Benevolent Societies of Jewish Hungarian Immigrants in New York City (1880-1950): an Example of Social Integration

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Abstract

The study deals with social motivations of Jewish emigration from Hungary and immigration of Jewish groups to the United States, in particular to New York City. Emigration of Jewish groups from Hungary began in the 1870s and by1914 some 12% of Hungarian Jews had left, the vast majority settling in New York City. The article focuses on institutions of self-support, primarily with reference to the sick and benevolent societies and fraternal organizations of Hungarian Jews, analyzing the role of these organizations in achieving social integration and in the development of the threefold identity of Hungarian Jewish immigrants in an American urban environment during the first half of the 20th century.

Keywords: emigration, immigration, social integration, self-support, threefold identity

Nineteenth Century Jewish Emigration: Re-examining the "Golden Age for Jews"

By the beginning of the second decade of the last century an estimated 100,000 Hungarian Jews, approximately12% of the Jewish population of Hungary had left the country, the vast majority settling in the United States.[1] In spite of their overall high numbers as well as the significant proportion of Jews among Hungarian emigrants their story is one of the less studied aspects of either American or Hungarian history. Absence of serious research no doubt stems from the widely held view that the 19th century was a "Golden Age" for Jews in Hungary.[2] This view is based on the fact that Hungary, in contrast to its neighbors, was a tolerant country where the liberal political elite supported legal emancipation and social integration of Jewish groups. This tolerant attitude had both ideological and practical reasons.[3] From an ideological perspective, Jewish emancipation was an integral part of the

[1]R. Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds: Hungarian-Jewish Americans 1848-1914,* Amherst 1991, pp. 114-117., 245.; A. Kovács, *A zsidóság térfoglalása Magyarországon,* Budapest 1922, p. 15.

[2] Hungarian Jews have tended to idealize the 19th century, specifically the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1867-1918) as a Golden Age. From the perspective of the anti-Jewish legislation of the 1930s and the Holocaust, the 19th century does give the impression of having been a peaceful and pleasant period. The "Jewish Golden Age" is often used in commemorational writing about victims of the Holocaust. For a bibliography on this subject see: N. Katzburg, *Fejezetek az újkori zsidó történelemből Magyarországon,* Budapest 1999, pp. 201-225.

[3]A. Prepuk, "A zsidóemancipáció a reformkorban", *Történeti Tanulmányok,* vol. 3 (1994) pp. 15-35.

Hungarian understanding of liberalism, according to which all members of society are equally entitled to civil rights. As for practical reasons, in Hungary the bourgeois middle-class was very weak; therefore political leaders concerned about the modernization of the country hoped to harness the financial acumen, commercial experience and diligent attitudes of the Jews in order to provide for Hungary a middle class which could contribute to advancement of the country. Another aspect of acceptance of Jews as members of the Hungarian nation was the need to increase the number of Hungarians as a proportion of the population. In the 19th century Hungary was a multi-ethnic state, however, Hungarians did not constitute the majority of the population. Therefore, the Hungarian political elite sought to increase the ratio of Hungarians to other ethnic groups in part by encouraging the integration of Jews into the Hungarian nation. Thus, out of necessity, the Hungarian political elite supported the assimilation of the Jewish groups, the majority of whom responded by learning the Hungarian language, becoming loyal citizens of the Hungarian nation state and identifying with Hungarian culture. It was this positive attitude of the Hungarian political elite that led to the Jewish middle-class playing a key role in the development of modern industry, commerce and banking in Hungary. Hungarian Jews formed a significant portion of the petty bourgeoisie, participating in the country's urbanization and contributing greatly to modern culture and intellectual trends.[4]

However in contrast to this positive narrative, currently a more nuanced picture of this era has begun to emerge. In Hungary, with the end of the socialist regime, it became possible for historians to engage in free discussions of Jewish issues. During the socialist period, the subject had been taboo since according to official ideology under socialism all social problems, as well as ethnic and religious conflicts, including the so-called Jewish question had been resolved. However since the 1990s a period of intensive research began on the issue, and currently we know more about the process as well as the conflicts of the acculturation and integration of the Jewish people.[5] Hopefully, research into Jewish emigration from Hungary can add nuance to the somewhat simplistic narrative of a "Jewish Golden Age."

[4] L. Gonda, *A zsidóság Magyarországon 1526-1945,* Budapest 1997; M. Silber (ed.), *Jews in the Hungarian Economy 1760-1945,* Jerusalem 1992.
[5]On Hungarian anti-Semitism in the 1880s see micro-historical analysis: Gy. Kövér, *A tiszaeszlári dráma. Társadalomtörténeti látószögek,* Budapest 2011.

Jewish emigration from Europe to the United States is an integral part of the issue of American immigration.[6] In the 19th century the vast majority of European Jews lived in Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Germany; therefore the massive emigration of Jewish groups was part of the East Central and East European migration process starting in the last third of the 19th century.[7] Between 1860 and 1920 about 22 million people emigrated from the European continent and settled in the United States. Some 10% of this influx was made up of Central and East European Jews.[8] A modest number of Jews had begun to leave Europe after the failed revolutions of 1848 when expectations of emancipation were not fulfilled. [9] Emigration started in earnest in the 1880s with the rise of anti-Semitism. The Russian pogroms from the early 1880s triggered a mass exodus of Russian Jews; by 1914 about 2 million Jews, or 40% of the total Jewish population of Russia had left, the vast majority settling in the United States. .[10] Similar mass departures took place from Rumania,[11]

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[6] Regarding general stages, different regions of Europe joined the process of emigration at various times. The idea of emigration gained acceptance at first in Western Europe and then in Central and Eastern Europe with the spread of the industrial revolution. Great Britain and the North-Atlantic coast commenced the process from the 17th century, followed by Scandinavia and Germany from the second third of the 19th century. The main flow of emigration from East Central and East Europe started from the middle of the 19th century and reached its peak by the turn of the century lasting until World War I. M. Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration 1607-1860. History of the Continuing Settlement of the United States,* Cambridge, MA 1940.; P. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet, European Emigration to the U.S.A.*, London 1971, pp. 103., 178-179.; J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America,* Bloomington 1985.

[7]The Jewish population of Russia in 1900 stood at 5,198,401, or 4% of the total population. M. Stanislawski, "Russia", in G. Hundert (ed.), *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe,* New Haven-London 2008. vol. 2, p. 1611.; In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Galicia 811 371 (11,1%), in Hungary 830 000 (4,9%), in Bohemia 92 746 (1,45%), in Moravia 41 158 (1,57%), in Lower-Austria 157 278 (5,07%), in Bukovina 102 919 (12,9%). H. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry. National Conflict an Jewish Society in Bohemia 1870-1918,* New York-Oxford 1988, p. 13.; W. McCagg, *Zsidóság a Habsburg Birodalomban 1670–1918,* Budapest 1992, p. 132., 135.; A. Kovács, *A zsidóság térfoglalása ...*, p. 11.; R. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews. The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austia-Hungary,* London-Toronto 1982, pp. 178-179.; In Germany 586 833 (1,04%) Jews lived in 1900. P. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria,* New York-London-Sydney 1964, p. 9.

[8] A. Ruppin, *Sociologie der Juden,* Berlin 1930, Band 1, p. 138.

[9]L. Goldhammer, "Jewish Emigration from Austria-Hungary in 1848-49",*YIVO Annual,* vol. 9 (1954) pp. 332-362.

[10]A. Ruppin, *Sociologie der Juden...*, Band 1, pp. 135-143., 157.; S. Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881-1910.* New York 1914, p. 93.

[11]Kissman,Joseph, "The Immigration of Rumanian Jews up to 1914",*YIVO Annual,* vol. 2-3 (1947-1948) pp. 160-179.

and almost 300,000 people or 12% of the total Jewish population emigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.[12]

Regarding their motivations, the changing political climate in European societies contributed to increased Jewish emigration. The 19th century was a time of legal emancipation and social integration for European Jewry. In most countries Jews attained equal civil rights. The Jewish middle-class made major contributions to the development of modern industry, commerce and banking and also participated in modern intellectual and cultural trends. However the inclusive tendencies of liberal nationalism underwent a transformation by the last third of the century. To begin with, economic recessions starting in the early 1870s reinforced conservative and exclusionist aspects of nationalism in various European countries. A new form of anti-Semitism, so-called political anti-Semitism emerged in Central Europe and anti-Semitic political parties were founded in Germany, Austria and Hungary calling for limitations to Jewish emancipation and the presence of Jews in modern society.[13] Anti-Semitism was extremely strong in Russia and Rumania, the only two countries that did not grant Jews equal rights during the 19th century. In Russia, the pogroms, placing Jews in physical danger, became a principal reason for massive Jewish emigration at the turn of the century.[14]

Although researchers have at their disposal statistics of arrivals and departures at European and American ports as well as census figures of host and European countries, data collection was not coordinated with the result that we cannot ascertain the precise number of Jewish immigrants. Consulting US census data I faced serious methodological problems. This is because while US census data contained information on skin color and race, no questions were asked regarding religious affiliation. White immigrants were required to state their mother tongue for the first time in 1910. This information was of some help, however, while English and Celtic covered more than one group of peoples (the English, the Irish, the Scotch, and the Welsh), Yiddish was reported as the mother tongue of only some Jews, others being classified as speakers of Polish, Russian, German, Hungarian, etc. In particular, it is probable

[12] A. Ruppin, *Sociologie der Juden...,* Band 1, p. 157.
[13]P. Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria...,*; Gy. Kövér, *A tiszaeszlári dráma...,*; J. Kubinszky, *Politikai antiszemitizmus Magyarországon 1875-1890,* Budapest 1976.; R. Fischer, *Entwicklungstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1876-1939,* München 1988.
[14]M. Aronson, "Geographical and Socioeconomic Factors in the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia," *Russian Review,* vol. 39 (1980) January, pp. 18-31.

that a large portion of the persons reported in 1920 as Russian native speakers were in reality Jews.[15] The following table shows only the Yiddish speaking population according to their country of origin and does not show the whole Jewish population, estimated at about 3.2 million at that time.[16]

Foreign Yiddish Population in the USA, 1920
(Mother Tongue by Country of Origin)

Russia	1,591,116
Austria	276,609
Rumania	54,372
Hungary	32,734
Germany	13,470
Turkey	2,542
England	2,445
Total	**2,043,613**

Source: *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920,* Volume II: Population 1920, General Report and Analytical Tables, Washington 1922, p. 977.

Jewish Immigrants in New York City

From the very beginning New York City became the most important destination as Jews there had played a major role in the creation of the city's multi-ethnic society since the late 19th century. Therefore the topic is a favorite subject of American urban historians as well as scholars of Jewish Studies. An abundance of books and papers are available on American Jewish history, especially since the 1970s, when Jewish history became a legitimate social science topic in the United States. The works of Steven M. Cohen, Deborah Dash Moore, Lucy Dawidowicz, Nathan Glazer, Calvin Goldscheider among others analyze the multifaceted pattern of Jewish integration and the transformation of Jewish identity in America.[17] On the process of immigration the works of John Bodnar, on Jewish immigration

[15]*Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920,* Volume II: Population 1920, General Report and Analytical Tables, Washington 1922. p. 967., 974.
[16]A. Ruppin, *The Jews in the Modern World,* London 1934, p. 52.
[17] S. Cohen, *American Modernity and Jewish Identity,* New York-London 1983.; N. Glazer, and D. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot,* Cambridge, MA 1970.; C. Goldscheider, *The Transformation of the Jews.* Chicago 1984. D. Moore (ed.), *East European Jews in Two*

Samuel Joseph, David Berger, Thomas Kessner, Robert Perlman and Leo Goldhammer deserve mention.[18] With regard to New York, Hutchinson Hapgood analyzed how Russian Jewish immigrants recreated their social and cultural life in the city.[19]

In New York City the arrival of the first Jewish immigrants coincided with the transformation of the city into a metropolis [20] immediately following the Civil War when the city started to expand as a result of the political consolidation of the 1860s. By the turn of the century New York's development outpaced that of all its European and American counterparts; the city became national leader in industry, banking and finance. It was thanks to the growth of industry in New York that the city was able to absorb a continuous flow of internal migrants as well as immigrants, among others Irish, Italians, Russians and Jews.[21]

By the 1920s almost half of the Jewish population of the United States resided in New York City.[22] (See table below.) The number of Jews soared throughout the beginning of the 20th century, reaching 1.8 million by 1926. Yiddish-speaking Jews as well as others combined accounted for 45% of the total Jewish population of the United States and 29.8% of the city's population.[23] However the American immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 by limiting new immigration to 3 and 2% of the total population respectively, served as a benchmark for Jewish immigration as well.[24] Serious consequences of these limitations came to be felt starting in the 1930s, when beginning with the anti-Jewish laws in Central Europe and later

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Worlds: Studies from the YIVO Annual, Evanston 1989. D. Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews,* New York 1983.

[18]J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted...,* D. Berger, *The Legacy of Jewish Immigration: 1881 and its Impact,* New York 1983.; L. Goldhammer, "Jewish Emigration from Austria-Hungary in 1848-49", S. Joseph, *Jewish Immigration to the United States, from 1881 to 1910,* New York 1914. T. Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New YorkCity 1880-1915,* New York 1977.

[19] H. Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto,* Cambridge, MA 1967.

[20] T. Bender, *The Unfinished City: New York and the Metropolitan Idea,* New York 2002.; E. Lampart, "The New York Metropolis in Transformation: History and Prospect. A Study in Historical Particularity," in H. Evers (ed.), *The Future of the Metropolis,* Berlin-New York 1986, pp. 40-90.

[21]D. Hammack,*Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century,* New York 1987.

[22]*Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920,* Volume II: Population 1920, General Report and Analytical Tables, Washington 1922, p. 1009., 1011.

[23]A. Ruppin, *Sociologie der Juden...,* Band 1, pp. 116-117.

[24] J. Jenks, and W. Lauck, *TheImmigration Problem. A Study of American Immigration Conditions and Needs,* New York-London 1926, pp. 448-450.

during the Holocaust, these laws prevented European Jews from escaping persecution and annihilation.

Foreign Yiddish-Speaking Population
New York City, 1920

	Total number	Ratio of white population
New York City	**946,319**	**22%**
Brooklyn	391,267	25%
Manhattan	377,945	21%
Bronx	166,416	28%
Queens	10,142	3,2%
Richmond br.	1,369	1.8%

Source: *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920,* Volume II: Population 1920, General Report and Analytical Tables, Washington 1922, p. 1009., 1011.

The social and cultural integration of the immigrant Jewish groups was determined by the fact that New York became representative of ethnic diversity, national tolerance and modern, liberal, cosmopolitan culture. The city preserved these values even after World War I. Since the American Revolution New York had experienced more or less uninterrupted development, and after World War I it consolidated its position as the metropolis of a greatly enhanced international power. The city maintained a liberal commitment and the city's leaders became major voices of American internationalism. By the 1930s, political and cultural values of New York helped to counter the provincial backlash of the 1920s, and the city became the main voice of New Deal liberalism.[25]

[25]Between 1934 and 1945 Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York. He came from an immigrant family, his father was an Italian Catholic and his mother came from a Jewish family that had resided in Trieste. LaGuardia was elected thanks to the combined support of New York's Italian and the Jewish voters. On co-existence of the Irish, Italian and Jewish groups see: R. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict. The Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City 1929-1941,* Baltimore-London 1978; On change of political leadership among these groups see: D. Hammack, "Political Participation and Municipal Policy: New York City: 1870-1940," in T. Bender, and C. Schorske (eds.), *Budapest and New York: Studies in Metropolitan Transformation, 1870-1930,* New York 1994, pp. 55-80.

The atmosphere of the city became a defining factor in the Jewish process of Americanization, which was less transformative compared to European social and cultural integration.[26] In the European constitutional nation states the liberal elites demanded national integration of the Jewish groups, encouraging their linguistic and cultural assimilation, and the modernization of religious traditions. As a result, the urban Jewish middle-classes stopped speaking Yiddish, abandoned many traditional customs and became representatives of modernity and national identity. By way of contrast New York maintained ethnic diversity and tolerance, making it possible for immigrants to preserve their traditional religious traits. The city allowed Jewish groups to maintain their diverse religious and ethnic identities as well. After 1890 German Jews came to be rapidly outnumbered by the East European Jews, who were Yiddish-speaking, generally poorer and less assimilated. Although the second generation modified its religious and ethnic heritage, the permanent flow of new immigrants was a source of strength for traditional Judaism. However the various generations met different challenges. The first generation of American Jews created largely segregated communities and because of their limited economic skills and resources banded together in immigrant residential enclaves. The second generation could take advantage of increasing opportunities to adapt to American social and political life, and steadily became a part of the city's bourgeois middle-class life. They modified their religious and ethnic heritage, established community centers, philanthropic and social welfare services, as well as several fraternal organizations. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Americanized synagogues had new functions; not only did they maintain worship services, but they also sponsored adult education classes, junior congregations, Hebrew schools and hosted major family celebrations.

Different challenges and patterns of social integration were reflected in the spatial division of the Jewish population.[27] New York was marked by patterns of geographical segregation by class and ethnicity. There were multiclass ethnic settlements such as the Lower East Side in the vicinity of East Broadway, where the Jewish elite lived a middle-class life in

[26]S. Cohen, *American Modernity ...*; D. Moore, *At Home in America...*; N. Glazer, and D. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Cambridge, MA 1970.
[27] D. Moore, "Class and Ethnicity in the Creation of New York City Neighbourhoods: 1900-1930", in T. Bender, and C. Schorske (eds.), *Budapest and New York...*,pp. 139-160.; G. Gurock, *When Harlem Was Jewish: 1870-1930*, New York 1979.

a sea of impoverished immigrant Jews. By the 1920s, however, the residential patterns of Jews showed signs of convergence. Williamsburg in Brooklyn and the Lower East Side continued to host new immigrants and poorer Eastern European Jews, while the majority of the Jewish upper middle-class lived in the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, in the Upper East Side and around Park and Fifth Avenues.

Regarding political affiliation in New York, ethnicity rather than class or ideology shaped the political identity of voting groups, ethnic political identity and competition being a positive measure of democratic politics. American democracy afforded opportunities for the Jews to define themselves as an ethnic and religious group. Like the Irish, Jews too played an important role in New York City's politics; the Jewish voters traditionally tended to support politically liberal policies.[28]

Hungarian Jewish Emigration to the United States

The above-mentioned changes can be observed among Hungarian-Jewish immigrants as well. However compared to the experiences of other Jewish immigrant groups, those of Hungarian Jews has received relatively less attention from historians of immigration either in the United States or in Hungary. To be exact, Hungarian Jewish immigration has been dealt with by just one historian, Robert Perlman.[29] Jewish emigration from Hungary began after the revolution of 1848 as a consequence of the disillusionment following that year's failed revolution which had been expected to result in equal rights for Jews. Although there was no mass exodus of Jews from Hungary in contrast to Russia and Rumania, among the Hungarian emigrants the numbers began to increase from the 1870s. According to Perlman's estimation 10% to 12% of the Jewish population of Hungary, about 100,000 people emigrated between 1880 and 1910, and about 98% of them settled in the United States.[30] Similar data were obtained by the Hungarian statistician, Alajos Kovács, according to whom 103,000 Hungarian Jews left the country between 1870 and 1910.[31]

In economic and social motivations Jewish emigration cannot be separated from general trends of non-Jewish emigration that had started in the early 1870s peaking after the

[28]R. Bayor, *Neighbors in Conflict...*
[29] R. Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds...*
[30] Ibid. pp. 114-117., 245.
[31] A. Kovács, *A zsidóság térfoglalása ...*, p. 15.

turn of the century.[32] According to Julianna Puskás's account, between 1870 and 1914 about 1,815,000 immigrants arrived in the USA from Hungary, however as a significant ratio subsequently chose to return home, the final number came to between 1.2 and 1.3 million, or between 6% and 7% of the total population.[33] Comparing Jewish and non-Jewish migration, it would appear that Jews participated more actively in emigration, their ratio reaching between 10% and 12% of the total Jewish population, a considerably higher percentage than that of non-Jews. Jewish emigrants accounted for about 10% of non-Jewish emigrants although the proportion of Jews in the entire population was around 5%.[34]

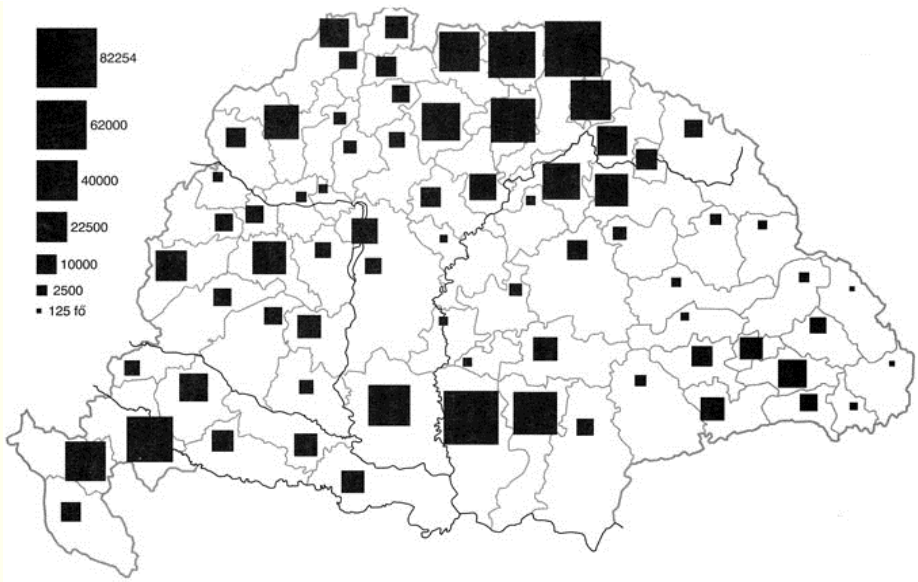
Comparison of total and Jewish emigrants, 1870-1914

	Total population	Émigrés	%
Hungary	13.7 – 18.2 million	1.2 million	6−7%
Jews	542,000−909,500 (4−5% of total population)	100,000−113,000 (9−10% of total émigrés)	10−12%

Not surprisingly, the majority of non-Jewish Hungarian emigrants came from the most economically backward areas: These included the eight northern and north-eastern counties (Sáros, Szepes, Zemplén, Abaúj, Bereg, Borsod, Gömör-Kishont, Ung counties), in Transdaubia, Veszprém county, in Transylvania, Nagy-Küküllő county, in the south, Torontál county, in the east, Szabolcs-Szatmár county; and in Croatia, Fiume and Zagreb counties. [35] The above counties were homes to the Slovak and Ruthene minorities in the north, and Serbs, Croats and Germans in the south. The first emigrants were artisans, shopkeepers and miners, while after the turn of the century agricultural day laborers comprised the majority, as they could find no jobs either in Hungarian large-scale industry or on the large agricultural estates.[36]

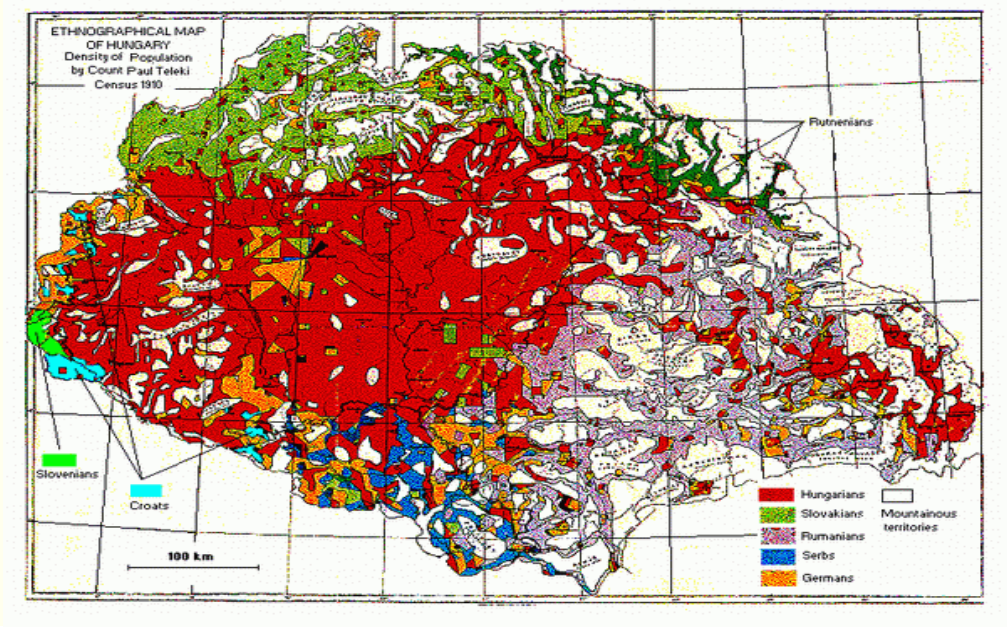
[32]J. Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban 1880-1940,* Budapest 1982.; B. Várdy, *Magyarok az Újvilágban. Az észak-amerikai magyarság rendhagyó története,* Budapest 2000.
[33] J. Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok...*, pp. 61-70.
[34]A. Kovács, *A zsidóság térfoglalása ...*, p. 11.
[35]J. Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok..*, pp. 98-105.
[36] On social and economic background of the emigration see: Ibid. pp. 76-81., 87-95.

Regional Distribution of Emigration from Hungary to the USA,1899-1913



Source: S. Frisnyák, *Magyarország történeti földrajza*, Budapest 1990, p. 111.

Ethnographic Map of Hungary, 1910



Regarding the national identity of emigrants, members of the non-Hungarian minorities comprised the majority, while less than one third of those choosing to leave the

country were ethnic Hungarians (26.3%). Two-thirds were comprised of Slovaks (26.8%), Croats and Slovenes (16.6%), Germans (15%), Rumanians (6.9%), Serbs (2.4%), Ruthenes (2.1%) and others (1.2%).[37]The above data, based on mother tongue, also included themajority of the Jewish emigrants, who were distributed among the Hungarian and German speakers. Jews identified as Jewish by nationality because of their use of either Yiddish or Hebrew as their mother tongue, constituted about 3.7% of the total number of emigrants.[38]

The social and geographic background of the Hungarian Jewish emigrants was similar to those of the non-Jews. By the late 19th century the northern part of the country had the highest ratio of Jews per population. Jews living in this area originally came from Galicia in the late 18th century.[39] They were mainly orthodox, lower middle-class, small-scale wholesalers, shopkeepers and artisans. They adhered to traditional customs and did not seek to be integrated into the majority local society. This area accounted for the largest number of Jewish emigrants. Around the turn of the century 53.3% of Jewish emigrants came from rural areas and north-eastern Hungary, while only 12.5% originated from Budapest or other large towns.[40] They were essentially a working-class and lower-middle class group. In other words, Jews who chose to leave Hungary at this time were largely poor, rural and traditional, i.e. not integrated into Hungarian society.

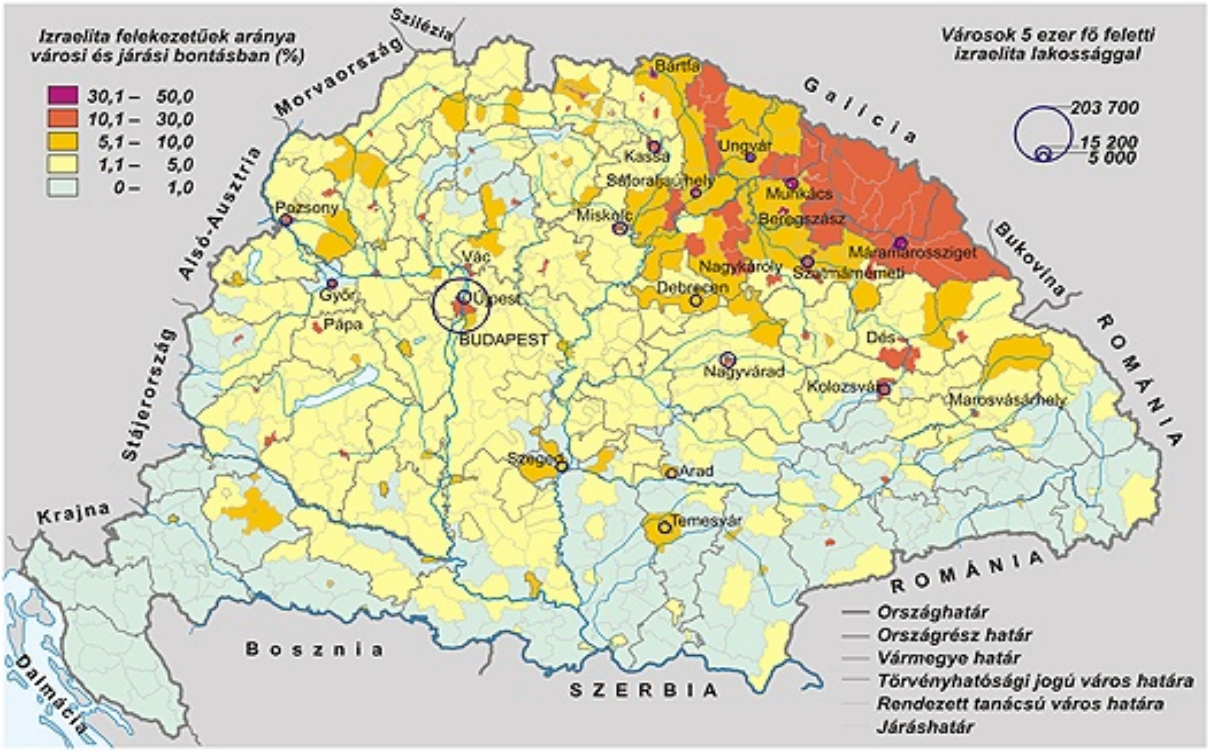
[37]J. Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok..*, pp. 71-75.

[38] The Jewish emigrants claiming Yiddish as their mother tongue could be found only among the records in host country ports. In Hungary Jews were identified as a religious group, and not as a nationality. This was because Hungarian Jews were expected to consider themselves to be Hungarian. Therefore the Hungarian censuses did not list Yiddish or Hebrew as mother tongues, and as a result Yiddish-speakers were generally lumped together with those who spoke German.

[39] Galicia was an eastern province of the Habsburg Monarchy, becoming a part of the empire after the partitions of Poland (1772, 1795). A very large Jewish community lived in Galicia, one part of which settled in the northeastern part of Hungary in the late 18th century, constituting the core of traditional Judaism in Hungary. C. Abramsky, M. Jachimczyk, and A. Polonsky (eds.), *The Jews in Poland*, Oxford 1988; W. Pietsch, "A zsidók bevándorlása Galíciából és a magyarországi zsidóság," in W. Pietsch, *Reform és ortodoxia. A magyar zsidóság belépése a modern világba*, Budapest 1999, pp. 18–35., 133–136.

[40] R. Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds*.., pp. 114-117., 245.

Geographic Distribution of the Jewish Population of Hungary, 1900



While there were many similarities between Jewish and non-Jewish emigrants the main difference was in the number of returnees. While a significant number of non-Jewish Hungarians went to America intending to return home after having made some money, the vast majority of Jews settled and remained in the United States. Statistics for the years from 1907 to 1910 indicate that 33% of Christian emigrants returned to Hungary, compared to 9% of Jews.[41]

For both Jews and non-Jews large scale migration came to an end after World War I. During the1920s only about 28,000 immigrants were permitted to enter the United States as the strict quotas set by the Johnson and Johnson-Reed Immigration Acts in 1921 and 1924 began to take effect.[42] However Jews came to comprise a significant segment among this greatly diminished number of emigrants. The new group of migrants came from a different generation and much higher social strata; they were for the most part intellectuals, members of upper middle-class groups, and liberal and left wing politicians who left the country after World War I, and later during the consolidation of the conservative Horthy-regime, which would make anti-Semitism as an integral element of official ideology.[43] During the

[41] A. Kovács, *A zsidóság térfoglalása...*, p. 15.
[42] J. Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok...*, p.169.
[43] T.Frank,*Kettős kivándorlás. Budapest-Berlin-New York 1919-1945*, Budapest 2012.

Depression of 1929−1933 international migration shrank so that in the 1930s no more than 6,000 people could emigrate from Hungary to the United States.[44]

Hungarian Jews in New York City

By the turn of the century New York became the main destination of Hungarian-Jewish immigrants. According to 1900 estimates 70% of 31,516 Hungarian-born immigrants were Jewish, 20% were Catholic and 10% Protestant. By1910 the number of Jews had increased to 53,000.[45] The Hungarian Jews followed residential pattern of other immigrant communities, setting up their colony in the ethnically mixed Lower East Side.[46] In several decades the population had begun to shift to other parts of the city, leapfrogging up the east side of the island to Yorkville around 80th Street. After the turn of the century a third center developed in Upper Manhattan, while the majority of the Orthodox community settled in Brooklyn.

Like other immigrant groups the Hungarian Jews faced the complex social and cultural influence of the new environment. For the first generation Hungarian culture and language proved to be a convenient means by which to maintain distance from German, Russian and Polish Jews. In the first generation mixed marriages with German, Russian or Polish Jews were rare. From the very beginning the Hungarian Jews established their community centers, philanthropic and social welfare services, and fraternal organizations in such a way as to preserve their culture. In the absence of state health-care and social insurance systems, this type of organizations played very important roles in all immigrant communities. All national groups established societies to provide financial support for members when they became ill or suffered from an accident and in case of death they cared for widows and orphans and took care of funeral costs.[47] With regard to immigrant groups in general, establishment of charitable societies predated the founding of churches. By 1910 Hungarian immigrant groups maintained about 800 societies in the United States. Some 78 Hungarian associations existed in New York City alone.[48]

[44]J. Puskás, *Kivándorló magyarok..,* p. 170.
[45]I. Rosenwaike, *Population History of New York City,* Syracuse 1972, p. 123.
[46] R. Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds...,* pp. 145-148., 249.
[47] On the Hungarian, Rumanian, Slovak, Polish, Czech, Italian and Jewish societies see J. Bodnar, *The Transplanted...*,pp. 120-130.
[48]On societies of American-Hungarians see: G. Kende, *Magyarok Amerikában. Az amerikai magyarság története,* Cleveland 1927, vol. 2, pp. 260-358.; J. Puskás, *Kivándorló*

The Jewish, as well as the Hungarian-Jewish immigrants were pioneers in the setting up of such self-supporting organizations.[49] Their activities in this field were rooted in Jewish religious and cultural traditions that encouraged support for the needy. As a result, Jewish immigrant groups were able to rely on past experience and to replicate in America charitable institutions with which they were familiar in their homelands. During my research I was able to identify about thirty associations set up by Hungarian Jews in New York City that continued to function until the middle of the 20th century.[50] I classified these organizations into three different types according to their functions. The largest group consisted of sick and benevolent societies and literary societies. Another group of associations represented Jews of a single geographical region; these tended to be founded by orthodox Jews. The third type was made up of Masonic lodges, and these became affiliated with American Masonic lodges. Umbrella associations coordinated the work of the different societies.

Hungarian-Jewish Associations in New York

- Sick and Benevolent Associations: First Hungarian Literary Society (1889), Kossuth Ferenc Literary Sick and Benevolent Association (1904), Jókai Mór Betegsegélyező Egylet, Hebrew-Hungarian Aid Society of Coney Island, Hadassa Bronx Hungarian Branch, Bronx County Hungarian Democratic Club, Rising Star Sick and Benevolent Society, Berta Weiss Society, Rotschild Society, Young Petőfi Ladies Society, American Jewish Refugee Aid Society, Central Hungarian Society

- Orthodox Associations: Szatmar and Vicinity Society, American Ugocsai Young Men's Aid Society, Federation of Maramaros Jews of America

- Masonic Lodges: Pannonia Lodge, Kiss József Lodge, Independent Jókai Lodge, First Hungarian Independent Lodge, Manhattan Lodge, Joseph Schwartzkopf Odd Fellow Lodge, Theodor Herzl Lodge, Transylvania Lodge

- Umbrella associations: Association of Hungarian Jews of America, The United Hungarian Jews of America, Ladies Auxiliary of United Hungarian Jews of America

Source:*Egyleti Élet.A New York-i Magyar Egyletek Hivatalos Közlönye,*1944. január 29. p 1.; 1944. február 5. p. 1.; 1944. május 27. p. 7.

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magyarok....,pp. 120-127., 161-178., 223-249.; B.Vassady,"Hungarian-American Mutual Aid Associations and and their 'Offical' Newspapers: A Symbiotic Relationship," *Hungarian Studies Review,* vol. 19, no. 1-2 (1992) pp. 7-27.

[49]In 1900 Perlman found 28 Hungarian-Jewish societies in New York. R. Perlman, *Bridging Three Worlds...,* pp.250-252.

[50]*Egyleti Élet. A New York-i Magyar Egyletek Hivatalos Közlönye*, 1944. január 29. p. 1.; 1944. február 5. p. 1.; 1944. május 27. p. 7.

A common feature of the associations was the maintenance of double or even triple identities. The societies defined themselves as Hungarian as well as Jewish, however in some cases only lists of members' names or other information referring to religious and cultural customs (for example the celebration of a Jewish holiday) identified the organization as Jewish. In most cases the Hungarian identity was dominant, made apparent by the society's Hungarian name. Some chose the name of a Hungarian political leader (Ferenc Kossuth), or famous literary figures (Mór Jókai, Sándor Petőfi, József Kiss) or a geographical region (Pannonia, Transylvania, Szatmár, Ugocsa, Máramaros). The language of the resource materials was mainly Hungarian until the 1930s, becoming English by the 1950s with the maturing of a new generation.

From 1923 the Jewish societies published their own weekly newspaper, the *Egyleti Élet*, through which they could maintain a network of social connections by purchasing an ad or column informing their own members as well as other societies about their programs and activities. Another important Hungarian newspaper was *The Humanity*, the main organ of liberal and left-wing Jewish intellectuals in New York, edited by Ferenc Göndör. In addition yearbooks and summaries published on anniversaries helped to access the topic. In the following paragraphs I will describe through the activities of two sick and benevolent societies how these Hungarian Jews tried to preserve their cultural and social heritage in the American urban environment.

First Hungarian Literary Society

One of the first associations, the *First Hungarian Literary Society* was established in 1889.[51] The founders were probably ordinary individuals seeking an institutional framework by which to preserve their cultural identity. One of these was an individual named Jozsef Cukor, whose son, Mor Cukor would later become prominent in New York in the leadership of the Democratic Party. The society started its activities in Lower Manhattan, moving after several decades to Yorkville in keeping with the departure of the majority of Hungarian Jews from the Lower East Side to upper parts of Manhattan. Until the late 1930s the *Literary Society* had

[51] F. Göndör, *Ötven esztendő az amerikai magyar élet szolgálatában,* New York 1939, YIVO Archives, New York, RG 906, Addendum Box I; Z. Neumarkt,*Summary History of Our 75 Years, 1889-1964*, New York1964, Ibid.; K. Schildkraut,*Sixty Years of Progress, 1889-1949*, New York 1949, Ibid.

almost 300 active members. Official language and by-laws were in Hungarian for several decades changing to English by the end of the 1930s.

I have no accurate data on the social background of the members, however according to the membership list the vast majority used Jewish family names.[52] As Magyarization of family names was general in Hungary by the late 19th century,[53] presumably many of them reverted to Jewish names, indicating that they felt they could maintain their Jewish identity more easily in the new, American social environment. The society became influential among Hungarians in New York. The names Ferenc Göndör, editor of the liberal Hungarian newspaper, *The Humanity*, as well as Géza Berkó who was editor-in-chief of *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* (the American Hungarian People's Voice), and Charles Brown, editor of the weekly newspaper of the Jewish societies could be found among the society's list of leading members.

The *First Hungarian Literary Society* was both a charitable and a literary organization. The members established the first Hungarian library in the United States, and published poems of the Hungarian national poet, Sándor Petőfi translated by Willam Loew. The members read Hungarian authors, and performed their plays. The society contributed to the foundation of a kind of cult of the national liberal political leader, Lajos Kossuth who went into exile after the failed revolution of 1848. Kossuth made a tour in the United States in 1851, and became a symbol of Hungarian freedom and independence among Hungarian immigrants. The society participated in all national events such as the annual commemoration of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848; it also lent its support to attempts to preserve the liberal traditions of the Hungarian policy after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. During the White Terror in the aftermath of World War I, in response to news describing the persecution and killing of Jews, the organization sent telegrams of protest to both the Hungarian government and Regent Miklos Horthy and set up a relief committee to aid victims of the terror.

[52] Membership. RG 906, Box I

[53]K. Karády, and I. Kozma, *Név és nemzet: családnév-választás, névpolitika és nemzetiségi erőviszonyok Magyarországon a feudalizmustól a kommunizmusig*, Budapest 2002, pp. 49-114.

It was the women who played a leading role in the society's charity works, organizing regular cultural evenings, Christmas parties, and traditional New Year's Eve Peasant Balls.[54] The society contributed to such charity campaigns as the March of Dimes to help children crippled by polio, supported the Denver Tuberculosis Hospital, the United Jewish Appeal, the Federation of Jewish Philanthropic Societies, and sent considerable sums to needy Hungarian children.

This philanthropic work became stronger during and after World War II. The society supported displaced persons seeking refuge in the State of Israel, and took part in the Food for Israel campaign in 1948. During the 1956 Hungarian Revolution the association sent funds to the American Red Cross and provided financial help to both Hungarian and Hungarian-Jewish refugees.

Kossuth Society

Another association, the *Kossuth Ferenc Hungarian Literary Sick and Benevolent Society* was established in 1904, and its activities can be traced until the 1930s.[55] The founders were admirers of Lajos Kossuth. They therefore requested permission to use the Kossuth name from his son, Ferenc Kossuth, a leading politician of the liberal opposition in Hungary. The society started its activity in Lower Manhattan, moving later to Yorkville. The membership developed very quickly and exceeded 500 persons by 1912. However, the introduction of immigration quotas in the early 1920s put an end to further membership growth. The association established separate sections for its various activities: literary, charitable and sports. The group's literary activities included setting up a library and reading room, while charity work included support for the poor, orphans, widows, and providing help for new immigrants. The charity aspect of their work increased during World War I.

The society participated in all Hungarian national events, such as the annual commemoration of the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution on March 15. In 1914 it

[54]On role of the women in immigrant communities see: A.Yamamoto, "Reorganization of Gender Relations among East European Immigrants in the United States: Realities and Representations," *Nanzan Review of American Studies,* vol. 30 (2008) pp. 121-130.

[55]*Silver Jubilee 1904-1930. 25th Anniversary Kossuth Ferenc Hungarian Literary Sick and Benevolent Association,* 1930, YIVO Archives, RG 960, Box I; E. Wisztreich, Egy negyedszázad, in Ibid., pp. 37-60.

participated in sponsoring the liberal politician, Mihály Károlyi's tour of America to gain support for the next democratic Hungarian election. During World War I the members expressed their loyalty to the United States, purchasing Liberty Bonds. Many members served in the military. After the war and under the Hungarian conservative Horthy regime the association supported the liberal Hungarian national traditions; it joined the Anti-Horthy League founded by liberal and left-wing groups among Hungarian Americans, which became one of the first anti-fascist organizations in the world.

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Summarizing some common features of the Hungarian-Jewish societies, first of all their similar social background needs to be emphasized. They represented middle-class groups, including both lower and upper middle-classes together. Beside their work in support of their members, they helped the needy regardless of race, religion, or membership in the organization. Also the social connections of the Jewish societies seem to have been relatively open. They had extensive relationships with non-Jewish Hungarian societies as well as with Jewish associations. All Jewish societies sought to maintain a Hungarian national and cultural identity, establishing libraries, organizing cultural evenings and appreciating Hungarian literature, music, and other forms of culture. Regarding their political affiliation they represented liberal and left-wing traditions, which became stronger after World War I. For the Hungarian societies the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy became a turning point. With the emergence of the conservative Horthy regime, and the concomitant shift to the right in Hungarian politics, the distance increased between the Jewish and right-wing Hungarian societies in America. The Jews severed their connections with the non-Jewish societies and began to reach out to Jewish associations. Their former aloofness to German and Russian Jews disappeared in a short time. In several decades Hungarian Jews came to be integrated into the American Jewish population, and paradoxically, because of their social and cultural isolation, it was the Hungarian orthodox and Hassidic Jews who continued to use the Hungarian language and maintain a Hungarian cultural identity.

The successful integration of the Hungarian Jews cannot be separated from a defining aspect of American Jewish integration. Although in American censuses Jews were categorized as white, in a social and cultural sense they were regarded as colored until the middle of the 20th century. It took a long time for the Jews to become "whitened." Their

integration into white society was realized partly thanks to their cultural achievements, which took on forms very different from patterns in Europe. While in Europe the educated Jewish middle-class played a very important role in high culture, in the United States their contribution to popular culture proved to be far more significant. It was reflected in the jazz culture of New York at the beginning of the 20th century, but perhaps the best example is the Jewish contribution to the history of Hollywood, where Hungarian-Jewish film directors and actors figured prominently.[56]

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[56] T. Merwin, *In their Own Image. New York Jews in Jazz Age Popular Culture*, New Brunswick 2006.; M. Rogin, *Black Face, White Noise. Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1996.; R. Snyder, "Immigrants Ethnicity, and Mass Culture: The Vaudeville Stage in New York City: 1880-1930," in T. Bender, and C. Schorske (eds.), *Budapest and New York...*, pp.185-208.

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