimilation can be discerned in the field of political sciences in the last decade. This return occurs after decades of dominance by theories of multiculturalism. This return is not anymore to the classic notion of assimilation rather to a "normatively defensible and analytically more complex" one. The prevailing understanding of assimilation in the 1960's with its emphasis on the homogenizing nation – state and the modernist universal "Enlightenment discourse" could no longer be adopted again after years of a differentialist dominance- it was not feasible neither from an analytical nor from a normative point of view. Instead of returning to the above mentioned 'traditional sense' of assimilation, the recent wave of assimilationism emphasizes more the individual's will of becoming similar to the surrounding society against the obsolete understanding of the complete absorption into the system.<sup>16</sup> Brubakers' notions on integration are indeed useful to examine the process of assimilation of mainstream Jewry in Hungary around 1900. Though the central homogenizing state is indeed present – even if its policies are not always coercive - the determinacy of certain segments of the Jewish population to integrate into the non-Jewish society was definitely decisive – geographically speaking I intend to designate the Jewish population which generally coincided with the reform minded mainstream population, southward of the Jews of the Felvidék and Kárpátalja, areas generally characterized by

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<sup>16</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "The return of assimilation" Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany, and the United States" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (July, 2001): 531-548.

orthodox and Hasidic tendencies, respectively.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the voluntary nature of Jewish integration we have to emphasize the fact that the Neolog section of the Jews in Hungary remained committed to the essential commandments of the Jewish religion and that in the identification: "Hungarians of the Jewish faith" the term "Jewish faith" was as important as the term "Hungarian"—Lajos Szabolcsi would argue that the religious thought lead by Miksa Szabolcsi was even more strict than the Neolog one, somewhere between the Neolog and the Orthodox versions.<sup>18</sup>

Historiographically the article of David Sorkin "Emancipation and Assimilation, Two concepts and their Application to German - Jewish History" can be very useful in our attempts to grasp the central features of the integrationist tendencies of Jews in Hungary. Though there are important differences between the Hungarian and the German case – mainly the non-existence of a central nation-state in the German case till 1871- I believe that Sorkin's article is relevant to our issue.

Sorkin claims that the terms "emancipation" and "assimilation" became increasingly inadequate "as tools of historical analysis" and there's need of looking for alternative notions. The term "emancipation" was adopted by German liberals after 1828 following the emancipation of Catholics in England; the concept of "assimilation" represented the "self-perception" of post-emancipation German Jewry. The two terms signified two sides in a reciprocal process: emancipation meant the role of the state granting equal rights to the Jews, while the embodiment of assimilation was Jewish regeneration through

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<sup>17</sup> The above geographical differentiation based on religious tendencies derives from Jacob Katz and Michael Silber, already referred to in the introduction:

Jacob Katz, *A house divided: orthodoxy and schism in nineteenth-century Central European Jewry*, trans. Ziporah Brody, (Hannover, N.H.: Brandeis University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő, Az Egyenlőség évtizedei (1881-1931), [Two generations, The decades of Equality]*, (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 13, 78-82.

occupational and educational reform constituting the counterpart of emancipation. The above expressions earned across Jewish political camps and in different currents of Jewish historiography clearly positive or negative connotations, and they were not able to comprise the numerous viewpoints – internal, social etc. – which developed in Jewish historiography. These developments made these terms, so Sorkin asserts, inadequate for historical analysis anymore. Indeed, there were tentative suggestions as to substitute them with other concepts – embourgeoisement by Jacob Toury, the introduction of the idea of a Jewish subculture by Jacob Katz, David Sorkin and others. Sorkin suggests the adaptation of the terms 'integration' or 'acculturation' which can integrate a wider spectrum of political, social and cultural phenomena.<sup>19</sup>

Hungary, the ideal environment for acculturationists

One of the main sources that I would like to rely on to explain the basic tenets of Neolog Jewry in Hungary is Ezra Mendelsohn's study "On Modern Jewish Politics". Mendelsohn begins his book with seven basic questions relating to different Jewish political movements, and by answering these questions he constructs a typology of Jewish politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These questions are: "What are the Jews"; "What should be their cultural orientation - in terms of language mainly"; "Where does the solution to the Jewish question lies in geographical terms"; the "historical narrative preferred by the movement"; possibility of alliances with gentile political forces; the nature of their political tactics; their understanding of the collective existence of Jews in the Diaspora.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> David Sorkin, "Emancipation and Assimilation Two concepts and their Application to German – Jewish History", *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 35 (1990): 17-33.

<sup>20</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.

The acculturationist political current's understanding about Jewish politics could be summarized as: "This is Our Home, Our Palestine". The central notion, according to Mendelssohn, in the integrationist context was "doikeyt" which could be translated into English as "hereness". The relevance of the national context in which the Jews were settled was central to their self-understanding. The solution of the Jewish question lied not in Palestine or in Uganda, but rather in the United States or in Hungary. A period of conceived toleration, acceptance and emancipation in these countries resulted in vigorous patriotism, and low profile politics- as far as it concerned collective Jewish rights. The intellectual figures, who were chosen to represent the Jewish tradition, were figures who became part and parcel of the non-Jewish cultural intellectual milieu in which they'd lived, such as Philo of Alexandria, Maimonides and Moses Mendelssohn. In terms of historical ideals, the integrationists stood for the 'age of emancipation' and its achievements and "saw in pluralism and religious toleration a desired value."<sup>21</sup>

In political terms, claims Mendelssohn, the ideal environment for Jewish integrationism would be as follows.

"(A) country or region that was either mononational...and that refused to recognize the legitimate existence of minority nationalities; a country dominated by a culturally "attractive" nation into which the Jews would be all-to-happy to integrate; and a country liberal enough to accept Jews into the national fold ...(O)ne would expect this region to be characterized by economic dynamism and a growing urban sector. Jewish integrationism requires the existence of a substantial number of Jews prepared to distance themselves from the spiritual ghetto. But in economically dynamic, culturally attractive,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 6-16.

and above all politically liberal countries...such Jews would be likely to reject not only oldstyle religious orthodoxy...but also modern Jewish nationalism."<sup>22</sup>

In geographical terms such areas, according to Mendelssohn, are the US, France, Italy, and Hungary in the period between the Ausgleich and the First World War. Indeed, Hungarian liberal nationalism was inclusive in its understanding of the Hungarian nation defining itself first and foremost on linguistic and not on ethnical terms. In Mendelssohn's view, Theodor Herzl and Max Nordau were exceptions in a mostly acculturationist bourgeois urban Jewry in Hungary.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid, Ibid*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid, Ibid*, 49-50.

## **Borsszem Jankó, Jewish humor and assimilationist Jewry in Hungary**

Before moving into the analytical sections of this paper I would provide some background on the more visual primary source of my thesis: Borsszem Jankó.

The second half of the 'long' 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the period between 1867 and the Great War, is usually coined as the golden age of Jewish assimilation in Hungary. The integration of Jews into the Hungarian society was first and foremost an urban phenomenon, more specifically a phenomenon of middle class Jewry in Budapest. The capital of the eastern part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy became united in 1873 (out of Pest, Buda and Óbuda) and began its unparalleled development to become one of the most thriving industrial and cultural capitals of Turn of the Century Europe- if not in absolute terms, than for sure in terms of its pace of development. The flourishing of Budapest was, to a decisive extent, the result of the industrial, commercial and cultural activity of the newly emancipated (1867) Hungarian Jewry, whose mainstream deeply believed in the 'contract of emancipation' in the Hungarian context. In 1870 the Jewish population of Budapest did not surpass 50000, whereas in 1902 it arrived to around 100000. The importance of the Jewish population in Hungary in general and in Budapest in particular was far beyond its sheer numerical share of the society. Next to their contribution to Hungary's economical development, the Jews around 1900 constituted the significant and to a great extent the only minority group – ethnic or religious remains open to discussion – that was ready to join the magyarization of the population of Hungary, indeed, without the nearly million Jews declaiming themselves – on a linguistic base – Hungarians, the proportion of the Magyar 'majority' would have been a 'minority'

between the borders of 'historical Hungary'.<sup>24</sup> Integrating, though, into the Hungarian socio-cultural environment, the Jews of Budapest co-constituted to a great part - to use Steven Aschheim's notion about German Jewry's integration into the German society – the newly born bourgeois culture in the capital.<sup>25</sup> One of the main contributions of the integrating Jewish middle class to the culture of Pest and of Hungary in a broader sense was the Jewish joke, as a substitute to the traditional Hungarian anecdote. The definition of the Jewish joke might be subject to further elaboration, as we'll see, but its long-lasting influence is without any doubt. Whether in the famous - or in the eyes of the Hungarian reaction: infamous – cabarets of Budapest<sup>26</sup>, whether in the newly born comic weeklies, these jokes reflected on the one hand the international character of Jewish culture, on the other hand Jewish humor adjusted itself to the reality of Hungary and Pest, being the very mirror image of every day actuality. The comic weeklies, mainly *Borsszem Jankó* – established in 1868 by the governmental party itself -, reflected the progressive, dynamic and open vision the Jewish middle class in Hungary. In contrast with the conventional themes of the Hungarian press, its topics, next to the political incidents, were no others than the incidents of every day social reality in the 'metropolis' in becoming. The Jewish issue was fundamental in *Borsszem Jankó* for two main reasons. On the one hand, from the 1880's on, the antisemitic feelings in the Hungarian society were expressed explicitly by an antisemitic political party in the Hungarian parliament. On the other hand, the

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<sup>24</sup> More on the policies of magyarization of the Hungarian state in the period of the dual monarchy: Viktor Karády, István Kozma, *Név és nemzet, [Name and Nation]*, (Budapest, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> More on Jewish assimilation and participation in the socio-cultural context of Hungary between 1867 and 1890:

Aladár Komlós, *Magyar-Zsidó szellemtörténet a reformkortól a holocaustig, [Hungarian-Jewish history of ideas from the age of Reform to the Holocaust]*, (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 1997), 105-110.

<sup>26</sup> Miklós Konrád, "Orfeum és zsidó identitás Budapesten a század-fordulón" [Orfeum and Jewish identity in Budapest at the turn of the century], *Budapesti Negyed* 16, (2008), 351-368.

Jewish issue was naturally dealt with from a entirely different perspective. It had to be dealt with since Borsszem Jankó's basic task was to be reflective of and responsive to the very dilemmas of the predominant segment of its readers: the Jewry of Pest.<sup>27</sup>

Kati Vörös in her article "Judapesti Buleváron"<sup>28</sup> gives an elaborate picture on the historical development and the social context of the caricatures about Jews in the press at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As for the visual representation of the 'Jew', Vörös draws on several sources according to their historical relevance. The notion of a "national character", argues Péter Hanák, was central to the self-imagination of 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic nationalism.<sup>29</sup> The alleged national character of the Jews was vital to 19<sup>th</sup> century European nationalistic discourse. The origins of the discourse on the Jews and the reasons for its centrality are embedded in the theological essentiality attributed to the Jews, in late Antiquity and in the Middle-ages, by the Christian theoreticians. Indeed, after dealing with the dominant features of the visual depiction of the Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – features such as: the contrast between the Jews and other nationalities, the specific inborn distortions of the Jewish body, the feminization of the figure of the Jewish male, and the pseudo-scientific nature of the entire discourse around the above issues, etc. – Vörös focuses on the 'demonization' and the 'dehumanization' of the figure of the Jew, detecting its origins in the Middle-ages. Vörös sees in the illustration of the 'figure of the

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<sup>27</sup> Géza, Buzinkay, "The Budapest Joke and Comic Weeklies as Mirrors of Cultural Assimilation", in *Budapest and New York: studies in metropolitan transformation, 1870-1930*, Thomas Bender and Carl E. Schorske, eds., (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1993), 229-233.

<sup>28</sup> Kati Vörös, "Judapesti Buleváron" [On the Boulevard of Judapest], [http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2003\\_01\\_tavas/02\\_judapesti\\_bulevaron](http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2003_01_tavas/02_judapesti_bulevaron).

<sup>29</sup> Péter Hanák, "Polgárosodás és etnikai előítélet a magyar társadalomban a 19. Század második felében" [Embourgeoisment and ethnical prejudice in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century], in *A kert és a műhely [The Garden and the Workshop]*, (Budapest: Gondolat, 1988), 81. (cited by Kati Vörös, "Judapesti Buleváron", 2.

Jew' in the Middle-ages as a complicit of the Satan or imbued with Satanic features – studied by Robert Wiestrich-, as a vital step on the way to depict the Jew as an inhumane being, towards his/her exclusion not only from the community of nations but from all humanity itself.<sup>30</sup> Though admitting that Borsszem Jankó's visual world was simply part of a socio-cultural context before the Holocaust, which changed ultimately the 'limit of tolerance' in the face of antisemitic propaganda, she's very critical about the role, that Borsszem Jankó, and Adolf Ágai as its main designer, played in the process of turning the concept of the Jew into a "cultural code". Vörös argues that the presentation of the 'Jew' in Borsszem Jankó might have intended to challenge its message, but its ultimate result was its reproduction. The standardization of this visual image of the 'Jew' resulted in the identification of the Jews with the visual image of the 'Jew'.<sup>31</sup>

### ***The concept of Jewish humor***

Aladár Komlós dates back the origins of the Jewish joke to the times when the Jews of Europe first left the outskirts of the ghetto. These Jews began to see themselves and their brethren according to the measurements of the non-Jewish socio-cultural world, mocking at and aiming at correcting the – alleged (A. Sz) - flaws developed during the long centuries of Jewish segregation in the European Christian society. Though Komlós does not negate entirely the pride in the fact that the Jews are the only nation which is capable and ready to mock itself and to amuse itself on the basis of its character flaws, but at the same time he is also critical about this tendency, which influences later generations of Jews who have nearly nothing in common with the Jewish archetype of passed centuries.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 3-5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, *Ibid*, 6.

Komlós argues that the fact that the Jews are capable of laughing at themselves, and to be void observers of their very nature withholds them of becoming "fanatic". Having said that, he asserts that this self-irony diminishes to some extent the self-appreciation of the Jews, and he hopes for a decadence in Jewish jokes and wishes for an increase for artistic representation of the Jews in order to nurture "Jewish heroism and self-gratitude".<sup>32</sup>

In the same context, Eduard Fuchs, in his book "Die Juden in der Karikatur" praises as well the exceptional ability of the Jews to laugh at their own expense, and he sees in it less of a sign of "weakness" rather an expression of "self-awareness."<sup>33</sup>

A very important and highly illuminating contribution on the nature of Jewish humor is Mary Gluck's article: "Jewish humor and popular culture in fin-de-siècle Budapest". Gluck emphasizes mainly the subversive nature of Jewish humor as a representative genre of popular culture. The importance of popular culture, according to Gluck, cannot be overestimated in its critique of the dominant consensus high culture and high politics. The main feature, which enables popular culture to be so sharp in its critique and in its ability to represent the flaws of the ever-prevailing socio-cultural milieu is its transgression. Transgression in gender, racial, class and national terms suggests a possible alternative vision to the homogenizing bourgeois liberal society, and by the exaggeration of cultural and political motives popular culture proves exactly their inaccuracy. The subversive nature of Jewish humor at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Budapest was directed in two different directions. On the one hand, against the official Hungarian political discourse in general and its antisemitic motives in particular. On the other hand, it suggested a viable alternative to the assimilationist attitude of the official

<sup>32</sup> Aladár Komlós, *Magyar-Zsidó szellemtörténet a reformkortól a holocaustig*, 54-57.

<sup>33</sup> Eduard Fuchs, *Die Juden in der Karikatur [The Jews in the Caricature]*, (München: Verlag Albert Langen, 1921), 307.

Jewish establishment. The hyphenated figures of the cabaret halls or of Borsszem Jankó, which represented a radically different approach towards Jewish integration into the Hungarian society, were, if it was possible, not even mentioned by the mainstream Jewish press. There's no doubt, the adherence of these figures to their Jewish traits of personality and appearance challenged the assimilationist paradigm of the liberal era.<sup>34</sup>

About Ágai's will at fighting the increasing antisemitic tendencies in Hungarian society and at the same time encouraging his Jewish brethren to assimilate in their language and in their customs Komlós was very critical. Komlós's criticism though is not directed mainly at Ágai's direction, he is turned by Komlós rather into a general critic on the "illusions" of the age of emancipation – looking back from the 'sobering' period of the 1930s.<sup>35</sup>

Ágai, who was the originator of the most successful and long-lasting figures of Borsszem Jankó – Itzig Spitzig the assimilating Jewish pater familias, Salamon Seiffensteiner the Jewish grocer, W.M. Börzeviczy, the Jewish banker (based on the figure of Wahrmann Mór) and others – which later became well-known figures in Hungarian popular culture and in the Hungarian daily public discourse was ambivalent towards the genre of Jewish self-irony. Nevertheless he was consciousness of the genuine nature of humor.

"Humor, Ágai pointed out ... , was a crooked mirror that reflected the deepest truths of society, ordinarily repressed or unavailable for serious discussion. The humorist, for this reason, enjoyed the protective mantle of the classic fool who could give voice to taboo subjects without being held to the standards of mainstream society... Jokes, he implied,

<sup>34</sup> Mary Gluck, "Jewish humor and popular culture in fin-de-siècle Budapest", *Twenty-Third Annual Robert A. Kann Memorial Lecture*.

<sup>35</sup> Aladár Komlós, *Magyar-Zsidó szellemtörténet a reformkortól a holocaustig*, 175.

were not reflections of social realities but distortions that needed to be decoded by culturally competent audiences."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Gluck, "Jewish humor and popular culture in fin-de-siècle Budapest", 5.

## The Tiszaeszlár – Affair and the issue of the 'Ostjude'

The Tiszaeszlár-Affair was a one of the constituent events of the history of dualist Hungary in general and of Hungarian Jewish history in particular. Indeed the first blood-libel in Hungary during the modern era bears striking similarities in its political and social importance and development to that of the Dreyfuss Affair in France. It divided Hungarian society into “defenders of the shachters’ (Jewish ritual slaughterers),” on the one hand, and “truth-seekers,” on the other.<sup>37</sup> The extraordinary attention that it got in the Hungarian as well as in the European gentile and Jewish press turned it an into an essential instance of the Jewish question in Hungary.<sup>38</sup> (To present an account on the portrayal of the Tiszaeszlár Affair in the foreign press is beyond the scope of the present project, however it is worth mentioning that the affair was followed with great attention by the foreign Jewish press, and this fact did not escape the attention of the editors of *Egyenlőség* itself.)<sup>39</sup> Only fifteen years after the emancipation of Jews in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy the event assumed all the more an important nature in the Hungarian mainstream Jewish discourse. The blood libel of Tiszaeszlár was constituent not only in a general sense but also regarding two very specific issues concerning the present paper. The main source of the present thesis, *Egyenlőség*, was established as a result of the passionate public discussion around the affair. Borrowing the phrases of Lajos Szabolcsi, sixty years later: “The fire of *Egyenlőség* was ignited by a lightning

<sup>37</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő, Az Egyenlőség évtizedei (1881-1931), Emlékezések, dokumentumok*, (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 26.

<sup>38</sup> János Pelle, “Tiszaeszlár visszhangja: Vértárhisztériák a Magyar sajtóban (1882-től 1918-ig)” [“The Echo of Tiszaeszlár: Histerias of Bloodlibels in the Hungarian Press (from 1882 till 1918)”], in *Vértáradak Üzenete*, ed., György Csepeli, (Budapest: Minoritás Alapítvány, 1996), 43-62.

<sup>39</sup> *Egyenlőség*, 03.12.1882, 11.

sixty years ago. That celestial war, which emitted this lightning, was called Tiszaeszlár.”<sup>40</sup>

The affair influenced in a decisive way the future editor of *Egyenlőség*, Miksa Szabolcsi.

Lajos Szabolcsi, the son of Miksa Szabolcsi described it 50 years later as follows.

“When the “Affair” started in the spring of 1882, he leaves everything, and he does not leave the spot for a year and a half. He knows the county since he was its native. The gentry, the landowner, the poor Jew, the urban intellectual. His heart smolders when he hears the crazy tale of the blood libel, and he makes a vow not to rest until he nails the lie down to the counter...he looks for the root of the lie in a fanatic fever and thrives to pluck it out, corroding the evil web, which is overlaid the whole of Jewry.”<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, one of the crucial questions that serves as an overarching thread in the present essay is the question of how Neolog Jewry defined itself vis-à-vis the surrounding Hungarian society. The Neolog stance was part of the current that saw emancipation and integration of Jews in Hungary in an optimistic way.<sup>42</sup> The self-definition of Hungarian liberal Jews reflected the standpoint of German assimilationist Jewry describing themselves as “Hungarians of the Israelite faith” – previously, during the ‘Age of Reform’, it sounded as Hungarians of the religion of Moses. The essential characteristic of this self-definition was the classification of the Jews in Hungary as a religious minority inside the civic Hungarian nation. Even the question whether the practice of religious activity should be demonstrated in public or restrained to the private sphere was discussed. To demonstrate to what extent liberal Hungarians saw Hungarian Jews as a

<sup>40</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő, Az Egyenlőség évtizedei (1881-1931), Emlékezések, dokumentumok*, (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 25, (the translation is mine).

<sup>41</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő, Az Egyenlőség évtizedei (1881-1931), Emlékezések, dokumentumok*, (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 28, (the translation is mine).

<sup>42</sup> János Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett Magyar Hazátok, A magyar nemzeteszmé és nacionalizmus története, [That’s what your Hungarian Homeland become, The History of Hungarian nation-idea and of nationalism]*, (Budapest: Osiris, 2007), 135-137.

denomination and not as an ethnic or national group, I'd like to quote a letter written by a gentile reader to the editor of *Egyenlőség* in the midst of the storm around Tiszaeszlár.

Me, who because of my religion cannot be accused of having my pen guided by a denominational interest, I see in your performance only the phenomenon of legitimate self-defense against those scoundrel assassins who want to dissociate Hungarian Jewry from the body of the nation. As a non-Jew I thank you for your efforts, because the case that you are in the service of, is not the case of a denomination but of the Hungarian nation.<sup>43</sup>

The Neolog standpoint was in contrast, practically, with all other Jewish or gentile understandings of the Jewish question in Hungary- except for the national-liberal establishment. (According to the official policy of the national-liberal elite, Jewish assimilation and Jewish legal emancipation became an unchallengeable axiom. As a result of it, the only reevaluation that was formed on the existing assimilationist model in Hungary, as in Germany, till the end of the Great War, was the antisemitic critique of it.) To begin with, the antisemitic view of the Jews was racial, however this racial view was defined. Quoting two different lectures of Istóczy shows that this classification was not unequivocally clarified even by the antisemites themselves. Relating to Jewish immigration from Russia, Istóczy opted for a racial definition. "The Jews are, in point of fact, a nation-race (*népfaj*), a race, with a specific national religion, namely a conquering nation-race, whose goal is the bringing to heels, and if possible annihilation, of the European nations..."<sup>44</sup> In his 'Palestine speech' in 1875, he represented a more cultural

<sup>43</sup> R. Y., *Egyenlőség*, 03.12.1882, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in János Gyurgyák, *Ezzé lett Magyar Hazátok, A magyar nemzeteszme és nacionalizmus története, [That's what your Hungarian Homeland become, The History of Hungarian nation-idea and of nationalism]*, (Budapest: Osiris, 2007), 146.

option. He advised Jews who are incapable of integrating into Hungarian society to leave for Palestine. But those who stay in Hungary should “cease to form a state within the state, should give up every plan of attacking us...should compromise frankly with the Christian civilization, should assimilate to us, should melt into us, should be the same body, soul and man with us.”<sup>45</sup>

The Neolog standpoint differed sharply from the so-called dissimilationist position as well. This mainly gentile current dissociated itself from the antisemitic view of society and considered the legal equality of the citizens of Hungary vital, but at the same time it considered the Jews in Hungary as a nation and kept also a certain social distance from them. The orthodox criticized the Neolog camp, furthermore, for making too many concessions in its dealing with the establishment in terms of its religious standards.<sup>46</sup> The only ideological ally of the Neolog camp was the liberal-nationalist establishment itself, as we’ve seen above, and any critic of the liberal paradigm on prospects of Jewish assimilation was considered illegitimate. The Tiszaeszlár Affair was seen as such a criticism formulated by antisemites. In this context, the issue of Jewish immigration from the east or the consideration of the Jews as an alien population was naturally central to the antisemitic propaganda.

The general position of *Egyenlőség* in the face of the Tiszaeszlár Affair was representing the Jewish population residing in Hungary as unified as possible. The words of Adolf Strausz exemplify very well this attitude. “But I believe and I am convinced, that the Hungarian Jews won’t be afraid with the sense of their truth and right...As soon as the

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>46</sup> János Gyurgyák, *A Zsidókérdés Magyarországon, Politikai Eszmetörténet, [The Jewish-question in Hungary, A Political History of Ideas]*, (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2001), 229-231.

rabble sees that the Hungarian Jew did not shrink, he will not fear them...and at that moment, the whole band have failed, together with their house of cards.”<sup>47</sup>

An additional article in *Egyenlőség* shows that indeed the intellectual halo around it saw Hungarian Jewry unified in its efforts to become an integral part of Hungarian society and in its endeavours to defend itself against those acting against it. The author, Ignác Acsády, argues that according to the present legal situation in Hungary, there is only one Jewry (*Zsidóság*) recognized. Acsády claims furthermore, that the antisemites do not genuinely differentiate between the different sections inside Hungarian Jewry, ”though they scorn the Orthodox, they think about the Neolog.” Acsády believes that especially after the Tiszaeszlár Affair the right policy to follow for all ”elements of Hungarian Jewry is to join the Hungarian national community.”<sup>48</sup>

The reports about a similar blood-libel taking place in Galicia at the same time epitomizes very well the understanding of *Egyenlőség* of Hungarian Jewry as a whole and of the journal’s task how to represent it at the given historical context. In December 1882 the first account appears and opens as follows. The editors of *Egyenlőség* felt obliged to report on the issue, which appeared to be another blood libel with striking resemblance to the case of Tiszaeszlár. They declared though that “[they] do not occupy [themselves] gladly with the issues of Galician Jews, with whom Hungarian Jews have no connection at all”.<sup>49</sup>

In the editorial of *Egyenlőség* at the end of December 1882 Ignác Acsády elaborates on the possible reasons for the expansion of the antisemitic idea in Hungary. Acsády argues that the motive for the appearance of the ‘Jewish question’ in Hungary should not be

<sup>47</sup> Adolf Strausz, “A „Függetlenségről”-ről” [About the “Independence”], in *Egyenlőség*, 03.12.1882, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Ignác Acsády, *Egyenlőség*, 11.02.1883, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Egyenlőség*, 17.12.1882, 6.

traced back to an internal Hungarian discourse. Its causes, he argues, should be looked for abroad, but not in Germany, because the political discourse there did not have a decisive influence on the Hungarian scene. Instead, it is the Pan-Slavic ambitions of Count Ignatyev who exploits various minority issues in Europe to undermine the public order in Western nation states. In Hungary the choice fell on the Jewish question since it seemed to require less energies. Acsády claims that rumors about intensive Jewish immigration from Russia were diffused in Hungary.

“The Russian Jews are coming! They want to flood Hungary! Like in a packed theatre when someone yells “Fire!,” there was suddenly such a panic, which was then exploited accordingly by the previously planned agitation. The Kagal, the Alliance Israelite wants to turn Hungary into a Jewish state! ... In the first minutes of the panic, there was no one, who would have warned the Hungarians, that the settlement of Russian Jews in Hungary is certainly not spoken of, moreover the expelled Russian Jews themselves are against moving here [Hungary]...But it could be realized that this manipulation will become clear, and those feared Russian Jews don’t come here, but rather they return to their home, or they migrate to America. In time, new means of agitation have to be thought of, and for this the horror-fiction of Tiszaeszlár was created.”<sup>50</sup>

In the following, Acsády describes an organized antisemitic propaganda campaign financed from Russian sources. The author highlights particularly the disinvolvement of the Hungarian Catholic Church in the campaign. The author expresses his opinion that the Hungarian nation is too mature to be prone to such agitation.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Ignác Acsády, “Visszapillantások” [Retrospectives], *Egyenlőség*, 31.12.1882, 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2.

On the very same page of *Egyenlőség* Miksa Szabolcsi himself publishes an interesting article regarding the theme of the Eastern question in the Jewish context. Szabolcsi claims to be in the possession of the notes of Salamon Schwartz himself, the main culprit of the Tiszaeszlár Affair. The educational background of Schwartz and Szabolcsi were very similar, both of them being educated in the traditional Jewish schooling system<sup>52</sup>. Szabolcsi in his article refers to the thoughts of Schwartz at the age of 18, which actually led to his expulsion from yeshiva, and put on end to Schwartz's aspirations to become a rabbi. Schwartz believed that reforms were needed, primarily in the linguistic sphere. Very much in the spirit of Reform Judaism, Schwartz encouraged rabbis to study Hungarian so that also Hungarians could understand their knowledge and could respect the rabbis. Szabolcsi quotes Schwartz, who looked upon the Sephardic rabbinic legacy of 'the golden age of Spain' and the following Spanish Diaspora as the archetype for a reformed Judaism. He thought that rabbis speaking the vernacular of the hosting society could be appreciated more and could contribute more the Hungarian society at the same time.<sup>53</sup>

"They should look back...to our forefathers, in front of whom all children of Israel get down on their knees: Moshe Ben Maimon, Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Samuel HaNagid, Yehuda Halevi, Abraham Ibn Ezra...who wrote and sang in Spanish, in Arabic, in Greek and in Latin, and don't they represent the honour, the ornament and the pride of Israel for eternity? Is it forbidden only for us to draw from non-Jewish knowledge? Are we condemned, to be seen ignorant and foolish by the nation, which is our benefactor, to

<sup>52</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő, Az Egyenlőség évtizedei (1881-1931), Emlékezések, dokumentumok*, (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 26-27.

<sup>53</sup> A similar argument about the respected position the legacy of Sephardic rabbis occupied in the discourse of Reform Judaism was elaborated in the article of Ismar Schorsch: Ismar Schorsch, "The Myth of Sephardic Supremacy", *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 34, (1989): 47-66.

whom we owe gratitude, by this Hungarian people, us, in whose heart the divine torch burns, who study, teach and diffuse the holy doctrine of God, only we were condemned, that we should not do any service to the good Hungarian people?”<sup>54</sup>

Another blood libel, which bears striking similarities to that of Tiszaeszlár, is the Damascus Affair of 1840. Jonathan Frankel researched intensively the various records on the affair. His central concern was, at the time of the study of the case, the field of modern Jewish politics. One of the surprising aspects of the affair, argues Jonathan Frankel, is the wave of Jewish solidarity, which followed right from the beginning. In this context, Frankel asserts, it was difficult to explain the affair in terms of the nationalist historical school of Simon Dubnow. Frankel did not consider this Jewish reaction to the Damascus affair nor the vestiges of the traditional notion of Jewish *shtadlanut*, lobbying, nor the manifestation of some sort of proto-nationalist Jewish reaction. Frankel claims that this wave of solidarity ought not to be understood in the framework of nationalist policies, rather in terms of “emancipationist” politics, which appealed to universal values.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, in the case of Tiszaeszlár as well, the process itself and the following public discussion stimulated a strong response on the part of Hungarian Jewry, and similarly to the establishment of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in the aftermath of the Damascus Affair, even the idea of the organization of a “Zsidó Védegylet” [Jewish defense association] was brought to discussion on the pages of *Egyenlőség*. The idea of

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<sup>54</sup> Salamon Schwartz, “Izrael reménye” [The Hope of Israel], quoted in Miksa Szabolcsi, “Schwartz Salamon”, *Egyenlőség*, 31.12.1882, 2-3.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Frankel, ““Ritual Murder” in the Modern Era: The Damascus Affair of 1840”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 3/2 (1997): 1-16. I owe the idea of the comparison between the Tiszaeszlár Affair and the Damascus blood-libel and their consequences to Prof. Carsten Wilke.

this association followed the logic of denominational and or social organization, conceived in the Hungarian context.<sup>56</sup>

I'd like to add to the discussion an illustration published in *Borsszem Jankó* during July 1882. The illustration is called "The Golden Fly"- alluding to the romance of Mór Jókai: "The Golden Man"- opened the issue of July 16, 1882. The scene depicted is situated around a theatre stage, above which the ritual slaughter of Eszlár is hanging on a cord. He has the visual attributions of the archetypal Eastern Jewish caricature figure: the 'Jewish nose', side locks, club feet, etc. He holds a huge knife, but he looks rather amusing hanging on a cord, with wings of a fly on his back, wearing short trousers and slippers. Representatives of the main newspapers play the musical instruments in the pit for the orchestra. The subtitles tell us: "there's need of such a comedy in such a heat, so that the poor newspapers would have readers." [1] The representation of the theme in such a ridiculous setting rather takes the edge off from the antisemitic accusations and expresses the absurdity of the chronicle of the alleged ritual murder, very much in the vain of the understanding of Mary Gluck on the functioning of popular humor.<sup>57</sup> The only instance that the 'Ostjude' is discernable in *Borsszem Jankó* around the affair is the visual features of the accused, but no division explicit division is made between assimilated Jewry and more traditional Jews, similarly to *Egyenlőség*.

<sup>56</sup> Ármin Várnai, "Mily alapon szervezkedjünk?" [On what grounds should we self-organize?], *Egyenlőség*, 25.03.1883, 6-7; S. W., "Védjük magunkat!" [Let's defend ourselves!], *Ibid.*, 7; G.... J.W., "Egy őszinte szó" [A sincere word], *Ibid*, *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> "Az Arany Légy" [The Golden Fly], *Borsszem Jankó*, 16.07.1882, 1.

## The reactions to the first Zionist congress and the Eastern Jewish-question

The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law. The Congress contemplates the following means to the attainment of this end:

1. The promotion...of the colonization of Palestine by Jewish agricultural and industrial workers.
2. The organization and binding together of the whole Jewry by means of appropriate institutions, local and international in accordance with the laws of each country.
3. The strengthening and fostering of Jewish national sentiment and consciousness.
4. Preparatory steps towards obtaining government consent, where necessary, to the attainment of the aim of Zionism.<sup>58</sup>

The above cited principles are the main ideas of the so-called Basle Program which was adopted in August 1897 by the first Zionist Congress in Basle. Originally the congress should have taken place in Munich, according to the plans of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), but because of the fierce opposition of various Jewish organizations in Germany, Herzl decided to move the event to a more 'neutral' scene. However, the initiatives conceived during the congress could not sound more radical to the ears of the emancipated Hungarian Jewish public. Thirty years after the legal emancipation of the Jews of Hungary, the years around 1900 signify the peak of the golden age of Jews in Hungarian public life. The mainstream Jewish public, and its main press organ *Egyenlőség*, seemed victorious against the political forces which stood behind the Tiszaeszlár Affair and the year 1895 brought even more success to the liberal spirit of the governing parties. The reception of the Jewish religion as equal to the Catholic and the Protestant beliefs and the enactment of the law over civil marriage in 1895 made the Jews of Hungary anticipate

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<sup>58</sup> "The Basle Program (1897)", in *The Jew in the Modern World*, compiled and edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 540-541.

with great pride the year of 1896 the alleged anniversary of the conquer of the Carpathian basin by the Hungarian tribes a millennium ago. Some tended to assert even that members of the Jewish nation were alongside the Hungarian warriors<sup>59</sup>, strengthening this way the argument of a common destiny of the Hungarians and the Hungarians of the Jewish faith.

Peter Haber, in his volume, *Die Anfänge des Zionismus in Ungarn*, presents a specific understanding of Zionism in Hungary, one, which is compatible with the understanding of Ezra Mendelssohn about the integrationist setting of Hungary. On the one hand, Haber emphasizes the support of Pressburg, the center of Jewish Orthodoxy in Hungary, to the Zionist movement – the activity of Samuel Bettelheim, the establishment of Ahavath Zion in 1897 etc. On the other hand, Haber argues that there was an

attempt to reconcile aspirations for a Jewish national homeland with a fervent and deep-rooted Hungarian patriotism. As Herzl himself observed, 'In Hungary, one must forge a red-white-and-green Zionism'...For Hungary's Zionists, this meant that the Jews in Hungary, though not constituting 'a separate political nationality with separate political tendencies', could still support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine – to be settled, of course, by persecuted Jews from Eastern Europe...'protecting' Hungary from the influx of impoverished, Yiddish-speaking *Ostjuden*.<sup>60</sup>

Gábor Schweitzer is very much in accordance with the above said on Hungarian Jewry in general and on its relationship to the Zionist idea in particular. Schweitzer draws a balanced picture on the reception of Zionism in Hungary. The acceptance and the

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<sup>59</sup> On the historical conjectures on the Khazar ancestry of Ashkenazi Jewry:

Arthur, Koestler, *The thirteenth tribe, the Khazar Empire and its heritage*, (London: Pan Books, 1977).

<sup>60</sup> Michael Miller, "Zionism in Hungary", review of *Die Anfänge des Zionismus in Ungarn [The beginnings of Zionism in Hungary] (1897-1904)*, by Peter Haber, *East European Jewish Affairs*, 34/2 (Winter, 2004): 180.

resistance to it in Orthodox circles, the fierce opposition of the Neolog integrationist camp and the above mentioned "red-white-green-Zionism" are all referred to in his account. Indeed, even the Zionists in Hungary understood, that Zionism as a political movement, as an alternative to Hungarian nationalism had no chance. János Rónai, one of the scant Zionists in Hungary, said as follows in his speech in the Basel Congress:

“Active Zionism has no ground in Hungary. There is a need, in our midst, for enlightenment in two directions. The one is that the impediment of the influx of Russian and Polish Jews and the expulsion of the Jews populating in great masses the North-Eastern parts of our homeland can be tackled with success only with the means of the Zionist movement. The other is that Zionism does not contradict patriotism.”<sup>61</sup>

There's no source more genuine to depict the sharp disagreement between Zionist thought and the patriotism of Hungarian Jews at the 'Turn of the Century' than Miksa Szabolcsi's account of his meeting in 1904 in Vienna with Theodor Herzl. The main basis for disagreement was the central tenet of Zionism considering the Jews first and foremost a nation. Szabolcsi's main argument against Herzl was that the Jews in Hungary did not want to be, and indeed would have been in a very delicate position in the Hungarian political arena to be considered as an ethnicity or a nation. As Szabolcsi stated:

“The Jew in Hungary is completely satisfied (which is exactly enough) of being Jewish regarding his religion. Regarding his nationality he does not want to be any other than Hungarian. And if he's Hungarian, he can't be of Jewish nationality.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Gábor Schweitzer, "Miért nem kellett Herzl a magyar zsidóknak? A politikai cionizmus kezdetei és a magyarországi zsidó közvélemény" [Why the Hungarian Jews do not need Herzl, the Beginnings of political Zionism and the Hungarian Jewish public opinion], *Budapesti Negyed* 4 (1994/2), the translation is mine.

<sup>62</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő*, 84.

As discussed above, Hungarian Neolog Jewry was highly critical about the Zionist idea, in general, and saw it, first and foremost, as a threat to its position inside Hungarian society. Though I've already touched upon the question of the Eastern Jews in this context, I'd like to research the issue further. Could indeed the Eastern Jewish question grant legitimacy to the Zionist idea?

In July 1897 about a month before the Congress in Basel, the opening piece of *Egyenlőség* reiterated the basic beliefs of Hungarian Neolog Jewry about its stance vis-à-vis the Zionist idea. Adolf Silberstein emphasized that the one and only homeland of Hungarian Jews is Hungary and therefore they cannot see legitimacy for themselves in any national movement which aims at a national project anywhere else outside Hungary. The author underlines that the Hungarian state gave equal rights to its Jewish citizens and even “acknowledged solemnly our long mocked, persecuted and defamed religion as one of the Hungarian religions”; and restates the returning image of Hungary as the ‘new Jerusalem’. Silberstein believes that Zionism has to narrow its scope to assist

the expelled Jews to find a new homeland ... There are a few hundred thousand miserable Jews, who were confiscated from everything by the superior authority, expelled from their homeland. Where should these poor people, who were expatriated, flee? If these people could be situated in Argentina, or in Palestine, or in Tripoli, or anywhere else, and educate them to be cultivators or artisans a great thing would be done, not only from the point of view of the *denomination* but from a humanistic viewpoint general... Christians and Jews have to unite so that a few hundred thousand people would

not knock without a homeland, like a martinet, dragging epidemics in his body and his soul.<sup>63</sup>

There are two vital ideas in Silberstein's analysis on the Zionist question. Silberstein believes that there is legitimacy for the Zionist project to act on behalf of Jews. Though, the main population that Zionism should strive to aid is not assimilated Jewry in Western and Central Europe but those Jewish masses which suffer the pogroms in Eastern Europe. The second interesting aspect is the moral arguments on which the author bases his claims. Similarly to various matters, which touched upon the Jewish-question in Hungary, the argumentation is not based on the criteria of any sort of national self-definition. Whether the political claims are in terms of equal rights for Jews inside Hungary or for the easing of the plight of Jews in Russia, the assertion will be positioned cautiously in the framework of a universal argument, in this case its humanism in the case of internal Hungarian issues it is the general ideas of the enlightenment which should lead the legislation; any alluding to national identification was carefully avoided, and even the existence of any national bond between Jews in the present age was explicitly denied.<sup>64</sup>

The article of Gerő referred to above is an excellent and intriguing example as well as to what extent the discourse of *Egyenlőség* was part of the general discourse of Fin-de-Siècle Europe. Gerő asserts in the article that European emancipated Jewry will not give up his newly acquired position and move to Zion. Gerő explains however that Zionism do have influence over some "hysterical" people. Zionism has influence only over "decadents, in whose sophisticated soul the sentimentality pullulate, and daydreaming

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<sup>63</sup> Adolf Silberstein, "A sionizmus" [Zionism], *Egyenlőség*, 11.07.1897, 1-2.

<sup>64</sup> Ödön Gerő, "Még egyszer a sionizmus" [Ones again Zionism], *Egyenlőség*, 18.07.1897, 1-2.

fluctuates.” Zionism has influence only over “sophisticated nerves”... “We the healthy look at its strange blooming in an alien way and can not understand it.”<sup>65</sup>

When the reader encounters the above lines cannot but recall the phrases formulated by Max Nordau in his volume “Degeneration”.<sup>66</sup> The description of those who are unsuitable for the requirements of the modern age, those decadents who are not appropriate for the bourgeois society are those who are receptive to the Zionist arguments. Ironically enough, the same Nordau, who reflected very much a dominant current in the 19<sup>th</sup> century European socio-cultural environment, was the vice-president of the very same first Zionist Congress in Basel, and determined in a decisive way the formulation of Zionist ideals. In other words, Zionism, as much as Neolog Judaism, was a product of 19<sup>th</sup> century European bourgeoisie which determined very much its understanding of the Eastern Jewish question, amongst others.<sup>67</sup>

Naturally, the separation of Hungarian Jewry from the “Eastern” Jews was not always such a clear-cut issue. In August 1897 the municipality of Budapest decided to banish foreign junkmen from practicing their activity in Budapest. The reaction of *Egyenlőség* to the ban was harsh. The issue was connected unequivocally with Jews who immigrated into Hungary from Galicia. The author of the article stresses on the fact that *Egyenlőség* brought up the issue of Galician immigration a number of times, and that there’s need to control the phenomenon intensively. Again, on humanistic grounds, the author opposes the expulsion of Jews who already entered Hungary.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, (New York: H. Fertig, 1968).

<sup>67</sup> I believe that my conclusions are in accordance with arguments that I’ve studied from Steven E. Aschheim.

<sup>68</sup> Sándor Fleischmann, “A külföldi ószeresek” [The foreign junkmen], *Egyenlőség*, 15.08.1897, 1-2.

On the pages of the first issue of *Egyenlőség*, which was published after the congress, Miksa Szabolcsi himself raises a highly critical voice about the participants in the congress. Szabolcsi's main concern is that the Zionists strive to define Jewry as a national entity which is in complete contradiction with the basic credo of Neolog Jewry in Hungary to define Hungarian Jewry according to denomination. However, the author does refer positively to a less radical minority inside Zionist circles, who, "for the sake of the many miserable stateless, supported the idea of Jewish colonization in the Holyland."<sup>69</sup>

A caricature appeared in *Borsszem Jankó*, in the issue of 15.09.1897, demonstrates to what extent the notion of Jewish colonization in the Middle East was smiled upon by mainstream Hungarian Jewry during the discussed period. The amusing piece bears the title: "The exodus of Jews to Palestine ones...and today." The caricature has a minor sketch in its up left corner displaying the People of Israel following Moses, with rays of light on his head, in the desert. On the rest of the picture we can observe properly dressed bourgeois Jews, the racial features are mildly emphasized, headed by Herzl and Nordau themselves. Herzl, in addition to wearing a typical hat of 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonizers, is smoking a cigar; the smoke dispersing from the cigar alludes to the rays of light associated with the representation of the figure of Moses in the book of Exodus.<sup>70</sup>

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The editorial column of *Egyenlőség*, two weeks after the congress opened the issue with the question: "In what sense can we be Zionists?" The article restates the absolute loyalty

<sup>69</sup> Miksa Szabolcsi, "Álláspontunk a sionizmussal szemben – a baseli kongresszus alkalmából" [Out standpoint against Zionism – on the occasion of the congress in Basel], *Egyenlőség*, 05.09.1897, 2.

<sup>70</sup> "A zsidók kivándorlása Palesztinába hajdan – és most." [The Exodus of the Jews to Palestine ones – and today], *Borsszem Jankó*, 12.09.1897, 9.

of Hungarian Jews to Hungary; however there is a feature of the congress that is seen with sympathy. Adolf Silberstein praises the congress for aiming at enhancing the faith amongst Jews, and the meeting itself of Jews from all around the world. The recurring theme of Russian Jews occupies an important place also this time. Indeed, the author claims, that "the Russian Jew can be a Zionist. Because the finger of God shows, that the Jews has no homeland along the Newa and Moscow. For years the expulsions from Russia are going on...the destiny of four million homeless people is a European question."<sup>71</sup>

An additional piece in Borsszem Jankó presents the understanding that the Zionist project would in reality serve, mainly, to ease the plight of the Eastern Jewish masses. The piece is published as written by the figure of Solomon Seiffensteiner, the traditional Jewish figure owning a grocery store in Budapest's Jewish quarter. After having seen a wealthy lawyer from Hungary participating in the Basel Congress, Solomon Seiffensteiner recalls a joke about a storeowner who opened on the Sabbath. The rabbi scolded him publicly because of it. The upcoming Sunday the storeowner arrives to the rabbi to thank him for the public opprobrium; he even brings him a bottle of petroleum oil as a present. The rabbi asks him whether he will keep his store closed on the Sabbath, and the storeowner responds negatively. The rabbi inquires why than he shows so much gratitude? The storeowner responds, that the public opprobrium scared all the other storeowners, so that all the costumers come now to his shop on the Sabbath. Solomon Seiffensteiner claims,

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<sup>71</sup> Adolf Silberstein, "Mennyiben lehetünk mi sionisták" [In what sense can we be Zionists], *Egyenlőség*, 12.09.1897, 1-2.

that, in the same vain, the wealthy lawyer from Hungary would not like to emigrate, instead he would like to encourage his colleges to do so.<sup>72</sup>

I believe, that, indeed, the question of the Eastern Jews, turned the Zionist idea, to some extent, legitimate in the eyes of the mainstream Jewish public in Hungary. It might have been looked at with skepticism, to some extent, but the idea that it could remedy the predicament of the Eastern European masses was dealt with. Their understanding about Zionism, as we know, did not stand that far from those who participated in the first Zionist Congress in Basel.

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<sup>72</sup> “Tönödések” [Speculations], *Borsszem Jankó*, 03.10.1897, 6.

## The First World War and the Jewish refugee question

With the beginning of the Great War the golden age of the emancipation of Hungarian Jewry came close to its end. The legislative and official public atmosphere that, at least on the level of the intentions, ensured Jewish integration commenced to be undermined. The ‘Jewish-question’ became more and more significant in the public and the political discourse. In this changing atmosphere, the question of the Eastern Jewish refugees occupied a much more acute topic than in the pre-war years. Indeed, the antisemitic critique on Hungarian Jewry and on Jewish immigrants from Galicia concentrated on two central issues: the matter of the army supplies and the refugee question.

In fact, Lajos Szabolcsi, who assumed the editorship and the management of *Egyenlőség* after his father’s Miksa’s death in 1915, dedicated considerable space in the newspaper to furnish abundant statistical data to contradict the information provided by the antisemitic propaganda. He succeeded to claim that in terms of delinquency in the form of price-boosting and ambiguous affairs of military provisions, Hungarian Jewry seemed even less involved than its proportion in the society. On the contrary, he asserted, “Jewish trade and industry made wonders for the sake of the state during the war.”<sup>73</sup>

However, the main issue of the antisemitic discourse was the approval of the government of temporary residence for 25,000 Galician Jewish refugees. Later, with the approaching of the Rumanian front, additional Jewish refugees appeared in Budapest, this time, from the southern regions of Transylvania. Szabolcsi turned to Dezső Kosztolányi to write an article in *Egyenlőség* to defend this “miserable mass” of refugees. The article of

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<sup>73</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő, Az Egyenlőség évtizedei (1881-1931)*, [Two generations, The decades of *Egyenlőség*, (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), 13, 183-184.

Kosztolányi appears in *Egyenlőség* in August 1916. The idioms used by Kosztolányi are unequivocally borrowed from the discourse on the Eastern Jew. In the defense of these Jews, but unmistakably a stereotypical language is employed.

“One of our poets, who writes in Jargon language, says about the Jew, that he is a ‘millionaire of tears’... All of our property: some clothes, some prayer books. And a tumbledown umbrella... We are always dressed in black, also, when others put caparison on. The misery of the world did not found us unprepared. We should even not have to put mourning gowns on.”<sup>74</sup>

The caricaturists of Borsszem Jankó noticed the waves of immigration of traditional Jewish masses from the East, and did publish sketches about it, much earlier than the 1916 governmental granting of asylum. In January 1915 a drawing appeared about a barbershop in Dob street – one of the main streets of the Jewish quarter in Budapest till today. The drawing is a sequence of three pictures. On the first, a long line of traditionally dressed ‘Eastern’ Jews is discernible- with umbrellas, similarly to the above description of Dezső Kosztolányi. In the central piece, supposedly the same Jews are leaving the barbershop, dressed in a modern way. The last part of the sequence shows the barber himself cleaning up sidelocks inside the shop.<sup>75</sup> [3] A phenomenon that should have been treated with much caution in the case of *Egyenlőség*, could be represented in a rather mocking way in Borsszem Jankó.

An additional example of the publicists of Borsszem Jankó relating in a scornful way to Galician Jews is in its issue in February 1915. The illustration, called “The Roundabout”, shows the standard image of an ‘Ostjude’ crossing the border of Galicia and Hungary,

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 184-186; Dezső Kosztolányi, “Mi huszonötezen...” [We twenty-five thousand...], *Egyenlőség*, 26.08.1916, 1-2, quoted in Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő*, 184-186.

<sup>75</sup> “Egy Dob utcai borbélyműhelyben” [In a barbershop in Dob street], *Egyenlőség*, 10.01.1915, 5.

when in the background supposedly alien horseman are perceptible. Later, Jews are presented while working as peddlers or engaging in, supposedly, dubious business activities. The last act of the drawing is the expulsion of the Jews by a Hungarian gendarme back to Galicia.<sup>76</sup> [4] The question arises whether the caricature aims at presenting the desperate situation of Galician Jewry, or mocking their dishonest, or non-respectable, activities.

The harshest critics of the antisemitic discourse were directed at the Eastern Jewish populations in Hungary. Endre Ráth stated, “the military trains take the Hungarians to the war field, and instead of them ‘Kaftan-Jews’ arrive. According to the antisemitic accusations, the unemployment level amongst ‘Khazar’ Jews<sup>77</sup> was extremely high, and during the Russian offensive they professed a traitorous attitude. Szabolcsi in his reaction to these recriminations, provides further statistical data to disprove the antisemitic claims. Besides, he reiterates the common position of assimilationist Jewry on the issue of the ‘Khazar-legacy’, emphasizing, that according to this theory, these Khazar Jews would be the only racially pure descendents of the ancient Hungarian tribes.<sup>78</sup>

The most disturbing instance, during the war, for Szabolcsi, however, was a survey issued by the journal of the *Twentieth Century*. The survey was issued to 150 intellectuals, public figures and artists in May 1917 and sounded as follows. 1. Is there a ‘Jewish-question’ in Hungary, if yes, what is its essence? 2. What are the reasons of the ‘Jewish-question’ in Hungary? Which phenomena of the Hungarian society; which social relations, institutions, characteristics, customs of Jews in Hungary and of non-Jews play a

<sup>76</sup> “Körforgalom” [Roundabout], *Borsszem Jankó*, 15.02.1915, 10.

<sup>77</sup> The term ‘Khazar’ has two different connotations in the present context. First, the reference refers simply geographically to Jews residing in the North-Eastern counties, Karpatoruss, of Hungary. The second, which might be connected to the geographical direction, refers to the Khazar-Jewish legacy discussed previously.

<sup>78</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő*, 192-193.

part in the creation of the ‘Jewish-question’? 3. What do you consider the solution of the ‘Jewish-question’ in Hungary, which social or legislative reforms are necessary in your view?<sup>79</sup>

The immediate event, which prompted the editors of the journal to release the questionnaire was the volume *The Way of the Jews*, written by Péter Ágoston- of Jewish origins as well- published in the spring of 1917. The volume considered a mistaken attitude of the Jewish side as the reason for the unsuccessful assimilation project. The author spurred Hungarian Jews to strive for total assimilation and baptism, as the right path, to integrate into Hungarian society. The larger background around the publication of the survey was naturally the social discontentment with the ongoing of the Great War. The deteriorating atmosphere around the above mentioned corruption scandals of army supplies and the worsening economical conditions put the Jewish-question in the social spotlight again- after a long period when the national liberal governing elite considered Jewish assimilation one of its key elements in the framework of its liberal paradigm.<sup>80</sup>

Before I move on to the Szabolcsi’s opinion I would like to cite two representative examples of opinions considering the issue of the ‘Ostjude’ an essential component in the Jewish-question in Hungary. The two opinions or not from Jewish intellectuals, but exactly for this reason they might serve as indicators, as to what extent the Jewish stance in *Egyenlőség* differed from the attitude of the Hungarian society on the issue.

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<sup>79</sup> “A zsidókérdés Magyarországon, A *Husadik Század* körkérdése”, [The ‘Jewish-question’ in Hungary, The Survey of the Twentieth Century], in Hanák Péter, ed., *Zsidókérdés, asszimiláció, antiszemitizmus, Tanulmányok a zsidókérdésről a huszadik századi Magyarországon, [The Jewish-question, assimilation, antisemitism, Studies on the Jewish-question in twentieth century Hungary]*, (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 15.

<sup>80</sup> György Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet: Oscar Jászi, 1875-1957*, (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 115.

Dr. Marcell Benedek believed that there is such an issue as the Jewish-question in Hungary. He believed, though, that Jewish integration was at hand, its legal conditions were given, and he believed that in terms of the mixture of races it would only contribute to the Hungarian nation as well as for the Jews. Nevertheless, he was very critical about that “segment of Jewry, which increases by natural population growth and *also by immigration*, which is one hundred times more conservative than our (the Hungarians’) peasants, who will maybe even in another thousand years insist on his tradition and separateness, as today. Only a thin skimming of this segment will contribute to our culture-Jew in the third or fourth generation.”<sup>81</sup>

Dr. Jenő Cholnoky believed, that the Jewish-question would disappear in a generation if not for the Eastern Jews who were sharply different from the assimilated Hungarian Jews. This Eastern Jewry, “we have to coin definitely as ethnicity. This is the Jewry with strongly Eastern characteristics, orthodox, speaking a corrupted German jargon, who is called by custom vulgar Galician. This did not melt into the Hungarian nation, he considers stranger everyone who does not speak his jargon, does not wear his ugly kaftan and his tasteless side locks. This ethnicity calls itself regularly German in the occasion of a census, great part of it does not know Hungarian at all, and it had infested mainly the Northeastern parts of our homeland. This ethnicity partly because of its racial specificities, but principally because of its extremely antic religious customs it secludes itself from its Christian environment. The moral-doctrine of the Talmud keeps them aloof the Christian morals infused with the ideas of Humanism...”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Benedek Marcell, in “A zsidókérdés Magyarországon, A *Huszadik Század* körkérdése”, 44.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

Szabolcsi himself was utterly critical about the mere idea of such a survey; he even claimed in his reminiscences that the questions of the survey might have paved the way for the Jewish laws in the end of the 1930s, because of the mentioning between the possible suggestions of potential legislative steps in the framework of the ‘Jewish-question.’<sup>83</sup>

To conclude the discussion about the period of the Great War, I would like to cite a representative article of *Egyenlőség* from the beginning of 1917. The article, “The road of the Eastern Jewry” was written by the prominent publicist and politician Ernő Mezei (1851-1932). Though the intellectual circles around *Egyenlőség* made efforts not to present Hungarian Jewry divided, in the occasion of the presentation of Jews in Russia and Rumania they were not anymore restricted in their critics about Eastern Jewry. Mezei claims, that although Eastern Jewry “cannot be considered an altogether homogenous entity in terms of religion and culture”, it can be stated, “that their living environment is the *ghetto*.” Mezei contradicts the “Jewish nationalist current”, who argues that this ghetto attitude is a natural aspect of Jewish life, and he believes that legal and social emancipation should be the appropriate means to liberate Eastern Jews from their plight of enclosure. The author requests understanding from the countries in whose territory these masses dwell, and he argues that these Jews needs assistance to leave behind their conditions of mental and social predicament. The following quote should exemplify the vision Hungarian assimilationist Jewry possessed about the ‘Ostjude’.

“There is a need of good willing improvement and guide for these Jewish masses who situate themselves, right now, amongst altogether new conditions... We have to take it for granted, that these masses who reconciled themselves with sufferings and

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<sup>83</sup> Lajos Szabolcsi, *Két emberöltő*, 194-200.

persecutions, who were constrained to the feeling of alienage, who are similar to atrophied cultivation in cellars would themselves look around doubtfully and dazzled in the world of the free civil existence, like the man who just woke up from a long congelation, who is scrubbing his veiled eyes for long and is staggering and blinking into the sunlight.”<sup>84</sup>

Borsszem Jankó goes further in his account of Eastern Jewry. A caricature, which was published in 1915, intends to present Jewish businessmen who take part in army supply speculation. The piece bears the title: “Galician morals”. Three Jews, with clear racial and custom features, converse, and one is asked whether he is not ashamed that he speculates in pork fat (zsír in Hungarian). He responds, that God reads everything reversed, so zsír becomes rizs (rise), and that is kosher, right?<sup>85</sup> [5]

The attitude of the contributors of Borsszem Jankó is definitely malicious in this case, however the difference between the outlook of *Egyenlőség* and Borsszem Jankó might be not that far from each other. *Egyenlőség* as the official press organ of Neolog Jewry could not have permitted itself such a temper, as of a satirical journal, vis-à-vis Eastern European Jews not even if it’s stereotypical description of the Jewish masses of the East betrays a highly biased view of the ‘Ostjude’.

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<sup>84</sup> Ernő Mezei, “A keleti zsidóság új útja” [The new road of Eastern Jewry], *Egyenlőség*, 06.01.1917, 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Galíciai erkölcs” [Galician morals], *Borsszem Jankó*, 10.10.1915, 12.

## Conclusion

The internal divisions of Hungarian Jewry, whether we refer to the Neolog-Orthodox-Chasidic split or to the one between newcomers and those already nested, were very deep and could hardly be covered. However, the Neolog sections of Hungarian Jewry realized, that the judgment of the Hungarian society of the other sections of Hungarian Jewry influenced to a decisive extent the appreciation of their integrationist aspirations as well. Similarly to the German environment, the question of Eastern European Jewish immigration constituted a genuine threat, in the eyes of the gentile society and in the eyes of the Jews themselves. The contrast between *Egyenlőség* and *Borsszem Jankó* offers an outstanding opportunity to examine the self-representation of Jews in Hungary in different press organs, which assume basically different tasks in their own, and in the eyes of the Jewish and the gentile society as well. Even though "today's German Jews were frequently the East European Jews of yesterday"<sup>86</sup>, still the divisions were very much relevant, as we've seen in the analysis of Walter Pietsch, they could cause deeper than denominational divisions were they not silenced. We have to keep in mind, that *Egyenlőség* was more sensitive to the De Bois type of 'double-consciousness' than *Borsszem Jankó*, since from the very beginning it understood its own mission in terms of the official representative of Neolog Jewry in the Hungarian public arena. *Borsszem Jankó*, being a satirical newspaper, did not have a similar commitment, and it is well discernable on its pages. The important idea to remember is that the publics of readers was to a certain extent congruent. This fact might suggest, that things that were said in a certain way in one of the organs and were said in another way in the other organ could

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<sup>86</sup> Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, xxvii.

have been simply two different sides of the coin, and could be even thought by the same reader, and expressed differently in various circumstances.

There is a certain change observable, chronologically, as to what extent the theme of the ‘Ostjude’ is given stage. In the case of the Tiszaeszlár Affair the issue is hardly touched upon, if not in terms of the visual representation of the Jewish participants in Borsszem Jankó. The Jewry residing in Hungary is referred to as unified as possible in the face of the antisemitic propaganda. The attitude is similar around the discussions about the first Zionist Congress, but changes dramatically during the Great War. The Galician refugees might be a possible reason for that. Another possibility, based on the sociological data on the immigration waves to Hungary, is that the Tiszaeszlár blood- libel was still close to the significant waves of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas in the 1920s some of the integrated Jewry in Hungary indeed went through a significant acculturation and did not felt anymore such vicinity to the ‘Ostjude’ than a generation earlier.

As to what extent the representation of the Eastern Jews can be considered as the internalization of the gentile or the antisemitic discourse is hard to define. To answer this question one should be able to ascertain some sort of ‘objective’ patterns of behavior, linguistic features etc. of Jews immigrating to Hungary from Eastern Europe. I would claim that the caricaturists of Borsszem Jankó displayed the key features of this discourse more blatantly and, for sure, touched upon very sensitive issues, as the issue of the speculations around the army supplies with a slightly antisemitic tone. This could confirm the argument of Kati Vörös about the common elements in the visual discourse between the antisemites and the company around Ágai, on the other hand it could be perceived, according to the assertion of Mary Gluck, as the delegitimization of the

antisemitic argument by demonstrating its absurdity. Egyenlőség, according to its solemn and respectable image, was not partner to the antisemitic discourse. One have to realize though, that the discourse on the ‘Ostjude’ in Hungary, as in the German context, pertained, first and foremost, to the discourse of ‘respectability’, elaborated by George L. Mosse, in the framework of the bourgeois society, and therefore it was certainly more challenging to tackle for Egyenlőség, whose contributors firmly and explicitly strived to integrate into Hungarian bourgeoisie.



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