

# **The Reception of Early Zionist Movement in Budapest (1897-1914)**

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Submitted to  
Central European University  
History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2012

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## **Abstract**

The topic of this thesis is the reception of the early Zionist movement in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Based on the articles of contemporary Jewish newspapers the debate between Neolog, Orthodox Jews and Zionists is presented between the time of the First Zionist Congress (1897) and the outbreak of the First World War (1914). The aim of the research was to analyze the attitude of the emancipated Jewish community of Budapest towards Zionism and the responses given to that by the Zionists.

The two major denominations of Judaism rejected the Zionist movement in their official organs. The Neologs referred to their loyalty to the Hungarian state, while the Orthodox Jews did not support it due to its secular nature and to religious reasons. The debate evolving around Zionism exposes some of the characteristic features of assimilation, emancipation, integration and nationalism in Hungary.

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# **The Reception of Early Zionist Movement in Budapest (1897-1914)**

*“Wenn ihr wollt, ist es kein Traum.”*

/Theodor Herzl: Altneuland/

## **Introduction**

Herzl's quote summarizes the struggle Hungarian Zionists had to face when they aimed to establish the Zionist movement in Hungary: at first only some idealists took up Herzl's ideas and slowly, with persistent work, were they able to achieve the first successes – congresses, state acknowledgement and more and more followers. This thesis aims to depict the first phase of this fight, which provided the basis for the later, successful Zionist movement in a darker period of the history of the Jews of Hungary.

At the time of the dualist Monarchy, Jewish minority lived in a relatively good situation: in 1867 all previous restrictions placed upon them were abolished and they received civil rights. Judaism as a religion was officially received in 1895. By that time assimilationist aspirations were quite widespread and accepted among the majority of the Jews of Hungary. Many supported the reformation of Jewish religion and customs and the giving of sermons in Hungarian language, which was considered outrageous in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many of the Jews interiorized Hungarian nationalism and adopted a double identity: they thought of themselves as “Hungarians of the Mosaic faith.” Another major group of Hungarian Jewry adhered to the previous state of their religion and to the centuries-old customs. The Orthodox branch seceded from the Neologs during the 1868 congress of Jewish religious leaders. They regarded the reformist ideas as unacceptable,

although most of them adopted Hungarian nationalism as a medium of new identity. Apart from Neologs and Orthodox Jews other, smaller Jewish groups existed in Hungary: the Status Quo community, which aimed to maintain the balance of the two major trends mentioned above, Hasidim, and strictly observant conservative Jews, most of whom lived in the North Eastern territories of Hungary.

This colorful palette shows how religion and identity intertwined. However, with the rising nationalism and its consequences the picture became even more complex. It is essential here to mention that modern type racial anti-Semitism appeared in Hungary as a side-effect of nationalism in the years right after Jewish emancipation. Nevertheless, political liberalism was strong enough to cope with the threatening shadow of anti-Semitism, and by the turn of the century it was more or less pushed out from public life.

All in all, until the First World War, the Jews of Hungary – apart from some minor issues – lived in relatively safe and solid circumstances. They were allowed to practice religion freely, they were members of the community of the Hungarian nation and assimilation seemed to be successful: they were admitted to higher education, could take part in economic and intellectual spheres and took part in the capitalist modernization of the country.

Zionism came suddenly into this picture at the end of the century. Obviously it was rejected by most of the Jewish communities in Hungary. The reasons behind this rejection lead to a special characteristic of Jewry, namely that they were living in Diaspora, without any territorial commitments. There was no such place where they made up majority; therefore they did not have an own community to which they belonged, which could have made up a basis for their own national aspirations. This was the main cause also for embracing the host nation's nationalism and the reason why they did everything they could to avoid even the suspicion that they had anything to do with Zionism. Depending on the

state of Hungary and being loyal and grateful to it, the Jews of Hungary could not allow themselves the liberty of supporting an “alien” type of nationalism, which would alienate them from their host nation. And in this case even the Hungarian origins of Theodor Herzl did not count at all.

Despite the cold reception of Zionism by the majority of the Jews of Hungary, there was a handful of Jews who, for some reasons, embraced this cause. Some of them did it because they were worried about the pogroms and anti-Jewish legislations in Russia and Romania, and they thought that settling the persecuted Jews of these countries could solve their problem. Others chose Zionism because they wanted to demonstrate that they were proud of their Jewishness. However, only five years after the First Zionist Congress (Basel, 1897) was the first Zionist Association organized in Hungary (Pozsony, 1902).

It was typical of Hungarian Zionism that the two main centers (Pozsony and Balázsfalva) were located in multinational areas (the first one in Northern Hungary, the latter one in Transylvania), where assimilated Jews had to face the wakening nationalisms of other minorities and their opposition to Magyarization. As Jews were considered members of the Hungarian nation, they fell into the same category as their host nation and were often held to be the propagators of Hungarian nationalism. Zionist Jews, however, followed their own path and in some cases tried to distance themselves from the Hungarian nationalistic cause. The “official” language of Hungarian Zionism became German, as an opposition to the Magyarizing efforts. After the first failures of Zionism in Hungary, the two centers became strong enough to conquer the capital and the Hungarian Zionist Association (founded in Pozsony in 1903) relocated its seat in Budapest in 1906.

Several scholars were engaged with the topics of the status of Hungarian Jewry at the end of the century, assimilation, emancipation, Zionism and their relations. Case studies concerning the integration of the Jews into Hungarian society and its problems were written

by Jacob Katz, who emphasized the alteration of Jewish identity and the effects of Hungarian nationalism on the Jews. The socio-historical status of the Jews of Hungary was analyzed exhaustively by András Kovács and Viktor Karády.

Some recent essays and monographs deal with the topic of Hungarian Zionism. The most notable among them is Peter Haber's book, *Die Anfänge des Zionismus in Ungarn (1897-1904)* (2001) which recounts the history of the first efforts to establish Zionism in the country. Haber wrote about the period which falls between the First Zionist Congress and the death of Herzl (1897-1904). The major part of his book is about the struggle of the representatives of the movement to find followers, while in a shorter chapter he introduces the opposition to Zionism, by describing the vicissitudes of *Egyenlőség* [Equality], the most important Neolog journal. The narrative is embedded into a social and historical framework, which gives a broader perspective and provides an insight into the circumstances of the Jews of Hungary at the turn of the century.

Another remarkable book is Alexander Emed's *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom története (1902-1948)* (2002) [The history of the Zionist movement of Hungary (1902-1948)] which, in a rather lexical style enumerates all the important events and personalities in the movement's history in Hungary. This work does not consider opposition or historical context: it focuses only on the Zionist movement and its achievements.

In my thesis I intend to analyze the reception of Zionism in the years between the First Zionist Congress (1897) and the outbreak of the First World War (1914). I will write about the reception of Zionism only in Budapest, because taking the whole country into consideration would exceed the limits of an MA thesis. The Jewish community of the capital had a decisive role in the country and as both Neolog and Orthodox Jews lived there, the voice of every main religious branch of Judaism can be represented. The most important sources of my investigation have been newspapers and journals issued by various Jewish



communities and for various purposes: Orthodox and Neolog religious, Zionist, social, literary, political and cultural, and so on. These papers were representative of the local communities; they shaped opinions and held the official viewpoints of the leaders of these groups, therefore they make up the basis for argumentation concerning the opinion of these groups on Zionism.

My main research questions are: how did Jewish denominations react to Zionism, and why did they react in the way they did? How did the Zionists answer to the charges brought up against them? What were the consequences brought about by Zionism on the Jewish community of Hungary? As most of previous literature focuses only on the history of the Zionist movement in Hungary, or on the reaction of religious leaders given to the appearance of Zionism (mainly Neologs are stressed in this case), I would like to fill at least partially the gap in previous research by delineating an ongoing debate in the Jewish community of Budapest. The case study of the capital will be contextualized with information on the socio-historical status of the Jews of Hungary and will show both sides of the coin, as not only Neolog and Orthodox opinions will be presented but the responses of the Zionists too. By doing so, I will be able to demonstrate not only the inner contradictions of this debate, but also the current status of assimilation and integration, and the relationship of Jews and their host nation, which bore the seeds of many of the anti-Jewish events happening after the First World War.

The thesis has four main chapters, all of them – except for the historical background chapter – focuses on a different Jewish group. In the historical background chapter, besides a historical overview of the legal and sociological position of the Jews of Hungary and especially Budapest, I will briefly delineate the Zionist ideology and touch upon the problem of the possible Hungarian influences on Herzl's idea. I will also enclose a short history of the Zionist movement in Hungary here.

The first Jewish group to be examined will be the one of the assimilated Jews. The main center of Neologs was the capital, Budapest, where they proclaimed their revulsion to Zionism in the probably most influential Jewish journal of the time, *Egyenlőség*. Several articles can be brought up as examples because leading Neolog personalities published their opinion in this paper, thus it is an appropriate medium to reconstruct their argumentation.

The Orthodox denomination was strangely also the nest from where the first pre-Zionists emerged. In Orthodox circles the affection for the ancient fatherland remained strong and from the beginning of the nineteenth century religious leaders promulgated the importance of returning to Palestine. Observant Jews embedded Mount Zion into their prayers and considered the re-foundation of Israel the redemption. This, however, could only be possible with the help of God. When Herzl's movement reached Hungary, the Orthodox leaders of Budapest raised their voice against it. Redemption, the foundation of Israel cannot be hastened by the Jewish people; it would come at the right time – they reasoned. Here two main Orthodox journals will serve as a basis for the third chapter: *Zsidó Híradó* [Jewish Newspaper] and *Magyar Zsidó* [Hungarian Jew].

In the last main chapter the responses of the Zionists given to the Orthodox and Neolog attacks and accusations will be analyzed. The first Zionist leaders established their own newspapers, which were published for more or less time; most of them only for a few years, as the movement did not have enough capacity to maintain them.

Hopefully by the end of the thesis the complete picture of the relationship of the Budapest Jewry and Zionism will evolve and additionally some of the mechanisms of assimilation, emancipation, integration and nationalism will be presented.

# 1. Theoretical and methodological considerations

## *1.1. Theoretical framework*

In my theoretical chapter I intend to touch upon two major topics. First of all, I will mention some of the existing theories concerning the socio-historical background of the Jewry of Hungary at the end of the nineteenth century. Connected to this, the transformation of Jewish identity will be considered, which can hardly be divided from the previous topic. Second, a conceptual framework for nationalism, of which Zionism was a belated example, will be added, particularly emphasizing the differences between the Zionist idea and other types of nationalism.

The starting point and historical background of my thesis topic describes the social and political status of the Jews of Hungary at the turn of the century. First of all some of the peculiarities of the Jewish community of Hungary shall be mentioned: in its relative size it was bigger than the Jewish minorities in Western European countries, but smaller than that of Russia and those living in the territory of Poland. In the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom (without Croatia) before the Treaty of Trianon<sup>1</sup> Jewish population was a significant minority of 5 per cent, which contained not only those who followed Hungarian nationalistic ideals and Neolog Judaism but also Orthodox Jews who had a different attitude towards the topical matters of that time, Hasidim, refugees from Russia, and so forth. In Hungary, emancipation arrived rather late compared to some Western European countries,

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<sup>1</sup> The treaty, signed as a peace agreement on 4 June 1920, after the First World War, regulated the status of Hungary as an independent state and defined its borders. Due to the regulations Hungary's territory was altered to 92.963 square kilometers from 325.411 square kilometers, while its population declined from 20.886.487 to 7.615.117

but much earlier than in Russia or in Romania.<sup>2</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Jews of Hungary basically lived under favorable conditions and were willing to be assimilated into their host society.

Introducing the entire socio-historical background of this complex community would exceed the limits of a master thesis. Instead of undertaking this huge challenge, I will focus on those essential moments and developments in the social status of the Jews of Hungary which either affected all of them (such as emancipation) or were their consequences, the answers to these seminal events (for example assimilation). As the main topic of my thesis is the reception of Zionism among the Jews of Budapest, it is unavoidable to provide these questions with a solid theoretical framework, as they influenced the attitude towards the movement. It is necessary both to ensure a theoretical background for them in order to understand the major dynamics of the social transformation of the Jews of Hungary and to show their current, authoritative interpretations.

Throughout the discussed era (i.e. the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, until the First World War) the identity of the Jews of Hungary changed in a constant process. This fact leads us to the first term which needs to be defined: several theories exist about *identity* and about the identity of the Jews of Hungary, together with its connection to emancipation and assimilation. These theories emphasize the effects of certain events occurred at the end of the nineteenth century which affected the development of the Jewish identity, one of them being the act of emancipation itself and the receiving of civil rights, others for example rising Hungarian nationalism, and the split between the three major branches of Judaism in Hungary. For the definition of identity I

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<sup>2</sup> This, in fact, depends on the country, and not on regional location, as for example Spain emancipated its Jews only in 1910. The Jewish communities of the Habsburg Empire were given civil rights in 1867, exactly 50 years before the Jews of Russia and 56 before the Romanian communities.

mostly rely on one of András Kovács's essays, "Identitások és lojalitások" [Identities and loyalties].<sup>3</sup>

Kovács uses the term "identity" in a sociological context. According to him, several types of identities exist in relation with historical situations. Entities which bear identity are nations, countries and cultures, and so they have crucial impact on the identity of the individuals connected to them. Identity and loyalty to a nation are normative notions in Kovács's interpretations, and in this case the norms defined by them have the role of creating group consensus and social cohesion among individuals belonging to the same group. Roles which are determined by norms are realized by social actors.<sup>4</sup> The major factors which affected the identity of the Jews of Hungary were their own closer (religious) community and the host society, Hungarian nation, which accepted them in the middle of the nineteenth century.

According to Kovács's theory, during the socialization process the individual obtains an apparatus, which contains a typical concern about what are socially still accepted acts that break the norms, and what is not accepted at all by society. In case the social actor remains in a consensually accepted distance from the idealtypical norm when realizing his identity norm, then he is considered loyal to the group, or to the nation. Loyalty and identity thus come into existence through a continuous process which is based upon social communication and has several actors. This interactive process is also dependent on the communication with "significant Others,"<sup>5</sup> who keep up the definition of identity norms and who evaluate the realization of norms.

Who are considered "Significant Others," who define norms for an individual? The answer depends on the social context to which the individual belongs, and on the type of

<sup>3</sup> András Kovács, "Identitások és lojalitások," [Identities and loyalties], in *Etnikai identitás, politikai lojalitás* [Ethnic identity, political loyalty], ed. Nóra Kovács, Anna Osvát, László Szarka, 67-72. (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Kovács, "Identitások és lojalitások", 69.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 70.

group he identifies himself with. The identification with a group has three main variations, which have been defined by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper as “commonality”, “connectedness” and “groupness”.<sup>6</sup> Commonality means a group of people belonging to the same social category and having common attributes. Those, who have regular interactive connections (for example through common language) and share a common culture, are in connectedness. However, these two do not create groupness, which is the feeling of belonging to a distinct, solidary group. Only “groupness” may create identity norms.

All in all, identity depends on many factors, among them the historical context of the individual, the socially accepted norms and the group, to which the individual belongs. The criterion of accepting the system of norms set up by a group depends on the individual’s socialization and his own decision. How strictly someone observes the norms and expectations depends on his relationship with the group.

For the Jews of Hungary, a decisive step in the re-formation of identity was *emancipation* (giving equal rights to the minorities of the state, among them to Jews). Up until the end of the eighteenth century Jews in Hungary, similarly to many of the Jewish populations of other European countries, lived in closed communities with their own internal traditions. They possessed group identity or collective individuality, which, in Marcel Mauss’ definition, was a “total social phenomenon.”<sup>7</sup> However, with the collapse of feudalism, Jewish identity went through a major transformation. The inherited status of the Jews had a diminishing influence on the reproduction of social relations. From this time, they had to face a growing “integrationist challenge”.<sup>8</sup> This term is used by Viktor Karády in the sense of social expectations which appeared in the period when emancipation was considered by the Hungarian government. The “integrationist challenge” contained such

<sup>6</sup> Rogers Brubaker – Frederick Cooper, “Beyond »identity«,” *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000): 19-20. Also cited in Kovács, “Identitások és lojalitások”, 70.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Viktor Karády, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 197.

<sup>8</sup> Karády, *The Jews of Europe*, 199.

expectations which had to be fulfilled by the Jews in case they wanted to gain civil rights. In other words, emancipation was not unconditional in Hungary: signs of self-distinction, cultural particularism and seclusion had to be abolished. These expectations later transformed into a political pressure to integrate, which was met by the willingness of the Jews to assimilate into the host society.

Viktor Karády formulated a theory which illuminates this problem from a different point of view and which is useful for grabbing the core of assimilation in Hungary. In order to win the Jews of the country for the national cause, an implicit social contract was promulgated, which expected linguistic and cultural assimilation and the support of Hungarian national independence in exchange for free practice of religion, protection, social mobility, the opportunity to use economic and social possibilities and the chance to be integrated into the new middle class.<sup>9</sup>

This process, which started with emancipation and the new expectations which appeared among the Jews during the second half of the nineteenth century, led to the necessity of finding new identity patterns. Many of the Jews chose to break with the previous practice of identity transmission and confirmation. Reform aspirations emerged accompanied by mixed marriages, and in some cases Jews converted in order to assimilate perfectly.<sup>10</sup> These steps were needed in order to be able to obtain their new social class positions.

*Assimilation*, the aim of embracing the culture and mentality of the host society, was often resulted by historical experiences. Assimilationist mobility has three major trends: the first one is acculturation, identification with the political nation of the host society and

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<sup>9</sup> Viktor Karády, "Politikai antiszemitizmus és nemzetállam-építés Közép-Európában," [Political anti-Semitism and the building of nation states in Central Europe], in *Magyar megfontolások a Soáról* [Hungarian considerations concerning the Shoah], eds. Gábor Hamp, Özséb Horányi, László Rábai (Budapest – Pannonthalma: Balassi Kiadó, 1999), accessed March 10, 2012, <http://www.magypaxromana.hu/kiadvanyok/soa/karady.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Karády, *The Jews of Europe*, 201-203.

denominationalism.<sup>11</sup> Additionally social integration can be added, which has accompanying phenomena such as mixed marriage, changing of surnames, residential mixing, and so forth.

*Acculturation*, learning the language and culture of the majority society, adopting its values through formal education is not a unilateral process. In the case of the Jews of Hungary it led to the liberation from the obligations of the traditional Jewish way of life and brought about social advancement. The linguistic and cultural assets and competence acquired through acculturation affected the ability to participate in the symbolic achievements of majority society.<sup>12</sup> Cultural integration was more complete when a mutual political interest served as its basis, as it happened in Hungary. New types of Jewish identity became compatible with the interests of the nation state, and although the religious uniqueness of Judaism was retained, it was deprived of its earlier political and cultural features. Thus Jews became a religious grouping, but not a people or nation.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, integration as an ultimate goal could not be achieved in Hungary. The so-called “unilateral rapprochement” followed during the process of assimilation produced social actors who identified with the corresponding social strata, but with a certain consciousness of their otherness: it could not be forgotten due to host society which made it clear to them that they were different.<sup>14</sup> The “unilateral rapprochement” was thus not sufficient for the success of integration: cooperation of the host society was also required. The “Jewishness” of the Jews of Hungary was never forgotten, and at the end of the nineteenth century the outburst of anti-Semitism forecasted the failure of assimilation.

There was another cardinal cornerstone of the assimilation and integration of the Jews of Hungary: assimilation occurred within the framework of the modernization of society,

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<sup>11</sup> Karády, *The Jews of Europe*, 208.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 209.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 213.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 205.



which resulted in social problems. The economic success which was the consequence of Jewish assimilation caused counter-assimilation, which was the reaction of the host society.<sup>15</sup> Especially in Central Europe (thus in Hungary as well) middle class was quite weak, which explains why they saw the economic prosperity of Jews, many of whom were members of the modern middle class, in a disadvantageous light.<sup>16</sup> Problems with assimilation did not emerge only on the side of the host society. Jews also experienced controversies. Deformations of Jewish personality emerged in three forms: in hiding one's origins, in a compensatory over-fulfillment of assimilationist expectations and in obsessional preoccupations with one's Jewish identity.

With the crisis of assimilation new reactions unfolded. First, the efforts to assimilate were redoubled by supporting potential allies, such as political parties and social forces that were against anti-Semitism. Second, traditionalists' endeavors to wipe out all assimilationist inclinations became stronger. The third response was Zionism, whose aim was to settle the masses of Eastern European Jews either to Israel or to another place where they would be safe from persecution or legal restrictions.<sup>17</sup>

*Zionism*, the nationalism of the Jews, unfolded at the end of the nineteenth century. Here it is necessary to investigate the peculiarities of the movement as a nationalistic effort and to see its place in historiography in order to understand its importance and its role in Jewish history. Zionism was established by assimilated, cosmopolitan, intellectual Jews. This in itself is a unique feature: assimilated Jews usually did not want to have any kind of connection to Jewish national aspirations, which could confute their commitment to the host nation. Herzl's vision was revolutionary and thus considered absurd by many as he tried to achieve the gathering of Jews dispersed throughout the nations without a common culture,

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<sup>15</sup> Karády, *The Jews of Europe*, 222.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 224.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 245-247.

language or land, and achieve their acknowledgement as a nation deserving a state.<sup>18</sup> The most important goal was, however, to settle the poor Jews of Eastern Europe, who had to face anti-Semitism, pogroms or legal restrictions. The paradox of Zionist thinking appears here: transforming the Jews into a unified, sovereign nation required extraordinary efforts, and was supposed to lead to normalcy after becoming a nation-state.<sup>19</sup>

Another special characteristic of Zionism as a type of nationalism was that Jews could not count on a national potential as they had no territorial basis with historical continuity, nor religious or cultural unity or uniformity. Even their religion had many variations.<sup>20</sup> The consequence of this was a kind of dual loyalty towards the host nation and the “Jewish nation.”<sup>21</sup> Besides this, the unfolding of Jewish nationalism was also caused by unique factors. First of all, anti-Semitism forced the Jews to think of themselves as a historico-cultural group.<sup>22</sup> However, the question emerges: after living and surviving in Diaspora for almost two thousand years, what did justify the existence of the Jewish state? According to the opinion of the Zionists, persecution of the Jews would stop at the borders of the planned state. The other factor that inspired Jewish nationalism was assimilation. An own state could offer the possibility of a richer Jewish life and secure the survival of Jewish culture.<sup>23</sup>

Due to these characteristics, Zionism had to be universal in order to embrace all Jewish communities. The ultimate goal could be achieved only through a strong ideology and territorial, cultural and ethnic unification. Zionism thus had to use a kind of messianism to touch all Jewish communities, and had to be transformed into a philosophy of history appropriate for constructing a new vision of the future and for self-perception.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Amnon Rubinstein, “Zionism: a Deviant Nationalism?,” in *New Essays on Zionism*, eds. David Hazony, Yoram Hazony, Michael Oren (Jerusalem – New York: Shalem Press, 2006), 116.

<sup>19</sup> Rubinstein, “Zionism,” 117.

<sup>20</sup> Karády, *The Jews of Europe*, 248.

<sup>21</sup> Rubinstein, “Zionism,” 122.

<sup>22</sup> Alain Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ruth Gavison, “The Jewish State: a Justification,” in *New Essays on Zionism*, eds. David Hazony, Yoram Hazony, Michael Oren (Jerusalem – New York: Shalem Press, 2006), 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Karády, *The Jews of Europe*, 251.

Alain Dieckhoff, who created an own concept concerning Zionism using Miroslav Hroch's theory,<sup>25</sup> claims that there are three moments of national rebirth: first, intellectuals exhume history, language, culture, this time without political intentions. Then patriots seize these achievements and use them for political purposes. Finally the masses accept nationalism. In Dieckhoff's opinion, Zionism was the third phase, while movements such as Hibbat Zion were representative of the second phase. Zionism had the capacity to integrate all Jewish groups and it also had an overall ideology which could be attractive to every Jewish community.<sup>26</sup> Theoretically it is true; still, this concept does not explain the initial aversion of many of the Jews towards Zionism. The answer to the reception of Zionism can be found in the assimilationist process: those who had already embraced the host nation's nationalistic ideals were against this new ideology, which tried to convince the public that Jews were actually a nationality.

During the exposition of the thesis, when talking about Hungarian Jewry, the above mentioned aspects of identity will be taken into consideration, and assimilation, acculturation and integration will be viewed from a cultural-political perspective. It is essential here to emphasize again the connection between these notions and Zionism and its reception: as I pointed out, melting into the host nation had far-reaching consequences which hugely affected the attitude towards Herzl's movement. And here it is also crucial to mention that in order to understand why Zionism was received in a negative way, one has to take into consideration the stress it put on its political goals and on the importance of Jewry as a nationality.

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<sup>25</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

<sup>26</sup> Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation*, 5-6.

## 1.2. Methodology

The main body of this work is based on articles published in Jewish newspapers and periodicals as primary sources. In this subchapter I intend to justify the relevance of these sources and to delineate the methodology which was used when applying them on Hungarian Zionism.

Media and press had increasing significance in the nineteenth century: the social and cultural changes in early modern Europe played a major role in the growing popularity of press. The increasing alphabetization resulted in more and more literate people and mass literacy had a strong connection with printed text.<sup>27</sup> The advantage of printed text was its transportability, and the possibility that it could be distributed among many people. Newspapers quickly grew into organs disseminating information.<sup>28</sup>

In Hungary the rise of media and press depended on political and historical changes, and the nineteenth century was indeed a hectic century for the country from this point of view. After 1851 the relatively liberal atmosphere favored the appearance of new journals. At that time politics and journalism were strongly connected, and the supporters of a certain idea gathered around a newspaper which disseminated their political program.<sup>29</sup> Publishing techniques were modernized throughout the century and after the Compromise of Austria and Hungary in 1867, more than 250 papers were published in Hungarian language: literary, scientific, cultural and entertaining periodicals alike,<sup>30</sup> due to the new policy of the government.

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<sup>27</sup> Marshall T. Poe, *A history of communications – Media and society from the evolution of speech to the internet*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 111.

<sup>28</sup> Poe, *A history of communications*, 139-140.

<sup>29</sup> Géza Buzinkay, *Magyar hírlaptörténet 1848-1918* [The history of Hungarian journalism 1848-1918], (Budapest: Corvina, 2008), 68.

<sup>30</sup> Géza Fülöp, *Sajtótörténet, sajtóismeret* [Press History, Press Studies], (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, 1996), 77-78.

The inner dynamics of media was influenced by rising capitalism: the economic and technical basis of press, the foundation of printing houses, introduction of modern inventions and the employment of more and more workers in printing and publishing. All these changes led to the evolution of popular press with high sales, based on advertisements. The main point became serving the interest of the public, providing information and news and keeping distance from politics.<sup>31</sup>

Jews had a significant role in the emerging of mass media. Outstanding personalities, such as Miksa Falk and Adolf Ágai contributed to the development of journalistic style and establishment of business press and modern political press.<sup>32</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century the majority of the “press palaces” of Budapest (press empires, editorial offices, publishing, printing, advertising) were established and run by Jewish publishers and editors, like the Légrády brothers, Zsigmond Bródy, Simon Tolnai, and so forth. Press business was financially successful.<sup>33</sup>

A watershed in the history of Jewish journalism in Hungary was the blood libel of Tiszaeszlár, which led to the establishment of *Egyenlőség* [Equality] in 1881, which later became the biggest and most influential Neolog newspaper.<sup>34</sup> The success of *Egyenlőség* inspired the launching of other Jewish denominational, cultural, literary and social newspapers. The main goal of these periodicals was to keep their readers updated concerning relevant Jewish issues: not only in cultural but also in political and social senses, as they informed the audience about anti-Semitic events, weddings and funerals, writings of Jewish authors alike. Thus these papers were not only the organs of the leaders of Jewish denominations, transmitting their ideas and opinions but also had an impact on readership

<sup>31</sup> Buzinkay, *Magyar hírlaptörténet*, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Géza Buzinkay, “Jewish Presence in Hungarian Journalism,” in *In the Land of Hagar*, ed. Anna Szalai (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, Ministry of Defence Publ. House, 2002), 221.

<sup>33</sup> Buzinkay, “Jewish Presence,” 224.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 223.

and shaped public opinion. This is the reason why the periodicals of Jewish groups and religious communities can be used as relevant sources.

In order to reconstruct the debate concerning Zionism, I went through every Jewish denominational newspaper of Budapest which was published in the period between the First Zionist Congress and the First World War. Besides Neolog *Egyenlőség* two major Orthodox journals and several Zionist papers were used as sources. Every article regarding Zionism had significance when the argumentation of these three groups had to be determined. However, the vast amount of sources needed some selection and here two main factors were taken into consideration. First of all I chose articles and writings whose authors have been famous or significant in Jewish cultural and intellectual life. Obviously, these famous personalities had greater influence on the public and it is not by chance that they were asked by the editors of the newspapers to publish their opinions. The other articles used in this thesis are those containing significant arguments or counterarguments, and which are crucial to reconstruct the debate between Neologs, Orthodox and Zionists.

## 2. Historical background

Before starting the examination of arguments pro and contra Zionism, it is unavoidable to become familiar with the historical background of the topic. Therefore in this chapter I will provide a brief account of three major issues: first of all on the social status and circumstances of the Jews of Hungary in order to introduce the community and the environment to where Zionism arrived at the end of the nineteenth century. In the second subchapter I will write about the beginnings of Zionism, focusing first of all on the works and ideas of Theodor Herzl and mentioning some of the possible Hungarian influences on his ideology. The last subchapter contains a short historical overview on the major events and personalities of the Zionist movement in Hungary.

### *2.1. An overlook on the Jews of Hungary in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*

#### **2.1.1. Jewry as a minority**

The Jewish population in Hungary, as in every other country, had its own peculiarities. The examination of this group should start with an overview on the ethnic composition of Hungary's population. By the nineteenth century several ethnic minorities lived among Hungary's borders, Jewry being among those who had the most peculiar religious and ethnic features. The fact that Jews were both an ethnic and religious minority made their identification quite difficult. Conversion and assimilation added to the confusion.

We have data about the country's ethnic minorities from the censuses taken from the end of the eighteenth century. The first census was ordered by Maria Theresa in 1777. In the

nineteenth century the population of the country was measured at varying intervals (1805, 1820, 1838, 1850, 1857), and after the foundation of the Central Statistical Office (1867) every ten years. The questions asked from the population after 1867 covered religion, native language, citizenship, and language knowledge.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the Jews religion was the most defining factor, even at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the multi-ethnic and multilingual country Hungarians were a minority even in the second half of the nineteenth century, despite linguistic and cultural efforts to Magyarize the peoples under the Hungarian rule.<sup>36</sup> The importance of increasing Hungarian-speaking population appeared in the state's policy towards the Jews, whose population grew significantly at the end of the century. In 1890, in Hungary (without Croatia) Jews made up 4.7 per cent of the total population, which meant a number of roughly 708.000 people. By 1910 the number of Jews in Hungary reached almost one million: 911.000, which meant the 5 per cent of the total population of Hungary, which had 18.265.000 inhabitants (without Croatia).<sup>37</sup> As they were one of the ethnic communities in Hungary which was lacking a homeland of their own, or a territory where they composed a majority, nationalism appeared only belatedly in their circles. The majority of them chose to be faithful to the country where they lived. The success of Magyarization can be seen in the language usage: at the end of the nineteenth century more than 75 per cent of the Jews answered to the survey that their mother tongue was Hungarian.

As it has been mentioned, the Jewish population in Hungary had its own characteristics. First of all, they were present in a relatively high proportion compared to Western European

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<sup>35</sup> János Vékás, "Spectra: National and Ethnic Minorities of Hungary as Reflected by the Census" in *National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary, 1920-2001*, ed. Ágnes Tóth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>36</sup> The 1880 census showed that less than 45% of the population spoke Hungarian as their native language, while in 1890 this number was 48,6%. This tendency shows slow but firm growth. Data from: János Vékás, "Spectra: National and Ethnic Minorities of Hungary as Reflected by the Census," 14, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob Katz, "The Identity of Post Emancipatory Jewry," in *A Social and Economic History of Central European Jewry*, ed. Yehuda Don, Victor Karady (New Brunswick-New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 15.



countries. It is also a fact that three quarter of them settled in the territory of Hungary coming from many other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Austria, Moravia, Bohemia and Galicia) during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

### **2.1.2. Assimilation, emancipation and their consequences**

The nineteenth century brought about major changes in Hungarian society. The transformation that started at the end of the eighteenth century fostered the integration of Jewry into a society still in the making difficult. Unfolding nationalism made distinctions based on origins, and those who were considered “alien” to the nation were also suspectable. The relatively high proportion of Jewish people in Hungary also served as an argument against their legal emancipation and reception.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the discrimination, the majority of the Jews of Hungary embraced Hungarian nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth, and aimed to gain civil rights. In 1867 their efforts were finally crowned, as this date hallmarked the history of the Jews of Hungary with the act of emancipation. Restrictions on their settlement had been previously abolished by the 1840 Diet, and from 1867 onwards the Jews were allowed to take part in business, agriculture and industry. The changing of the legal position of Jewry was expected to eliminate the impediments of Jewish integration caused by the peculiarity of their religion. The last barrier disappeared in 1895, when Judaism as a religion was made “received” officially. From 1867 onwards thus Jews had to come to terms with the modern nation as a unifying force.

Emancipation as a legal act was made possible by the liberalism of political elites of the time. The implicit contract bound between Jewry and the nobility of the country required

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<sup>38</sup> Katz, “The Identity of Post Emancipatory Jewry,” 4.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 16.

that Jews would give up on their own cultural norms and customs, renounce the “conspicuous” elements of their religion, and identify themselves with the “Hungarian cause”<sup>40</sup> in order to be accepted by the host society. Most of the Hungarian Jews accepted these conditions together with Hungarian nationalism, and Magyarized in their language and way of life. They lost the previous characteristics of their culture, traditions, to become “Magyars of the Jewish faith” – many of them took up a new type of identity, and their “Jewishness” was symbolized only by their reformed religion. This was a relatively successful process: many of the Jews of Hungary declared themselves to be of Hungarian nationality and the majority of them used Hungarian language.

By breaking the confines of traditional patterns, Jews significantly contributed to the dynamic advancement of the country on the way to modernization. Many of them attended universities and high schools as soon as they had the opportunity and chose intellectual or economic carriers. The preconditions for economic take off were the achievement of a base for industry and the availability of investment of capital. Jews dominated the commercial scene.<sup>41</sup> This situation changed by the end of the century, when the economic capital of elite Jewish circles grew to a significant degree.

Emancipation, however, had not only economical but social consequences as well: it served as a drive to choose new identities, to assimilate and to get rid of the attitudes and signs of Jewish ethnic properties and distinctive markers. A whole range of degrees of assimilation and solutions between total loyalty to the state and traditional modes of thought and behavior became possible, including changing names, mixed marriage, conversion, and so forth. The disintegration of Jewry as a clearly defined ethnic minority speeded up.<sup>42</sup> The new identities chosen by Jews living in Hungary led to the fragmentation of the community.

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<sup>40</sup> Katz, “The Identity of Post Emancipatory Jewry,” 16.

<sup>41</sup> William O. McCagg, *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1986), 118.

<sup>42</sup> David Vital, *Zionism: The Crucial Phase* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 36.

Many Jews distanced themselves from traditional way of life. The price Jewry had to pay for their economic success was the disappearance of their cultural distinctiveness.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the social integration and the gaining of rights the Jews of Hungary became the promoters of modernity, liberalism and were committed to the state which emancipated them. Emancipation also facilitated social mobility and for some the access to the ranks of the nobility was made possible. After 1868, 350 Jewish families were ennobled. This obviously affected the traditional alliance between Jewish elite and noble families:<sup>44</sup> in some cases Jews appeared as rivals in economy, but on the other hand for the ennobled families this act symbolized a stronger connection to the Hungarian nation. The middle class of Hungarian society was constructed with the involvement of the Jews, as most of them integrated in this stratum, which was the bearer of national character, the “civic religion of nationalism,” as George Mosse termed the interlocking of national feeling and Christianity.<sup>45</sup>

The drift to emancipation influenced the Jews of Hungary; however, both emancipation and assimilation were one-sided processes. For the total integration of Jewry into society the acceptance of non-Jewish population as a partner was needed. This kind of acceptance happened only partially. The presence of Jews in public life was regarded by the “host community” often with irony, sometimes even with open hostility.<sup>46</sup> Even when a Jew converted, in many cases society still regarded him a Jew. Anti-Semitism, which was

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<sup>43</sup> András Gerő, “A szétesett zsidóság,” [Jewry fallen apart] in András Gerő, *A zsidó szempont* [The Jewish Viewpoint] (Budapest: PolgArt, 2005), 68-69.

<sup>44</sup> Howard Lupovitch, *Jews at the Crossroads* (Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2007), 252.

<sup>45</sup> George L. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation* (Hannover-London: University Press of New England, 1993), 122.

<sup>46</sup> Tamás Ungvári, *The “Jewish Question” in Europe: The Case of Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 2.

present in the atmosphere, motivated dissimulation, as it assumed that Jews were not capable of assimilation due to their “racial characteristics.”<sup>47</sup>

### 2.1.3. The split between Orthodox and Neolog Jews

Another major event in the history of the Jews of Hungary was the congress which was called together by baron József Eötvös, minister of religious affairs, in order to develop a national framework, an overall organization for the Jewish community. The congress of the Jewish leaders took place in the end of 1868. By this time two major trends unfolded in the Jewish communities of Hungary: many of them supported the idea of the reformation of Judaism, while another huge group was against it and adhered to traditional Jewish lifestyle. The opposition led to a break: 57 per cent of the participants of the congress belonged to the Neolog party, while 42 per cent supported Orthodoxy. Orthodox Jews took every reform aspiration as a danger to the original, true faith and they did not welcome desires for Jewish equality and political freedom. The decision of Orthodox leaders to file out from the congress was “celebrated as divine deliverance from deadly danger to the true believers.”<sup>48</sup>

Orthodox leaders did not accept the constitution written by the conference and when Emperor Franz Joseph signed it, they passively resisted to accept it. In 1870 the parliament acknowledged that the resolutions of the congress were not compulsory for the Orthodox Jews. At that point the Orthodox organized an own congress.<sup>49</sup> The split between the two major branches was acknowledged at the state level, which was a unique phenomenon in Europe. Two national institutions were organized in order to represent them both. According to the leaders of these groups, their ideas and attitude to religion were more

<sup>47</sup> Gerő, “Zsidó utak – Magyar keretek a XIX. században” [Jewish ways – Hungarian frames in the nineteenth century], in András Gerő, *A zsidó szempont* [The Jewish viewpoint] (Budapest: PolgArt, 2005), 30.

<sup>48</sup> Katz, “The Identity of Post Emancipatory Jewry,” 19.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob Katz, “A végzetes szakadás,” [The fateful split] in *Múlt és Jövő* [Past and future], 1 (1991): 54.

distinct from each other than those of Protestantism and Catholicism, so they should not have been forced to cooperate or have common institutions.<sup>50</sup>

Orthodox Jews were not willing to follow the path of total integration or secularization. Their aim was to safeguard the community of believers and for this the authority of the halakha<sup>51</sup> was maintained. This conservative community kept the commandments of the Torah; most of them adhered to traditional way of life and considered their religion the true path to redemption. The major Orthodox-Neolog debate was about the language of the sermon: the Neologs supported Hungarian.<sup>52</sup>

The Neolog communities were open to changes in religion, social and political conditions; they thought that Jews were an integrant part of Hungarian society. A third, small group chose the golden mean, became the Status Quo Ante branch, which hosted those who did not or could not choose between the two stronger branches.<sup>53</sup>

The majority of the communities joined the Orthodox trend. By the end of the century 315 Orthodox communities existed besides 160 Neolog and 66 Status Quo. These groups varied in size, the most populous ones were Neologs, who made up 60 per cent of the Jews of Hungary. About one third of the Jews were Orthodox.<sup>54</sup>

## ***2.2. The early history of Zionism***

### **2.2.1. The foundation of Zionism**

Zionism is the name which labels the Jewish national movement founded by Theodor Herzl. Herzl was born into an assimilated Hungarian Jewish family on May 2, 1860. He

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Jacob Katz, "A végzetes szakadás," 53.

<sup>51</sup> Jewish religious law

<sup>52</sup> Nathaniel Katzburg, "Assimilation in Hungary During the Nineteenth Century: Orthodox Position," in *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times*, ed. Béla Vágó (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 50-52.

<sup>53</sup> Kinga Frojimovics, *Szétszakadt történelem* [Split history], (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008), 126.

<sup>54</sup> Katz, "The Identity of Post Emancipatory Jewry," 20.

lived in Pest until 1878, when, after the death of his sister Pauline, the family moved to Vienna. Although he left Hungary and gave up his Hungarian nationality in 1885, he did not abandon the language, or his Hungarian ties, and he visited Budapest frequently.<sup>55</sup> In Vienna Herzl studied law but instead of a legal career he chose journalism. He became an employee of *Neue Freie Presse*. Besides publishing articles, he wrote several plays. As an assimilated, cosmopolitan Jew, Herzl came to the Zionist idea slowly: he first claimed that Jews should return to their political autonomy only in 1894-1895, and until that time he was unaware of the writings of major thinkers in this topic.<sup>56</sup> However, it is sure that some events and impressions and personalities affected him, even when he still lived in Hungary. Just to mention three of them: Rabbis Judah Alkalay and Joseph Natonek, and emerging anti-Semitism. Judah Alkalay (1798-1878) was the Sephardic rabbi of the Jews of Zimony,<sup>57</sup> who wrote several books, in which he argued that Jews should return to Eretz Israel. Alkalay, although cannot be considered Hungarian, still reached Herzl through his grandfather, Simon Loew Herzl, who lived in Zimony, attended Alkalay's synagogue and was in personal contact with him.<sup>58</sup>

Herzl's father, Jákob was a supporter of Rabbi Joseph Natonek (1813-1892),<sup>59</sup> former pupil of Chatam Sofer in Pozsony,<sup>60</sup> rabbi of Jászberény and Székesfehérvár. Natonek made efforts in order to awaken the consciousness of his brethren: in 1860 he preached that the real home of Jewry was not Hungary but Palestine and due to this he was forced to withdraw from his position by the authorities. Natonek thought that emancipation would not solve the problems of the Jews and claimed that they were a nation, and not only a religious

<sup>55</sup> Haya Harel, "Herzl and his Hungarian Friends in Paris, 1891-1895," in *In the Land of Hagar*, ed. Anna Szalai, (Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, Ministry of Defence Publ. House, 2002), 125.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 14.

<sup>57</sup> Zimony (Zemun, Semlin) city in South Hungary, in county Szerém.

<sup>58</sup> Rafael Patai, "Cionizmus: előfutárok, alapítók, ellenfelek," [Zionism: precursors, founders, opponents], *Múlt és Jövő* [Past and Future], 4 (1993): 23-24.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Handler, *An Early Blueprint for Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 156.

<sup>60</sup> Pozsony (Bratislava, Pressburg) centre of Pozsony county in the discussed era, capital of Slovakia since 1992.

group. He published a pseudonymous pamphlet, *Messiás, avagy értekezés a zsidó emancipációról* [Messiah, or an essay on Jewish emancipation] in 1861, in which he circulated these ideas.<sup>61</sup> The Hungarian government considered Natonek's work *Messiás* unpatriotic and confiscated it. After his resignation he dedicated his time to the propagation of the return to Palestine.<sup>62</sup>

Herzl was also influenced by anti-Semitism, and he knew about the case of Tiszaeszlár (1882-1883),<sup>63</sup> and about the foundation of the Anti-Semitic Party in Hungary in 1883. This party was led by parliamentary representative and lawyer, Győző Istóczy (1842-1915) who besides many other anti-Jewish claims demanded the expulsion of Jews from the country. Istóczy had promulgated anti-Semitic views even before Tiszaeszlár; his famous Palestine-speech in 1878 was the catalyst of his career. In Istóczy's monthly, *12 Rőpirat* [12 Pamphlets] he propagated that Jews were sponging on the Hungarian nation; however, if they were allowed to build their own country, they would form a strong nation.<sup>64</sup> As Istóczy put it, expelling the Jews would have had been better for both the Jews and the Hungarians: "Let those Jews who are unwilling or unable to assimilate [...] return to their homeland along with our incorrigible philosemites. We, anti-Semites, declare ourselves to be non-Jewish Zionists"<sup>65</sup>

Later on the Hungarian supporters of an independent Jewish nation took over some elements of Istóczy's ideology. For instance in 1878 a petition was submitted to the Berlin

<sup>61</sup> Published under the name of Abir Amieli, *Messiás, avagy értekezés a zsidó emancipációról*, (Budapest, 1861)

<sup>62</sup> Peter Haber, *Josef Natonek: A Forerunner of Herzl from Hungary*, <http://www.hist.net/datenarchiv/haber/texte/105230.pdf> (accessed October 26, 2011)

<sup>63</sup> A blood-libel, based on the death of a young girl, Eszter Solymosi, who disappeared under unclarified circumstances. Locals suspected that the Jewish community of the village committed a ritual murder. The case and the trial following it gained the attention of the public. The trial ended with the acquittal of the Jews of Tiszaeszlár.

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, "Az országgyűlési antiszemitapárt válaszfelirati javaslata a trónbeszédre" [The response proposal of the parliamentary Anti-Semitic Party to the throne speech] in *12 Rőpirat* [12 Pamphlets] 1 (1884):1-8. [http://mtdportal.extra.hu/tizenket\\_ropirat/5\\_evfolyam/5\\_evf\\_01\\_szam.pdf](http://mtdportal.extra.hu/tizenket_ropirat/5_evfolyam/5_evf_01_szam.pdf) (accessed March 24, 2012)

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Handler, *An Early Blueprint*, 152-153.

Congress from Hungary, which was signed by three unknown individuals (M. Levy, T. Freund, C. Meir Reisler). They wrote: “Honored Congress, like all the other Eastern peoples, we Jews, poor and oppressed, also request humbly that Your Excellencies make use of your power and goodwill to give us [...] a home in the ancient land of our fathers, as a legal and independent kingdom, according to the enclosed motion of Istóczy.”<sup>66</sup> The memorandum was not discussed by the participants of the congress, nevertheless its significance lies in the fact that the senders referred to an anti-Semitic politician, which also shows the influence and effect Istóczy and his views had on contemporary Hungarian Jews.

The similarities of the goals of Zionism and the Anti-Semitic Party can be easily noticed; however they also had many differences. Just to mention the most important one: Istóczy wanted to expel the Jews from Hungary, while the settlements proposed by the Zionists were based on voluntary work and participation of European Jews in order to avoid anti-Semitism. Herzl knew about Hungarian anti-Semitism; he could not have avoided it during his annual visits to Budapest.

Theodor Herzl published two major works in which he propagated his ideas concerning the establishment of a territorial basis for Jewry: *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State, 1896) and *Altneuland* (Old-New Land, 1902). *Der Judenstaat* is considered the most important writing of early Zionism, laying down the basis of the movement’s goals. Herzl started out with the problems European Jews had to face: anti-Semitism, the constant actuality of the “Jewish Question” and persecution. “The Jewish question still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It is a remnant of the Middle Ages, which civilized nations do not even yet seem able to shake off, try as they will. They certainly showed a generous desire to do so when they emancipated us.”<sup>67</sup> Herzl clearly saw the problems that surrounded the Jews and that they exist in a kind of self-sustaining circle. He also knew that it would be extremely difficult to get rid of them, due to

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Rafael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996) 349.

<sup>67</sup> Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover Publications, 2008), 75.



their centuries-long practice. His conclusion reflects solidarity with the persecuted and also it is the base of his nationalistic ideology: “We are a people – one people.”<sup>68</sup>

After the enumeration of problems, Herzl outlined his solution: an own territory for the Jews either in Palestine or in Argentina. The first step leading to the establishment of the Jewish State would be achieving the conviction in European Jews that they are capable of building their own state and the elimination of misunderstandings: “For this, many old, outgrown, confused and limited notions must first be entirely erased from the minds of men. Dull brains might, for instance, imagine that this exodus would be from civilized regions into the desert. That is not the case. It will be carried out in the midst of civilization. [...] We shall not sacrifice our beloved customs; we shall find them again.”<sup>69</sup> Herzl described in detail how this idealistic state and its society would function, mentioning details starting from the purchasing of land and the organization of labor to the apparatus and arrangement of the state, and various social layers.

As the common identity of Jews living in Europe was problematic due to the fact that they were dispersed in many countries, the creation of some kind of bond between them was the most important task of Zionism. The aim of Herzl was to make his ideas universal and attractive to all the Jewish communities, thus he did not lay emphasis on religion, which, by the end of the nineteenth century was rather a factious than a unifying force. In *Altneuland* he propagated supreme tolerance and religion removed from public life. Herzl’s Zionism thus contained social and political attitudes and was capable of absorbing socialists, liberals, and conservatives alike.<sup>70</sup>

Herzl was aware that creating national symbols and rites, like flag and songs, would help the unification of Jews, scattered all around in Europe and would start the inner

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<sup>68</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 76.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>70</sup> George L. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation* (Hannover – London: University Press of New England, 1993), 125.

renewal of a Jewish nation with its own dignity. Art played a significant role in the process of committing a whole generation of new Zionists to the movement. As “Zionism was born into a highly visual age,”<sup>71</sup> artistic imagery and symbols were the expressions of common culture and history which the Zionists aimed to elevate, and thus they propagated the aims of the movement and the need to preserve the cultural assets of Jewry. They also sustained the belief in a Jewish national regeneration. For Herzl, art was the vehicle for the absorption of national ideas.<sup>72</sup>

The question of language also became a cardinal problem for Zionism, since it was another instrument of nation building and a national symbol. Language may evoke associations, memories, emotions and for the Jews it became an “epitome of peoplehood.”<sup>73</sup> Thus choosing a language meant part of an ideology and the Zionists chose Hebrew, the ancient, sacred language which, as they thought, bore Jewish unity and history. Zionism concerned with creating a “new Jew,” not only in spiritual but in physical sense too. Bodily rejuvenation was stressed especially by Max Nordau,<sup>74</sup> and it was connected to the ancient, heroic past, which inspired its followers to fight against “degeneration” in both senses. In this way national character was meant to be seen in outward appearance too.<sup>75</sup>

The first concrete steps taken in order to establish the Jewish state were the Zionist congresses, the first one being held on August 29-31, 1897 in Basel. The World Zionist Organization was also founded in 1897, during the congress and later served as an umbrella organization for the Zionist movement. The First Congress was followed by a number of congresses held regularly with the attendance of delegates from all over Europe.

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Berkowitz, “Art in Zionist Popular Culture and Jewish Self-consciousness, 1897-1914,” in *Studies in contemporary Jewry VI*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn, (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

<sup>72</sup> Berkowitz, “Art in Zionist Popular Culture,” 10.

<sup>73</sup> Zvi Gitelman, “A Century of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe,” in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics*, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>74</sup> Max Nordau (Maximilian Südfeld, 1849-1923) Zionist leader, physician and writer, co-founder of the World Zionist Organization

<sup>75</sup> Mosse, *Confronting the Nation*, 127.

The reception of Zionism was controversial in many places. In Western Europe highly assimilated Jewish communities refused to join the movement. In Eastern Europe Zionism gained more popularity due to anti-Jewish atrocities and pogroms which still happened periodically.<sup>76</sup> However, the ideology and the practical steps taken by Zionist leaders raised bitter objections from many Jewish leaders everywhere. Assimilated Jews considered Zionism dangerous due to its nationalistic claims which endangered the achievements of assimilation and emancipation. Orthodox Jews did not like the secular nature of Zionism and the fact that they forced the act of redemption, i.e. the return to Palestine, which is reserved only to God.

Zionism as a new type of initiation gained popularity and followers due to the changed circumstances of European Jewry. First of all, the influence of the Haskalah movement was present: rationalism, breaking with traditions and the spreading of secularism led to changes in politics. The shift to mass politics, taking up of new issues such as economics, civil rights, and so forth, and radicalization helped the unfolding of Zionism, and changed the structure of contemporary Jewish politics.<sup>77</sup>

When considering the role of the Zionist movement, it is crucial to mention that Jews living in Diaspora regarded themselves a people in exile and prayed regularly for being freed of their current existence.<sup>78</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century another factor came into the picture: modern, racially based anti-Semitism, which indicated the shortcomings of assimilation. The role of Jewish communities naturally changed due to the enlightened atmosphere and emancipation which broke their belief in their subordinated status; however non-Jewish population also realized the differences between them and the

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<sup>76</sup> A wave of pogroms broke out in 1881, after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II for which Jews were blamed. Another period when a series of pogroms occurred was 1903-1906, starting out from Kishinev and affecting 64 cities.

<sup>77</sup> Gitelman, "A Century of Jewish Politics," 3-4.

<sup>78</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *A modern cionizmus kialakulása* [The evolving of modern Zionism] (Budapest: Századvég, 1994), 11.

Jews not only on a religious level but also in the light of nationalism, where origin mattered, and which caused the exclusion of Jews from society in many cases.<sup>79</sup> The pressure of the nationalism of local population forced Jews to choose new types of identities. One of these was Zionism, which turned Jews to their historical heritage, their language and introduced self-consciousness.<sup>80</sup> As Zionism sought an answer to anti-Semitism and nationalism alike, it seemed to be a proper choice to all of those Jews who wanted to break with Diaspora-existence, and did not want to face persecution or simply wanted to help their brethren.

### ***2.3. The history of Zionism in Hungary***

#### **2.3.1. Magyar Cionista Szövetség [Hungarian Zionist Association]**

The Zionist idea could hardly find its way and followers in Hungary; and although the cause was supported by a number of people, it could not gain proper foothold before the First World War. Zionist circles and associations existed and worked, and some outstanding personalities made efforts to get more and more people involved.

The first Zionists came from multiethnic parts of Hungary: János Rónai from Balázsfalva,<sup>81</sup> Transylvania, and Sámuel Bettelheim from Pozsony. Both of these towns laid at the center of territories where the nationalistic movements of ethnicities were strong, and where Jews were considered the agents of Magyarization, which may explain why Jews living there turned to Zionism: on the one hand it meant escape from the situation to which they were forced by their Hungarian identity, on the other hand they must have been influenced by the aspirations of local nationalities to get autonomy.

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<sup>79</sup> Avineri, *A modern cionizmus kialakulása*, 20-21.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 22.

<sup>81</sup> Balázsfalva (Blaj, Blasendorf, Blußendref), town in Transylvania, political and cultural center of Romanians of Transylvania until the nineteenth century, Greek Catholic Episcopal center, today belongs to Romania.

By the end of the nineteenth century some of the shortcomings of assimilation could already be seen: racially based anti-Semitism appeared not only in certain scientific circles but also in politics; in Russia Jewish inhabitants suffered pogroms. Zionism offered a kind of solution to all these problems, as its basis was the assumption that Jews were a separate nation with dignity that was able to help its members by joining forces. Jewish nationalism promised cultural revival, the restoration of the Holy Land, autonomy, spiritual reawakening and the help of the persecuted. It fostered messianic hopes and pride, but meanwhile led to conflicting loyalties<sup>82</sup> as being a patriot in one's homeland and supporting the revival of Israel at the same time were considered to be in opposition.

In Hungary Jewish nationalistic ideas were discovered and embraced by János Rónai first. Rónai (1849-1919), a lawyer from Balázsfalva, was seriously engaged in the "Jewish Question:" he published an article, *A nacionalizmus és kozmopolitizmus különös tekintettel a zsidóság mai helyzetére* [Nationalism and cosmopolitanism with special attention to the contemporary status of Jewry] in 1875. He corresponded with Herzl even before the First Zionist Congress.<sup>83</sup> Rónai was the leader of the Hungarian committee of the First Zionist Congress, which consisted of seven, self-appointed members. He described the situation of the Jews in Hungary at the congress. As soon as Rónai returned from his trip in Basel, he was attacked by Jewish organs and questioned by delegates of the government, which shows how suspicious the Zionist movement may have seem to contemporaries.

Another significant leader of Hungarian Zionism was Sámuel Bettelheim, who remained a central personality until 1903 and in 1904 he took part in the world congress of the Mizrachim, the religious Zionists.<sup>84</sup> In October 1897 Bettelheim, after a group of Orthodox yeshiva students asked him, established Jagdil Torah in Pozsony. The members gathered

<sup>82</sup> Shmuel Almog, *Zionism and History* (Jerusalem: The Magness Press, 1987), 10-11.

<sup>83</sup> Alexander Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom története (1902-1948)* [The history of the Zionist movement of Hungary (1902-1948)] (Budapest: Bethlen téri Oneg Szabbát Klub, 2002) 48.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Haber, *Die Anfänge des Zionismus in Ungarn (1897-1904)* (Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2001) 23.

every Saturday to talk about the actual topics concerning Zionism.<sup>85</sup> Soon the group was re-named to “Ahavat Cion” (Love of Zion).

In the first years the Jagdil Torah was the focal point of the slowly evolving Hungarian movement. They sent an elected representative, Oszkár Marmorek to the Second Zionist Congress (Basel, 1898) and they chose Béla Österreichier as delegate for the third congress (Basel, 1899). The Zionists of Pozsony were actively involved in the movement and they also had the necessary support, as the rabbi of Pozsony gave his permission, along with the Orthodox rabbis of Nyitra,<sup>86</sup> Pápa<sup>87</sup> and Kolozsvár.<sup>88</sup> The Jagdil Torah received positive press in *Der Ungarische Israelit*, *Ungarische Wochenschrift* and *Jüdische Tageblatt*.<sup>89</sup> In the summer of 1900, when pogroms happened in Romania, the members helped their brethren there.<sup>90</sup>

The first Zionist associations, apart from the one in Pozsony, were founded in Nagyszeben, under the name “Czion Egylet” [Zion Association] on October 17, 1897;<sup>91</sup> and in Kolozsvár. These first major groups were followed by a number of smaller ones in Nyitra, Nagyszombat,<sup>92</sup> and Nagytapolcsány<sup>93</sup> (all of them in multiethnic territories of Hungary); by the time of the Second Zionist Congress, 32 local groups existed. The later leaders of the movement became involved from the beginning, and started their activity as central figures of their own groups: one of them was Niszon Kahan, who formed a student association in Beszterce.<sup>94</sup> This group was named “Ivria.” Soon Kolozsvár became the center of Zionist activity; however, after the energetic start the movement had to face a

<sup>85</sup> Haber, *Die Anfänge*, 38.

<sup>86</sup> Nyitra (Nitra, Neutra), Episcopal and cultural centre, today belongs to Slovakia.

<sup>87</sup> Pápa: educational center in county Veszprém.

<sup>88</sup> Kolozsvár (Cluj, Klausenburg) historical and cultural centre of Transylvania, today it belongs to Romania.

<sup>89</sup> Haber, *Die Anfänge*, 40-41.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 51.

<sup>91</sup> The Nagyszeben group was founded by Bettelheim. Schweitzer, „Miért nem kellett Herzl,” 53. and Haber, *Die Anfänge*, 41.

<sup>92</sup> Nagyszombat (Trnava, Tyrnau) metropolitan centre, today it belongs to Slovakia.

<sup>93</sup> Nagytapolcsány (Topolčany) today it belongs to Slovakia.

<sup>94</sup> Beszterce (Bistrița, Bistritz) today belongs to Romania.

serious problem: there were no such personalities who had good organizing skills, and who would have kept the leadership of the national movement in their hands.<sup>95</sup>

Bettelheim planned a congress in Budapest together with Herzl in order to found a central Zionist organization. Bettelheim thought that even if the Neologs did not want to join them, the Orthodox denomination would back their goal. Eventually the congress was organized by Marcel Hajdu, and the planned organization's name became "The Central Jewish Cultural and Charity Assembly of Hungary in Budapest."<sup>96</sup> It is doubtful who founded the central establishment of Hungarian Zionism and when. Attempts were made in several centers, but none of them lasted for much time, and none of them was capable of taking over the capital. In 1901 Gyula Gábel, Vilmos Kohn and Sámuel Reich also founded a Zionist association, from which Gábel seceded in March 1902 and created a new group. Bettelheim was one of the main characters who managed to keep his circle alive until 1904.<sup>97</sup> He took part at the Fourth Zionist Congress (London, 1900) and the Fifth Congress (1901, Basel).

The Hungarian Zionist delegation (Österreicher and Ármin Abrahamsohn) asked for the help of the board of the Zionist Congress in 1901, and a preparing committee got together in March 1902 in Pozsony, whose aim was to found the national Zionist organization. The leaders of this committee were János Rónai, Béla Österreicher, Ármin Abrahamsohn and Adolf Reichenthal. They traveled together to Basel in order to elect the leaders of the Ideiglenes Országos Bizottság [Temporary National Committee]. Rónai became the chairman, Österreicher his deputy and Bettelheim the actual president.<sup>98</sup>

On March 22, 1903 the First Zionist Congress of Hungary was opened in Pozsony with thirty delegates from all over the country. Their program consisted of two main points: first

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<sup>95</sup> Haber, *Die Anfänge*, 43.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>98</sup> Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom*, 50.

of all they accepted the program of Basel which aspired to create a safe home for homeless Jews in Palestine; and the second stated that they excluded direct political involvement; they did not want the Jews of Hungary to exist as a nationality, or to take over nationalistic views.<sup>99</sup> They only dealt with culture: language, religion, and history, and with humanitarian goals. The so called “Program of Pozsony” also assigned the twelve participants of the Sixth Zionist Congress, whose task was to work out a Hungarian platform. *Ungarische Wochenschrift* became the Zionists’ official organ. Bettelheim became the head of the organization, the vice-president Österreicher. The number of the shekel-payers grew from ca. 500 to 1200 in a few weeks after the first Hungarian congress.<sup>100</sup>

However, in spite of joining forces, a conflict emerged between Bettelheim and Rónai, which grew to an extent that Rónai resigned three months after the Sixth Zionist Congress (Basel, 1903). There was obviously a great tension between Rónai and Bettelheim both in their perception of religion, political views and in social experiences. They also did not sympathize with each other, and had personal reasons to end cooperation.<sup>101</sup>

The religious wing of Zionism by this time strengthened so much that its representatives, the Mizrachim called together a world congress in Pozsony on August 22, 1904. 78 Orthodox Jews took part in the gathering.<sup>102</sup>

The Magyar Cionista Szövetség [Hungarian Zionist Association] held its second congress on March 13, 1904 in Pozsony, with more than one-hundred participants. The Association had several problems: the government did not acknowledge them and the Jewish denominations of Budapest also obstructed their functioning. The third congress took place in Budapest, in 1905, with 37 participants. The leaders were still Bettelheim, Österreicher and Beregi and they re-assured the intention that they would not follow Jewish

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<sup>99</sup> Haber, *Die Anfänge*, 56.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 59.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 53.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 72.



nationalistic politics. The congress divided the territory of Hungary into ten districts; they took action on the legalization of the Association and elected seven delegates to the international congress.<sup>103</sup>

Only the fourth congress was capable of relocating the office of the Association to Budapest, in 1906. By this time the Zionist propaganda achieved to attract three thousand supporters, who bought shekels with which they helped the persecuted and around 200 associations arose in the territory of the country. In 1907 the annually held congress took place in Budapest. The congress had two main tasks: the system coordinating the local groups had to be developed, and coordinating positions had to be distributed to the first leaders who participated in the launching of Hungarian Zionism. The chairman of the Association became Österreicher; members of the Makkabea<sup>104</sup> took care of the Zionist newspapers, Niszon Kahan became responsible of propaganda,<sup>105</sup> Lipót Leibovits controlled the issues of the Mizrachim.

In June 1908 the sixth congress was held in the capital with 91 people showing up. It can be observed that throughout the history of the Magyar Cionista Szövetség, the leadership basically remained the same, only the titles changed: Béla Österreicher, Ármin Beregi, Sámuel Bettelheim, Lajos Dömény, Niszon Kahan.

The Zionist Association was attacked from different sides. The government repeatedly refused to acknowledge them, despite that Österreicher asked for audience from Gyula Andrássy, Minister of the Interior. Andrássy told him that he did not see the legitimacy of the movement. Österreicher desperately turned for help to David Wolffsohn,<sup>106</sup> who could achieve that the movement was not banned.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom*, 54.

<sup>104</sup> Zionist student association, see the next subchapter.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>106</sup> David Wolffsohn (1856-1914) Lithuanian Jewish businessman, prominent member of the Zionist movement and the second president of the Zionist Organization.

<sup>107</sup> Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom*, 57-58.

The first significant success the Zionists achieved was due to a memorandum written by Beregi and sent to all the members of the Parliament, the government, and the leaders of towns, which drew attention to the movement. The reactions did not hold off: the *Egyenlőség* immediately agitated against Wolffsohn and a thousand people came to the next national congress.<sup>108</sup>

In the end of the 1900s major transformations happened in Zionist circles: by the time of the ninth congress (1909) 138 local organizations existed in Hungary, which means that the Zionist Association had an extended network. New, ambitious leaders appeared, such as Viktor Jordán, who started his career in Makkabea. Bettelheim started a new Zionist organ in Pozsony, called *Pressburger Jüdische Zeitung* in German language. In 1911 Ármin Beregi became the new chairman of the Zionist Association (and remained until 1918). In 1911 three young Jews founded the Jewish scout association, the “Kadima.” In 1912 a Zionist secretariat was established in Budapest, whose first leader was József Schönfeld. Shmuel Jordán founded a kindergarten with Hebrew as first language, for the first time in Europe.<sup>109</sup> In 1909 the Hungarian Mizrachim opted out from the World Zionist Organization, and Lipót Leibovits was elected as their chairman. Another congress was organized for them in the same year, where the participants assigned their tasks: buying houses in Jerusalem for pious Jews, and helping the immigrants.<sup>110</sup>

All of these events stood in close connection with the happenings of the World Zionist Organization, and the Hungarian Zionists were quick to react to the ideological and political nuances that appeared on the international level.

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<sup>108</sup> Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom*, 58.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 61-62.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 60.

### 2.3.2. Makkabea

A different chapter opened up in the history of Hungarian Zionism when the student circle, Makkabea, was founded in Budapest in September 1903. Makkabea, getting its name from the Maccabees,<sup>111</sup> expressed pride and confidence, which was needed to Jews who propagated nationalistic-Zionist ideas which were excluded from most of the non-Jewish student groups. The Makkabea had 24 founding members, who later became leaders of the national movement: Ármin Beregi, Lajos Dömény, Mózes Bisseliches, Ármin Bokor and Niszon Kahan. All of them were university students living in Budapest, from various parts of Hungary. The launchers of the group were Niszon Kahan, who arrived to Budapest already with experiences, and Mózes Bisseliches who was invited by Herzl's deputy, Sámuel Krausz. Krausz was voted to be the first president of the group.

The Makkabea met weekly as a table and organized social events, such as their famous Chanukah-celebration in December 1903 in Hotel Royal, which attracted several hundred participants. The Makkabea had intellectual debates with other student associations, such as the "Galilei kör"<sup>112</sup> [Galilei circle]. The ideological standpoint of Makkabea was based on Herzl's political Zionism: they proudly promulgated the thought of state-founding and Jewish national existence, which, according to them, could provide shelter to Eastern European Jews. In this they followed the pattern of other Hungarian Zionists, stating that Hungarian Jews did not need such a protection.<sup>113</sup> The practical aims of Makkabea were to propagate the values of Jewish culture and to revive Jewish national pride and consciousness. They tried to increase the number of members, and organized youth associations, in which the ultimate goal was to prepare the next generation to the Zionist idea.

<sup>111</sup> Maccabees (BCE 164-63) a Jewish rebel army that took control of Judea and founded the Hasmonean dynasty, strengthened Jewish religion, expanded the boundaries of the Land of Israel.

<sup>112</sup> Galilei kör (1908-1919) an intellectual circle of free thinkers, whose aim was scientific research, defence of free thinking, helping poor students.

<sup>113</sup> Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom*, 52.

Members of the Makkabea took care of the propagation of Zionism by issuing newspapers: the most active member, Ármin Bokor and Lajos Dömény, edited the first one, called *Zsidó Néplap* [Jewish Popular Paper]. This social-literary weekly ceased after one year due to the absence of financial background, and was re-launched under the title *Zsidó Élet* [Jewish Life] in 1907.<sup>114</sup>

Makkabea also served as an example for later Zionist youth groups: in 1905 “Jehuda,” an association for young Jewish officials and merchants was organized, and “Ivria,” a circle for Jewish secondary school students. The Zionist women’s association was given the name “Deborah.” Another important group was the Vívó és Atlétika Club [Fencer and Athletic Club], which was launched by two Makkabea members, Lajos Dömény and Dávid Kohn in 1906, in the spirit of Nordau’s *Muskeljudentum*.<sup>115</sup> In the same year these Zionist groups merged into the Budapesti Cionista Kerületi Bizottság [Zionist Regional Commission of Budapest].<sup>116</sup>

The history of Makkabea intertwined with that of the Magyar Cionista Szövetség, as the first leaders of the student association joined the latter and were followed by those new young Zionists who grew up in the ideological milieu of the youth groups.

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<sup>114</sup> Emed, *A magyarországi cionista mozgalom*, 52.

<sup>115</sup> A term coined by Zionist leader Max Nordau, which expresses the corporeal and moral ideals to be achieved by the Jews in order to leave behind the old stereotype of the physically weak Jew.

<sup>116</sup> Haber, *Die Anfänge*, 69.

### 3. The Neolog Reaction to Zionism

The Neolog branch of Judaism appeared as a consequence of reform aspirations and the need to adapt Judaism to modern expectations. This need went hand in hand with the necessity to reform Jewish way of life and assimilate into majority society. In Hungary Neolog Jews assimilated linguistically and culturally as well: they adopted Hungarian language instead of German, which was widely used by Jews in the nineteenth century. They also embraced Hungarian culture, customs, which were recognized as the symbolic ingredients of Hungarian identity.<sup>117</sup> Judaism was thus reduced to a mere religion instead of the rich system of traditions and regulating rules that it used to be previously. Hungarian language was so well interiorized that it became a basic element of differentiation between assimilated Hungarian Jews and newly immigrated “alien” Jews, who spoke Yiddish.<sup>118</sup>

After the split between Orthodox and Neolog denominations in 1868, Neologs were the ones who promoted the cause of assimilation and modernization. For them being patriotic and faithful to the state was moral obligation, and this attitude naturally affected their relation to Zionism. Several anecdotes and stories exist about the first encounters of the representatives of Zionism and the Neolog community. One of them, probably the most peculiar, tells about Herzl’s meeting with his nephew, Jenő Heltai,<sup>119</sup> who, by that time was a popular, well-known author. As Heltai described,

<sup>117</sup> Vera Ránki, *The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1999), 56-57.

<sup>118</sup> György Bárány, “Magyar Jew or Jewish Magyar,” in *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe, 1918-1945*, ed. Béla Vágó et al. (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1974), 55.

<sup>119</sup> Jenő Heltai (1871-1957), poet, author and journalist. He was best known for his humorous, bohemian works. His oeuvre was acknowledged all over Europe. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, ed. Péter Ujvári (Budapest: Pallas, 1929) 357.

...suddenly Theodor stopped, grasped my arm, looked strongly into my eyes and said, "Listen well. You are my nephew; we rose from the same tribe. So I tell you: [...] I want to make the Jewish state! [...] You have to undertake to spread the idea in Hungary. You have to get the whole Hungarian Jewry for this movement. You will be my man, my commissioner; I will give free run of tools, even financial support. Take it!" "I do not undertake it!" I answered. "Why don't you undertake it?" "Why... because there is no feeling in me and in my heart, my mind that inspires me to undertake this task. I tell you honestly: I am not a Jew. I am a Hungarian."<sup>120</sup>

This quotation from Heltai's recollection is a precise description of the opposition of assimilated Jews and Zionism: the main subject of conflict was the question of nationality, as Heltai himself said in his last sentences. Assimilated Jews did not find being Hungarian compatible with being Jewish ethnically. Another specificity of their attitude is also emphasized by Heltai, namely the strong feeling of belonging to the Hungarian nation. After this conversation and his nephew's negative answer, Herzl said his famous prophecy about an age when "it will be rubbed in that you are not Hungarian. [...] But then it will be late!"<sup>121</sup>

Theodor Herzl had plans with the Jews of Hungary in his big jigsaw of the renewal of the Jewish state. He assigned them the role of "the Hussars of Judea, who can be excellent, champion horsemen."<sup>122</sup> Soon, however, he had to face that the Neologs would not support Zionism and first he acknowledged that the "Hungarian Zionism can only be red-white-green,"<sup>123</sup> still having hopes that he would find followers among them; later he called the Jewry of Hungary a "dry branch,"<sup>124</sup> referring to their attitude towards the movement and Jewish nationalism and to their adherence to the Hungarian state.

In 1903 Miksa Szabolcsi, editor of *Egyenlőség* [Equality] the most significant Neolog newspaper met Herzl. He told Herzl that "The Jew in Hungary is totally satisfied with being Jewish in terms of his religion. And if he is of Hungarian nationality, he cannot be of Jewish

<sup>120</sup> Gábor Schweitzer, "Miért nem kellett Herzl a magyar zsidóknak?" [Why did not the Hungarian Jews need Herzl?] in *Budapesti Negyed* [Budapest Quarter], 4 (1994), 45.

<sup>121</sup> Schweitzer, "Miért nem kellett Herzl," 45.

<sup>122</sup> Haya Harel, "Herzl and his Hungarian Friends," 125.

<sup>123</sup> Colors of the Hungarian national flag. Quotation from Schweitzer, "Miért nem kellett Herzl," 55.

<sup>124</sup> Patai, "Cionizmus," 19.

nationality.”<sup>125</sup> Herzl answered that Hungarians would not recognize Jews as Hungarians, referring to the assumed interaction that was needed for integration. Sámuel Kohn, the chief rabbi of the Neolog Israelite Congregation used even more radical words, when he made an official statement concerning Zionism, in which he claimed “I consider political Zionism, which wishes to create in Palestine a new Jew-state, sheer folly, a dangerous craze. In Hungary, Zionism ... will never recruit adherents.”<sup>126</sup>

And indeed, Kohn had an insight into the affairs of the Neolog communities, knowing how they saw Zionism but this statement is also normative for his denomination. Kohn’s opinion is mirrored by what Lajos Venetianer<sup>127</sup> wrote in 1922 about Zionism before the First World War: “But although Jewry gathered almost everywhere numerous around the flag of political Zionism, the movement was unable to gather ground in Hungary; until the sad ending of the world war and the mournful symptoms accompanying it, the idea did not spread beyond the narrow circle of passionate youths in our home.”<sup>128</sup>

### 3.1. *Egyenlőség*<sup>129</sup>

*Egyenlőség*, the most prominent Jewish newspaper of the discussed era was run by Neolog Jewish journalists. It was launched as a consequence of the Tiszaeszlár trial, its first issue was published on November 5, 1882, and at first the journal provided information on the trial on a daily basis. It ran until the end of 1938. *Egyenlőség* was published under the label “Social weekly,” and its editor was Miksa Szabolcsi since 1884.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, 344.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 341.

<sup>127</sup> Lajos Venetianer (1867-1922) rabbi of Újpest, historian, teacher. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 945.

<sup>128</sup> Lajos Venetianer, *A magyar zsidóság története* [The history of Hungarian Jewry] (Budapest: Fővárosi Nyomda Rt. 1922), 318.

<sup>129</sup> Sándor Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok és folyóiratok bibliográfiája 1847-1992*, [Bibliography of Hungarian Jewish newspapers and periodicals 1847-1992], (Budapest: MTA Judaisztikai Kutatócsoport, 1993), no. 18 (pps. 47-49), editorial office: Budapest, József tér 10.

<sup>130</sup> *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 213-214.

Miksa Szabolcsi (1857-1915), the editor and publisher of *Egyenlőség* as a child received religious education, and after a short period of teaching, became a journalist. The Tiszaeszlár trial brought him success, as he reported frequently about his experiences gained during the trial. These articles were published in *Pester Lloyd* and *Neue Freie Presse*, and with his revealing writings Szabolcsi helped in rolling up the case. During the three decades spent as the editor of *Egyenlőség*, his style and oeuvre left a distinctive mark on Hungarian Jewish journalism. He was a committed propagator of assimilation, stressing that the Jews of Hungary were a denomination and not an ethnic minority, popularized Hungarian sermon and the Magyarization of Jewish surnames. He fought for the official reception of Judaism, in which he succeeded when Judaism became a received religion in 1895. Szabolcsi also had significant role in discovering new talents for journalism and literature.<sup>131</sup> His leading articles always had a defining role in the issues of *Egyenlőség*, and formed common opinion.

Being the flagship of assimilation, *Egyenlőség* stood for the goals and intentions of the Neolog denomination. It is not surprising thus, that the journalists of the newspaper attacked Zionism even before the First Zionist Congress was organized. The first overheated articles appeared in the beginning of 1896. The main argument against the movement was that it endangered the social and political positions acquired by the Jews during the nineteenth century<sup>132</sup> by trying to initiate a Jewish national movement in Hungary.

Based on the articles published in *Egyenlőség*, the period between 1897 and 1914 can be divided into two sections: from 1897 roughly until 1904, the death of Herzl, the newspaper handled the issue with particular attention and intensity, dedicating several articles per month to the newly evolving movement. These writings were dealing not only with the international line of Zionism and the diplomatic and political steps Herzl took, but also with

<sup>131</sup> *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 818-819.

<sup>132</sup> Schweitzer, "Miért nem kellett Herzl," 47.



the unfolding movement in Hungary. From 1904 onwards the articles ebbed away, and soon the previously serious criticism and opposition gave place to other considerations concerning the humanitarian aims of the movement for instance.

From the rich collection of articles here I raised those that analyzed Zionism from an uncommon perspective, and those that were written by an illustrious author in order to see what brought notable Jewish persons to express their opinion on the movement. Generally the attitude of the articles towards Zionism reflected “official” Neolog opinion (see Kohn’s statement), which considered the ideology of Zionism treasonous and incompatible with Hungarian patriotism. Many of the authors emphasized that initiating Jewish ethnic politics is unacceptable, no matter what the ultimate goals of the politics are.

### **3.1.1. International Zionism versus the “Hungarians of the Jewish faith”**

The first lines about Herzl and his ideas were published among the small, colorful news on February 21, 1896. This article let the public know about Herzl’s book *Der Judenstaat* which was issued in Vienna. A short summary was also included, telling that Herzl’s aim was to create a Jewish colonizing company which would settle the Jews of the world in Palestine. The author added that “we are not the followers of the ideology which seems to be served by the book,”<sup>133</sup> pre-projecting the attitude that would be followed by the newspaper. One month later, when the first news arrived about the planned Zionist Congress, another short article appeared in the end of March, which labeled Zionism an “unattainable idea.”<sup>134</sup>

<sup>133</sup> *Egyenlőség*, February 21, 1896, vol. 15, issue 8. pp. 9.

<sup>134</sup> *Egyenlőség*, March 28, 1897, vol. 16, issue 13. pp. 10.

One of the first major articles that dealt extensively with Zionism was written by a well-known contemporary writer, Árpád Zempléni.<sup>135</sup> Although Zempléni was not Jewish, he was concerned with Jewish affairs and supported emancipation and assimilation. He used the term “Sionism” instead of Zionism in order to degrade the movement by not using its proper name. He acknowledged that Mount Zion awakes homesickness in many people, which was a common introducing line in articles about Zionism, and also the right that even “good patriots” may be enthusiastic about Palestine, and “may love the great minds lighting up there, just like we love Shakespeare besides our own authors.”<sup>136</sup>

However, Zempléni continues with his main objection:

Enthusiasm for the Holy Land does not require the ancient owners of this land, the Jews settling back there, because bitter disappointments, unpredictable consequences would hit them both there and here at home. [...] Jewry, as a nation, true, is homeless, but who would dare to tell to a Hungarian, French, English Jew that he is also homeless?<sup>137</sup>

Zempléni emphasized the role of Jews in European culture and the intertwined cultural and civilizational background of the European nations, together with the modern achievement of emancipation. According to this argumentation, Jewry belonged to European civilization and composed a part of it. As Zempléni explained, the “sionists” wanted to awaken Jewish national feeling, which existed for several centuries only “in the bitter feeling of persecution.” Thus he denied that Jewry was a separate ethnic group, the only bond between them was their pariah status, which can be traced back to their religious distinctiveness. Zempléni assumed that due to this situation, even the Jews themselves would not want to support the idea of the reconstruction of the ancient Jewish state.

<sup>135</sup> Árpád Zempléni (born as Árpád Imrey, 1865-1919), popular poet and translator at the end of the century. He held progressive ideas about democracy and supported Jewish emancipation. Data from: *A magyar irodalom története* [The history of Hungarian literature] vol. 4, ed. István Sótér (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965), 657.

<sup>136</sup> Árpád Zempléni, “A sionisták,” [The Sionists] *Egyenlőség*, May 9, 1897, vol. 16. issue 19. pp. 1.

<sup>137</sup> Zempléni, “A sionisták,” 2.

The article gives information about a delegate who was sent to Budapest in order to propagate the first congress, however, he had to leave in disappointment the next day, after the “leaders of the Jewry of the capital” told him that Jews here became Hungarian patriots and they did not want to emigrate, nor participate at a conference where dreams like this were discussed. “Every step like this would be ungrateful from them to the new home [Hungary]. They do not bear even the shadow of the suspicion that they are cosmopolitans or that they would like to lead Jewish national politics.”<sup>138</sup>

After declaring the patriotism and faithfulness of the Jews, Zempléni explained why they were twitted especially with Hungary. As he thought, the history of Hungary in itself meant enough suffering for the Jews who lived there, it was “not necessary to persecute the Jew specially, he suffered enough for his being Hungarian.”<sup>139</sup> This assumption ignores the fact that prior to the nineteenth century Jews were not considered Hungarians. The view of the two nationalities suffering together through centuries is a romantic notion, underpinning both the importance of Jews in Hungarian history and their right to belong to their host nation.

The opinion of Jews being a religious group instead of an ethnic minority appeared in other articles too. On July 18, 1897 another popular writer of the era, Ödön Gerő<sup>140</sup> also felt the need to express his opinion on the columns of *Egyenlőség*. He repeated Zempléni’s view by stating that

Jewry used to be a nation while its belief in God needed shelter. Then it became martyrdom. [...] The time of Jewish politics ceased, the historical mission completed, the national character became unnecessary. [...] Jewry had to become merely a religion, because no other content and task remained for it except for preserving that huge moral material that remained after the national function had ceased.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Zempléni, “A sionisták,” 2.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>140</sup> Ödön Gerő (1863-1939) writer, journalist. He worked for *Pesti Hírlap* [News of Pest], *Neues Pester Journal*, *Magyar Ujság* [Hungarian Newspaper], *Pester Lloyd*, and later founded *Élet* [Life]. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 310.

<sup>141</sup> Ödön Gerő, “Még egyszer a sionizmusról,” [Once more about Sionism] *Egyenlőség*, July 18, 1897, vol. 16. issue 29. pps. 1-2.

These sentences mirror the concept of assimilation and clearly describe contemporary notions concerning the role of Judaism. The romantic historical approach explained why “Jewishness” transformed into a religion, abandoning all other elements that had composed parts of it previously, such as culture, language, and so forth. With the “extinction of Jewish national feeling” it became possible for Jews to embrace Hungarian patriotism.<sup>142</sup> This is the main argument Gerő used in order to explain why Zionism had no place in the heart of Hungarian Jews. He called the Zionists “languorous people, gentlemen with decadent, modern minds,”<sup>143</sup> which insult presented the Zionist idea as an unattainable aim, and its propagators as people who had nothing better to do than to invent such an unnecessary movement.

The First Zionist Congress took place between the 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1897, in Basel. Immediately after he was informed about the course of events, Miksa Szabolcsi, the editor of *Egyenlőség* published a long article in which he took a stand against Zionism. His characteristic opinion defined the keynote of a series of later articles written both by him and other journalists. Szabolcsi attacked the Zionists and the congress with vitriolic and well-organized arguments, starting out with the mere existence of the congress: “They consulted about the fate of Jewry, without Jewry.”<sup>144</sup> Szabolcsi resented that the Hungarian representative who participated at the congress was not a real representative, chosen by the Jewish population. “Or does anyone know about it for example that Dr. János Rónai from Balázsfalva was delegated by the smallest district to report on our circumstances to the Basel congress?”<sup>145</sup>

This question seems to be valid in the light of the fact that most of the delegates of the congress were elected and sent there by Zionist societies from various countries. Rónai

<sup>142</sup> Gerő, “Még egyszer a sionizmusról,” 2.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>144</sup> Miksa Szabolcsi, “Álláspontunk a sionizmussal szemben,” [Our standpoint against Sionism] *Egyenlőség*, September 5, 1897, vol. 16. issue 36. pp. 1.

<sup>145</sup> Szabolcsi, “Álláspontunk,” 2.

participated voluntarily and this must have had been a weak point in the eyes of the Hungarian Jewish denominations. But Szabolcsi went further, and denied the legitimacy of the other representatives too: “The two hundred people, who appeared at the Basel conference, represented two hundred people, not more, nor less.” Thus he tried to minimize the role of the movement and also disputed the achievements of the conference.

In the rest of the article, Szabolcsi wrote in the name of “Hungarians of the Jewish faith,” stating that they were “horried especially at that kind of Sionism which came to domination at the Basel congress and which wants no smaller thing than awakening, and where it does not exist, creating the Jewish national idea.”<sup>146</sup> The author operated with the patriotism of Jews, arguing in the same way as Zempléni, and denying the possibility of them becoming a nationality. Szabolcsi used impetuous words to express his opinion concerning Zionism: he called it a “bemusement” abroad, “the ridiculous dream of a bunch of eager beavers,” and “high treason” in Hungary.<sup>147</sup>

When Szabolcsi came to the criticism of the Jewish state, he enumerated his arguments against it: “They have nothing for the foundation of the state. Neither the territory, nor the unifying factor, the necessary routine, the living language, least of all the power which would create it. There is nothing, only anti-Semitism, banished Jews and Herzl and Nordau.”<sup>148</sup> This harsh summary neglected and depreciated the humanitarian and cultural aims of Zionism and took into consideration exclusively the political ones. And although Szabolcsi disagreed with the goals of the congress, he did not suggest any kind of solution to the questions and problems raised there.

The editor finished his article with the statement that “we do not take the whole thing too seriously. The experiment is silly and sinful but not dangerous, as its success is

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<sup>146</sup> Szabolcsi, “Álláspontunk,” 2.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. 2-3.

impossible.”<sup>149</sup> Despite not taking it seriously and Szabolcsi being certain that the movement would stay isolated, the journal published articles often in order to “stigmatize it.” These words addressed not only the readers, but also the greater public: Jews and Gentiles alike, in order to prove the loyalty of Jewish citizens to the Hungarian state.

In the beginning of 1898 Szabolcsi turned to the opinion of the Orthodox Jews, and used the religious argument to add even more reasons why Zionism was unnecessary and sinful. According to this article,

the Almighty swore Israel [...] that until he lives among the nations, he will adapt to them, respect their laws, love their dwelling place and will not do anything to reconstruct his olden home, until God sends his Messiah, son of David to lead them back to Sion, re-created by the Almighty himself.<sup>150</sup>

The argumentation used against Zionism pointed out other problems of the ideology too. Lajos Palágyi<sup>151</sup> brought up the issue of state-foundation, questioning the legitimacy of “founding a home with stocks and membership fees,” establishment of a state was legitimate only with “bloody wars” which, as he stated, was the common way.<sup>152</sup> Even assuming that peaceful means may lead to the foundation of the new state in the modern era, Palágyi had moral problems with the initiation, which “*may not vindicate any open or secret sympathy*.”<sup>153</sup> Palágyi also used the romantic idea concerning the mission of a people, saying that until the Jews lived in their own state, they had such mission, and the new state would also need one. However, maintaining the mission of the ancient Jewish state by the new one would be useless; but choosing a different mission would mean that the Jewish state was not Jewish.<sup>154</sup> Palágyi also added practical notions, namely that the new state

<sup>149</sup> Szabolcsi, “Álláspontunk,” 2.

<sup>150</sup> Miksa Szabolcsi, “Igazolásul,” [As justification] *Egyenlőség*, January 16, 1898, vol. 17. issue 3. pp. 12.

<sup>151</sup> Lajos Palágyi (1866-1933), socialist poet, teacher in Hódmezővásárhely. Data from: *A magyar irodalom története* 667.

<sup>152</sup> Lajos Palágyi, „Az új honszerzőknek” [To the new home-founders] *Egyenlőség*, July 8, 1900, vol. 19. issue 27. pp. 1.

<sup>153</sup> Italicized by the author.

<sup>154</sup> Lajos Palágyi, „Az új honszerzőknek,” 2.

would not have inner or external power, nor support of any kind, and its inhabitants would speak a variety of languages, which would be similar to Babel.

The emergence of Zionism made Ernő Mezei,<sup>155</sup> one of the journalists of *Egyenlőség* curious even in 1903. He tried to go around the question and solve the mystery by searching for the origins of the movement both in Orthodoxy and in Neolog Judaism, which he obviously did not find there. He admitted that the phenomenon called Zionism had a remarkable impression on European Jewish life, and attracted some notable persons. Getting back Palestine for the Jews seemed to be a wonderful dream, redemption in Orthodox Judaism, which led many to the conclusion that it was an unattainable utopia.<sup>156</sup>

*Egyenlőség* kept its readers informed on every major event of international Zionism, starting with the first split between Herzl's followers, the Uganda plan,<sup>157</sup> and the death of Herzl. Then a quite long article appeared appreciating Herzl's role in literature and his skills as a leader. Just one year after Herzl's death, the Neolog denomination decided that they will demonstrate that Zionism could not monopolize the love for Eretz Israel, and thus they organized a trip to the Holy Land. This first journey was launched in 1905 and a series of articles followed it in *Egyenlőség* from Szabolcsi's pen, who enthusiastically painted the landscapes of Palestine to his readers. After the success of the first one, a second trip followed in 1911, and was also described during many weeks after the editor arrived home.

Let us now turn to an article written in 1908 to see how the attitude towards Zionism changed through the years. This anonymous article shows the same hostility towards the movement which can be observed in the first ones: "We were sworn enemies of state-founding Zionism from the beginning. We denied community with those who brought up

<sup>155</sup> Ernő Mezei (1851-1932) journalist, poet, member of the editorial of *Egyenlőség*. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 591.

<sup>156</sup> Ernő Mezei, „A cionizmus mint nemzeti eszme,” [Zionism as national idea] *Egyenlőség*, March 1, 1903, vol. 21. issue 9. Appendix, pp. 1.

<sup>157</sup> Uganda plan: getting a portion of British East Africa for the purposes of the new Jewish state. On the topic see for instance Miksa Szabolcsi, „A Bási fordulat,” [The turn in Basel] *Egyenlőség*, August 30, 1903, vol. 21. issue 35. pps. 1-2.

the question of Jewish nationalism and complicated the depressing troubles Jewry had with this unnecessary burden.”<sup>158</sup> The author of this article stressed that Jews were not capable of making a state as they did not have strength for it, or economic, political reasons to choose Zionism. This could be the summary of both the arguments Neologs used against Zionism and their overall opinion of the movement.

### 3.1.2. On Hungarian Zionism and humanitarian aims

After fighting the Zionist idea, the authors of *Egyenlőség* had to face the newly formed Hungarian Zionist groups, and they immediately criticized not only their members but also their existence. The first one to write about these groups was Adolf Soltész<sup>159</sup> at the end of October 1897. He emphasized the place where one of the groups was founded: Nagyszeben,<sup>160</sup> which was located in a multiethnic territory of the Hungarian Kingdom, in Transylvania. “Its prophet some kibitzer from Balázsfalva, its president a Jewish man from Királyföld,<sup>161</sup> who glorified the Saxons in his inaugural speech; the Saxon nationality that triumphantly resisted alien oppression.”<sup>162</sup> With this remark, the author linked the movements of the nationalities of Hungary with Zionism. The cynical adjectives he used to describe the leaders of the new group and the speech indicates the attitude of assimilated Jews towards the nationalistic aspirations of the minorities.

The battle of *Egyenlőség* against Zionism continued as a series of attacks against the first Zionist newspaper, *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, and its editor, Gyula Gábel; first in an

<sup>158</sup> „A politikai cionizmus kudarca,” [The failure of political Zionism] *Egyenlőség*, February 16, 1908, vol. 27. issue 7. pp. 7.

<sup>159</sup> Adolf Soltész (1868-1920), journalist who specialized in economical and industrial issues. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 795.

<sup>160</sup> Nagyszeben (Sibiu, Hermannstadt), cultural centre of the Saxons of Transylvania, today belongs to Romania.

<sup>161</sup> Királyföld, also known as Szászföld, is a historic region in between the rivers Nagy-Küküllő and Olt, the autonomous territory of the Saxons.

<sup>162</sup> Adolf Soltész, “Magyarországi cionizmus,” [Zionism in Hungary] *Egyenlőség*, October 31, 1897, vol. 16. issue 44. pp. 1.



article issued on the occasion of the Zionist convention in Budapest in 1899. The author, Mordechai Hajehudi brought up that Gábel used to be in contact with Romanians, possibly in connection with their nationalistic movement, then with the Status Quo Ante denomination, until he discovered Zionism. Hajehudi cynically wrote about the movement as a female, who is a stranger [i.e. not Hungarian], and who is the descendant of anti-Semitism, stating that Gábel was so in love with her that he did not consider who the father of his lover was.<sup>163</sup>

These attacks went so far that in the end of 1900 the representatives of the two journals went to court, where Szabolcsi was convicted for defamation against Gábel. The whole material of the trial was published in *Egyenlőség* on November 25.

In Hungary the Zionist movement followed especially the cultural and humanitarian lines of international Zionism. At first, Miksa Szabolcsi was accused most possibly by the Hungarian Zionists of obstructing the support of the persecuted Jews with his articles, which the reader may find out due to a remark in one of his articles: “How can thus a sane, not hostile person say that because I fight against an unattainable and apparently dangerous plan and I fight merely here in Hungary, from where they do not expect a contingent at all, that I obstruct changing the fate of the persecuted?”<sup>164</sup> He dedicated a whole article to make his arguments clear concerning humanitarian Zionism and tried to defend himself against accusations.

The humanitarian goals (i.e. helping the Jews of Eastern Europe) raised the attention of Ödön Gerő too, who wrote about it in a two-page long article in *Egyenlőség*. He put an equal sign between Zionism and humanitarian aims, and stated that the term “Zionism” itself caused confusion, as it referred to the Jewish national movement; however, Hungarian Zionists did not embrace these ideas. This way, according to Gerő, there was no need to

<sup>163</sup> Mordechai Hajehudi, “Czizionista gyűlés Budapesten,” [Zionist assembly in Budapest] *Egyenlőség*, October 15, 1899, vol. 18. issue 42. pp. 8.

<sup>164</sup> Miksa Szabolcsi, “Igazolásul,” [As justification], *Egyenlőség*, January 16, 1898, vol. 17. issue 3. pp. 12.

attack the Hungarian Zionists, as they were simply trying to help their oppressed brethren, which was “not a new invention, nor Zionism, but an old, humane aspiration.”<sup>165</sup> He also worried about the possible consequences of this misunderstanding. By simplifying the complexity of Zionism, Gerő’s aim was to bring it closer to the readers and to make the phenomenon more understandable.

In another article, which was published in 1910, humanitarianism was discussed again. The author was delighted by the development that Zionism got “sober” and tried to save Jewish culture, strengthen Jewish rights instead of focusing on state-making. This was a more acceptable aim for *Egyenlőség* too, and compatible with Hungarian patriotism.<sup>166</sup> The thoughts of Oppenheimer,<sup>167</sup> a Jewish sociologist were being introduced here: he distinguished between “western and eastern Jews” on the basis of their “self-consciousness” which was national and cultural in the case of Eastern Jews, who were aware of that their culture was as highly developed as (or even more developed than) that of their host nations. Meanwhile the western Jews had “tribal” consciousness, which derived from common origins, but had no other content as they took the culture of their host nations.<sup>168</sup> This twisted and highly ideological historical view stated that western Jewish culture did not flower because “Jewish culture could not develop in the ghettos.”<sup>169</sup>

“Official Zionism” took the thoughts of Oppenheimer, and, according to the author of the article, walked on a path that led to settlements in Palestine, but not to a new Jewish state. This was the “only way, on which sober Zionism may proceed with success, assigned” by the opinion of the journalists of *Egyenlőség*, who fought against the abuses of Zionism from the beginning. The author wrote about this “new” Zionism as if it was the result of the

<sup>165</sup> Ödön Gerő, “Magyar cionisták,” [Hungarian Zionists] *Egyenlőség*, June 25, 1899, vol. 18. issue 26. pp. 3.

<sup>166</sup> “A cionizmus józanodása,” [Zionism getting sober] *Egyenlőség*, April 3, 1910, vol. 29. issue 14. pp. 4.

<sup>167</sup> Franz Oppenheimer (1864-1943) German-Jewish sociologist and political economist.

<sup>168</sup> “A cionizmus józanodása,” 5.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

many articles published by *Egyenlőség*, and was glad that they would not have to fight against the movement any more.

After analyzing the articles of *Egyenlőség* concerning Zionism and the clashes between the journal and Hungarian Zionists, it becomes clear that the strongest accusation against Zionism was that it was not patriotic and that it would cause a Jewish nationalist movement in Hungary, which was unadmittable and also would have undermined the then seemingly successful “social contract” between the Hungarian state and its Jewish inhabitants. Romantic historical concepts and the contemporary notion of assimilation also played role when it came to building an ideology rejecting the Zionist idea. For the Neologs the only acceptable aspect of Zionism was helping the persecuted Eastern European Jews.

#### 4. The Orthodox Reaction to Zionism

The Orthodox branch of Judaism was followed by conservative, “faithful” Jews who refused to assimilate to Hungarian society in terms of culture and religion. In the Jewish population of Hungary they made up the group which supported patriotism, but still stuck to their traditions without modifications, as a decisive element of their culture, identity and lifestyle, and to the ancient form of Judaism, considering themselves as the only group which believed in the original faith, not accepting Neolog, reformed Judaism.<sup>170</sup> These aspirations became a force of cohesion among them. Besides keeping the old religion many of the Orthodox also spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue, and considered themselves Hungarians.<sup>171</sup> The Orthodox, conservative Jews had a strong connection to Mount Zion, and this relationship affected how they reacted to the Zionist movement.

The Orthodox attitude to Zionism was quite contradictory. Orthodox Jews considered the idea of Zion and the ancient fatherland, Israel to be sacred. It appeared in their prayers, songs and rituals, and the return to Zion was thought of as the ultimate goal of Jewry, which also meant redemption (from the Diaspora and also from dependence). They prayed for their return to Zion three times every day.<sup>172</sup> The central role of Zion was, however, a transcendent one, which depended entirely on the mercy of God: if He pleased, He could redeem His chosen nation but the Jews had only a passive role in this situation.

Not only Orthodox Jews held Zion as a symbol in honor, though. In the North Eastern parts of Hungary (Carpatho-Ruthenia and North Eastern Transylvania), where the majority

<sup>170</sup> Katz, “A végzetes szakadás,” 52.

<sup>171</sup> Patai “Cionizmus,” 19.

<sup>172</sup> Shlomo Avineri, *A modern cionizmus kialakulása*, 11-12.

of Jewish immigrants lived, Hasidism was quite strong. The rabbi of Munkács<sup>173</sup> and a prominent Hasidic leader, Hayim Elazar Shapira claimed that Zion itself was the focal point of the struggle between God and the evil forces.<sup>174</sup> This thought indicates the sacredness of this almost mythical place and demonstrates that it had nothing to do with secular aims. Moreover, engagement in any kind of secular efforts was considered a sin.<sup>175</sup>

The Orthodox and Hasid Jews of Hungary thus opposed the concept of a secular-induced aliya,<sup>176</sup> which was initiated by Herzl and his followers.<sup>177</sup> As Zionism was basically a political enterprise, and its ideology was planned to be acceptable to every Jew, the role of religion was neglected in it. This obviously led to the disapproval of the Hungarian Orthodox Jews. They were uncompromising in their anti-secularization stance.

Despite the general rejection of Zionism among Orthodox Jews, we can find examples of the opposite as well. In the journal *Múlt és Jövő* [Past and Future] an article was published by Adam S. Ferziger, who wrote about the journey of an Orthodox rabbi, Salamon Cvi Schück.<sup>178</sup> According to the article on March 10, 1905 the Neolog denomination organized a trip to Jerusalem, and Salamon Cvi Schück, the Orthodox rabbi of Karcag joined them on the ship. The goal of the trip was to prove that Zionists could not monopolize the love of Eretz Israel.<sup>179</sup>

During the trip Rabbi Schück wrote a diary, in which his attitude towards Zionism becomes clear. For example, when the ship docked in Cairo, the leader of the local Zionist organization called the visitors to join the movement and Schück answered him in a friendly manner that exhibited his affection for the Promised Land. He said: “Anyone who has eyes

<sup>173</sup> Munkács (Мукачеве, Mukačevo, Munkatsch) city in county Bereg, today belongs to Ukraine.

<sup>174</sup> Aviezer Ravitzky, “Munkács and Jerusalem,” in *Zionism and Religion*, eds. Shmuel Almog et al. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 67.

<sup>175</sup> Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, 337.

<sup>176</sup> Aliya: immigration of Jews to the land of Palestine, later Israel

<sup>177</sup> T. D. Kramer, *From Emancipation to Catastrophe* (Oxford: University Press of America, 2000), 27.

<sup>178</sup> Adam S. Ferziger, “A magyar ortodoxia és a cionizmus,” [Hungarian Orthodoxy and Zionism], in *Múlt és Jövő* [Past and Future], 4. (1993): 36-41.

<sup>179</sup> Ferziger, “A magyar ortodoxia,” 37.

to see and heart to feel, knows well that it is our duty to support those who are praying whole heartedly for the peace of Zion and Jerusalem. [...] I myself also promulgate [the idea] that Hevrat Cion is the strand which interweaves every member of the house of Israel with love.”<sup>180</sup>

When he cast his eyes on the mountains of Israel for the first time, he noted in his diary: “How can we expect God to show mercy on the people of Israel and rebuild Zion and Jerusalem, when the scattered Jewry does not return en masse?”<sup>181</sup> Rabbi Schück believed in the humanitarian aims of Zionism, which, he thought, would reunite Jewish people in Jerusalem. He was aware of the situation of Russian and Romanian Jews and thought that settlement in Palestine would be a solution to their problems. As he put it:

Is there such a man who can be unconcerned seeing the suffering of our Russian and Romanian brethren? They have no other place to escape than Zion. [...] The sparks of redemption have come through to us. [...] Who could resist happily offering a holy shekel for the purchasing of the land of Zion?<sup>182</sup>

These extracts show that the rabbi did not write his diary only to himself but rather he recorded his impressions for further use, perhaps for propagating certain aspects of the Zionist idea. He supported the practical aim of the movement: the settlement itself, but not their political enterprises. It is thus still debatable if Rabbi Schück can be considered a Zionist, as he emphasized only the religious aspects.

This one example of an Orthodox rabbi shows us that various attitudes existed to Zionism and there were indeed Orthodox Jews, who were touched by the idea. After the rooting of the movement in Hungary, some of them joined it. Yet the “official” opinion of the Orthodox denomination was the firm rejection of Zionism. Lipót Lipschitz, the president of the Ortodox Közponi Iroda [Orthodox Intermediary Office] stated: “They [the Orthodox Jews] too condemn this rash movement, which sins against both patriotism and religion. The

<sup>180</sup> Ferziger, “A magyar ortodoxia,” 38.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 39.

Magyars of the Jewish faith want to thrive here at home; they have not the slightest intention of founding a Jewish state in Palestine.”<sup>183</sup> Not long after the First Zionist Congress, one of the leaders of Orthodoxy hurried to ensure public opinion (and the state) about the loyalty of the Orthodox Jews to Hungary. This tactical step shows the urge to distance themselves from the movement and also the rising importance of Zionism.

In order to reconstruct the Orthodox “struggle” against Zionism in the almost twenty years between the First Zionist Congress and the beginning of the First World War, I used the newspapers of the Orthodox Jewish community of Budapest. During these years three main journals were published in Budapest: *Zsidó Híradó* [Jewish News], issued between 1891 and 1906, *Magyar Zsidó* [Hungarian Jew] published from 1908 until 1913 and *Hitőr* [Guardian of Faith] which appeared only for a few months in 1914.<sup>184</sup> In this chapter I am going to analyze the arguments used in the articles of the Orthodox journals and their approach to Zionism in order to see their development and their transformation. While the first two journals formatted a strong opinion against Zionism, the latter – due to the limited time period of its existence – did not dedicate any articles to the topic, and thus will not be discussed here.

#### 4.1. *Zsidó Híradó*<sup>185</sup>

The *Zsidó Híradó* [Jewish News] was published from March 12, 1891 until 1906. This weekly journal appeared on every Thursday under the label “Orthodox denominational and social weekly journal.” Its editor was Dániel Weisz, who hid behind the pseudonym

<sup>183</sup> Quoted in Patai, *The Jews of Hungary*, 341.

<sup>184</sup> Data from Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*

<sup>185</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 29 (pp. 58), editorial office: Budapest, Dorottya str. 6.

“Viador.” Weisz, being the chief secretary of the Orthodox Országos Iroda [National Orthodox Office] was an enthusiastic patron of Magyarization.<sup>186</sup>

This newspaper published several vitriolic articles about Zionism. The first of them appeared on June 10, 1897, when rumors about the Zionist Congress infiltrated into Hungarian Jewish circles. This article started with the statement that the silence of the editors concerning the movement was intentional (referring to other Jewish newspapers which had started publishing opinions right after the coming out of Herzl’s *The Jewish State*<sup>187</sup>). “We did not want to write about it as we considered and still consider this aspiration barren and ridiculous,”<sup>188</sup> wrote the author. Obscuring the weight of the Zionist movement could not be continued and despite this sentence, the published writing in itself shows that Zionism was not such a “ridiculous” enterprise as the article aimed to represent it. In this first article the anonymous writer confirms that although in every Jewish heart “an unquenchable desire burns for Zion” and all of them “dream about seeing that land at least once”, not one of them “raised the notion of the foundation of the Jewish state.”<sup>189</sup>

The next article considering Zionism could be called a summary of the Orthodox religious point of view. It was written by Ernő Osváth<sup>190</sup> and published on July 1, 1897. According to Osváth “the great turn can only occur if the steward, protector and punisher of Israel’s fate, the Almighty Himself gives impulse to the development of any action. But until that, Israel has only one obligation, to love the land which nourishes him...”<sup>191</sup> Later he went on condemning those who wanted to act against the will of God: “Evil lives in the hearts of those who want to extinguish the sacred feeling of affection to his [Israel’s] home from his heart and those who want to do with their weak human hands that work which was

<sup>186</sup> *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* [Hungarian Jewish Lexicon] 960.

<sup>187</sup> Published on February 14, 1896 in Leipzig.

<sup>188</sup> *Zsidó Híradó*, June 10, 1897, pp. 19.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.* 1.

<sup>190</sup> Ernő Osváth (born as Ezékiel Roth, 1877-1929) critic, writer; editor of *Nyugat* [West], the most significant literary periodical of the period between 1908 and 1929. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 675.

<sup>191</sup> Ernő Osváth, “A czionista mozgalom kudarcza,” [The failure of the Zionist movement], *Zsidó Híradó*, July 1, 1897, pp. 1.



reserved by the Almighty for Himself...”<sup>192</sup> He adds: “The fate which was assigned by the Almighty to Israel can not be changed by any artificial movement.”<sup>193</sup>

Besides referring to God and his plan with the people of Israel, Osváth added rational arguments against Zionism. First of all he called attention to the reaction of the anti-Semites:

All the Hungarian anti-Semitic parties welcomed the plan [i.e. that of the congress to be held in Munich] with great pleasure [...]. Even this welcoming of the anti-Semites could convince every calm thinker about the danger of the politics of Zionism. [...] On the other hand it is a pleasure to experience the accordance dominating the denominations, how loyally they dote upon the royal family...<sup>194</sup>

Osváth projected here the main arguments which appeared almost in every article which opposed Zionism. As it was well-known, just twenty years had passed since Istóczy's dangerous political initiations and fifteen since the Tiszaeszlár case. Anti-Semitism still lingered in the air and Hungarian Jews wanted to distance themselves from every enterprise which evoked the fancy of political anti-Semites. Osváth found the unity of the (otherwise constantly arguing) Jewish denominations gratifying – most probably this was the only point besides the disapproval of anti-Semitism in which they found a common ground. In the end of his article Osváth wrote: “the gentlemen who threw the slogan of Zionism into the world and who do not bother about Jewish public opinion have no right to allude to Jewry.”<sup>195</sup> This concluding remark finally condemns Zionism and its representatives.

Another practical issue is addressed in the article of Jakab Vértes, published shortly after Osváth's. As he put it: “And did the good gentlemen think about what kind of matter could stick together, solder to each other the members of Jewry currently scattered everywhere in the world?”<sup>196</sup> The only solution is, of course, religion. Religion, which was the force of cohesion throughout the centuries and which remained the medium between God and his

<sup>192</sup> Osváth, “A czionista mozgalom kudarcza” 1.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 2. also quoted in Gábor Schweitzer, “Miért nem kellett Herzl,” 50.

<sup>194</sup> Osváth, “A czionista mozgalom kudarcza” 1.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>196</sup> Jakab Vértes, „Jelek II. A cionizmus” [Sings II. Zionism] in *Zsidó Híradó*, August 19, 1897, pp. 2.

people for the Orthodox Jews. The author drew far-reaching conclusions from this and turned them against the Neologs (or “the main reformers”, as he called them). In his opinion the reformers finally realized that leaving behind religion was not a solution, that the reform failed, and that in the end anti-Semites still hated them just as much as they despised a religious, conservative rabbi. With this conclusion he interweaved Zionism and the reformist aspirations, or rather suggested that the Zionist movement could not have been launched, had the reformation of Judaism not taken place.

The author thus advocated that all Jewish movements should be rooted only in religion. In this case Vértess lumped together secular and Neolog/Reformed Jews as he thought that the former appeared as a consequence of the latter, in a process which led to more and more extreme forms of Judaism (or even to the denial of religion). “The foundation of the building of Jewry is religion, and those who want to restore this building by taking away that foundation are insane and hostile.”<sup>197</sup>

Later, in the article about the First Zionist Congress appeared the patriotic credo of Orthodox Jewry:

...we have to come to the conviction that it is a movement of which every just Jew has to shudder. They have to shudder of it because it is unjewish and unpatriotic! Or we should say simply unjewish as one of the most sacred duties of Jewry is patriotism. [...] Those who speak about a Jewish nation offend Jewry in the bottom of its soul in its patriotism!<sup>198</sup>

Here the incompatibility of Zionism and patriotism becomes clear: in the view of the author supporting the persecuted Eastern European Jews (which was an accepted humanitarian goal even for many Orthodox Jews) could not be separated from the assumption that Jewry is a separate nation and from the foundation of a common Jewish homeland where every European Jews were supposed to move.

<sup>197</sup> Vértess, “Jelek II.”, pp. 2. also quoted in also quoted in Schweitzer, “Miért nem kellett Herzl” 51.

<sup>198</sup> Memor, “A Baseli kongresszus” [The congress at Basel], *Zsidó Híradó*, September 9, 1897, pp. 2.

Sometimes, however, more favorable voices emerged on the pages of the journal. In September 1897 “Verus” wrote “Another word about Sionism.”<sup>199</sup> The author intentionally called Zionism “Sionism,” the term was also used by the Neolog *Egyenlőség* in order to refer to the original word (i.e. Mount of Sion) and thus to degrade the movement verbally. Verus interpreted the Zionist movement merely as a reaction to anti-Semitism, and as an objection against inhumanity. In this respect he even sympathized with those followers of the movement who were protesting against the persecution of their brethren.

Verus considered the awakening Jewish national pride as a phenomenon

showing that [Israel] is returning again to the path on which it can succeed, returning to the path of religion, which leads to greatness and glory! And if it follows this path, then the castles in the air conjured by Herzl and his companion will collapse spontaneously before its eyes.<sup>200</sup>

For a while the tensions around Zionism stilled, but before the third Zionist congress (Basel, August 15-18, 1899) the topic came to the surface again. The journal condemned those two Hungarian representatives who travelled to the congress in an anonymous article and mentioned that the Ministry of Interior asked the counties to send them information about local Zionist activity.<sup>201</sup> The official disquisition around Zionism caused the alienation of the Jewish population from it, and later led to the rather lengthy procedure of acknowledging the first Zionist groups officially, which actually took years for the state to complete.

In another article an author named “Marcus” accused Zionism of exploiting the misery of East European Jewry and “arguing, banqueting for the good of their brethren in need.”<sup>202</sup> Marcus also presented Zionism as a reaction to anti-Semitism and wrote that it would disappear as soon as the problems of Jewry ceased to be. In 1904 Viador (the editor) wrote about the world congress of the Mizrachim which was held in Pozsony (August 21-23,

<sup>199</sup> Verus, “Még egy szó a sionizmusról” [Another word about Sionism] *Zsidó Híradó*, September 16, 1897, pps. 1-2.

<sup>200</sup> Verus, “Még egy szó”, 2.

<sup>201</sup> “A harmadik cionista kongresszus” [The third Zionist congress] *Zsidó Híradó*, August 24, 1899, pp. 8.

<sup>202</sup> Marcus, “Levél Oroszországból” [Letter from Russia] *Zsidó Híradó*, March 8, 1900, pp. 4.

1904) and he repeatedly assured his readers that Zionism was a noxious ideology, labeling the religious Mizrachi movement with the same attributes as the Zionist (“undermines Jewish denominational feeling”, “enemy of the Jewish religion”, and so forth).<sup>203</sup>

#### 4.2. *Magyar Zsidó*<sup>204</sup>

The *Magyar Zsidó* [Hungarian Jew] was issued from April 1908 until September 30, 1913 with the same label as *Zsidó Híradó* (“Orthodox Jewish denominational and social periodical”). The *Magyar Zsidó* was issued twice a month and took over the role of *Zsidó Híradó*, which is not surprising since one of its editors was Jakab Gábel, who also edited the latter for a while. Gábel (1853-1918), who was a teacher in Ungvár<sup>205</sup> and Nagyvárad,<sup>206</sup> wrote schoolbooks, several articles about teaching and education and edited the *Biharmegyei Népinevelési Közlöny* [Bihar County Bulletin of Popular Education], as well as the two denominational journals mentioned previously and *Jüdisches Tageblatt*.<sup>207</sup>

The other editor of *Magyar Zsidó* was Lajos Hartstein, who formerly played a prominent role in the political life of Bereg County and took part in the governance of Jewish denominational politics on a state level. He was vice secretary of the Orthodox Országos Iroda until 1902 and stayed there later as an honorary leader. He remained the editor of *Magyar Zsidó* until its last issue. Hartstein was a strong, remarkable figure of Jewish Orthodoxy and received honorable recognition from the Minister of Culture for his work.<sup>208</sup> As a prominent member of the Jewish community, in *Magyar Zsidó* Hartstein found a

<sup>203</sup> Viador, “A czionista (»Mizrachi«) kongresszus” [The Zionist (»Mizrachi«) congress] *Zsidó Híradó*, June-July 1904, pps. 1-2.

<sup>204</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 75 (page 92), editorial office: Budapest, Eötvös str. 19.

<sup>205</sup> Ungvár (Ужгород, Ужгородъ, Ungwar) the regional centre of Carpatho-Ruthenia, today it belongs to Ukraine.

<sup>206</sup> Nagyvárad (Oradea, Großwardein) the seat of county Bihar. Today it belongs to Romania.

<sup>207</sup> *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 301.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.* 345.

medium through which his voice could be heard and which could represent the opinion of his denomination.

The newspaper of Gábel and Hartstein also took over the opinion of *Zsidó Híradó*. The overall picture of Zionism drawn by the journal was a quite negative one. Yet, after the first tensions surrounding the movement as a new phenomenon, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century the topic scarcely emerged. The *Magyar Zsidó* published three main articles about Zionism: two of them in 1908 and one in 1910.

The first article dealing with Zionism is a kind of “introduction,” taking position in the debate. Besides acknowledging the merits of the movement (namely that it turned the attention of many young Jews back to the problems of their ethnic group) the author, Sándor Gábel did not forget to state that “its errors incomparably surpass the dazzling, superficial results.”<sup>209</sup> The main problem was the irreligiousness of Zionism. Hungarian Orthodox Jews were constantly worried about the “deceived” Eastern European Jews, who became “the biggest imaginable atheists,” “wrested away from the Torah” by Zionism.<sup>210</sup> The journalist believed that the new movement could promise these Jews a solution to their problems which was simply irresistible and thus alienated them from religion.

The radical vocabulary of the article sometimes turns into a rather offensive attack, for instance in the case of the “national [i.e. Zionist] poets and writers,” who were stigmatized with the remark that there was not one of them who “would not desecrate the Sabbath publicly.”<sup>211</sup> The author did not differentiate between Jewry being an ethnic or a religious group. He criticized the anti-religious views of Zionism, yet among its advantages he enumerated – as mentioned above – its effect on those Jews who had turned away from Jewry, despite the fact that probably many of them were (and remained after joining the Zionist movement) irreligious.

<sup>209</sup> Sándor Gábel, “Kinövések...” [Lumps...] *Magyar Zsidó*, July 31, 1908, pp. 10.

<sup>210</sup> Gábel, “Kinövések...” pp. 10.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 10.

In the second half of the article, Gábel stated that these “conquered” Jews regarded Zionism their religion: “instead of our thirteen denominations there are the points of the Basel program; Tivadar Herzl’s *Altneuland* is their Bible.”<sup>212</sup> The question of religion had always been in the focus for the Orthodox: it was inseparable from Jewish lifestyle and culture in their opinion. In this case not only the problematic approach of Zionism to Judaism, but also the harmful influences of assimilation (i.e. reformation of the ancient religion, loosening up of the strict rules) came into the picture. The author doubted the validity of the premise that “the sole effective counterweight of assimilation is Zionism.”<sup>213</sup> Instead, according to Gábel the only counterweight could be religious Orthodoxy, which led back Jewish people to their original religion and lifestyle.

Finally Gábel concluded, “despite the condemning critique, I do not throw a stone on the handful of Hungarian Zionists, moreover, I am convinced that they strive in their best faith to popularize the pretty but false slogans of Zionism with their abilities, in which they will not succeed with the help of God.”<sup>214</sup> It is typical that below this article explicating such sharp judgment, the editors wrote that they “do not share [the author’s] views entirely,”<sup>215</sup> most probably because of its radical, offensive tone.

Still, on September 25 Jakab Gábel wrote an article in which he used almost the same terminology when considering Zionism. He showed his benevolence with the assumption that “Dr. Herzl, when launching the movement, considered his final goal to be leading that stratum of Jewry, which became unfaithful to the traditions of Jewry and the laws of the Torah, back to this basis of existence of Jewry.”<sup>216</sup> This statement, which was intended to be ironic, was followed by the same accusation which appeared in Sándor Gábel’s article,

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<sup>212</sup> Gábel, “Kinövések...” 11.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. 12.

<sup>215</sup> *Magyar Zsidó*, July 31, 1908, pp. 12.

<sup>216</sup> Jakab Gábel, “Czionizmus” [Zionism] *Magyar Zsidó*, September 25, 1908, pp. 3.

namely that “these individuals, who tread the sacred laws of Jewry, act as the advocates of the Jewish people [...]”<sup>217</sup>

Both of the articles represent the Zionist movement as an error, which will disappear as soon as its followers realize its vicious character and the impossibility of their aims. It may seem to the reader that the authors did not take into account that Zionism had existed for more than ten years by that time and had gathered more and more members and sympathizers, despite the internal debates. The controversy between the aforementioned viewpoint, namely that Zionism would disappear spontaneously and the aspiration of demonizing Zionism (which implicitly shows the fear of the popularity of the movement) indicates the inconsistency of these arguments. Jakab Gábel, in order to frighten away pious Jews from the movement went as far to state that “in the scope of Zionism those kind of people play roles as decisive factors, whose activity is oriented straight towards the extermination of faithful Jewry.”<sup>218</sup> Gábel did not spare the religious Mizrachi movement from critique either. Despite their positive attitude toward the ancient faith, the author concluded that “those who drift with these [i.e. the Zionists], forfeited their right to call themselves belonging to the Jewry which clings to its traditions.”<sup>219</sup>

In the last *Magyar Zsidó* article, which was written again by Sándor Gábel, the author demanded an account of the “outrages committed against Jewry in the Zionist chief-office”<sup>220</sup> in the name of the Orthodox community. The text is full of imperative sentences, for example the Mizrachi movement is called to “leave the camp of the morally blighted to its own conscience.”<sup>221</sup> Finally, Gábel degraded the whole Zionist movement as being based

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<sup>217</sup> Gábel, “Czionizmus”, 3.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>220</sup> Sándor Gábel, “Cionista kongresszus” [Zionist congress] *Magyar Zsidó*, January 20, 1910, pp. 6.

<sup>221</sup> Gábel, “Cionista kongresszus”, 7.

on an “endless humbug,” which is proved by the “pompousness, the total lack of honesty”<sup>222</sup> of its followers.

From the radicalization of the expressions used in this article the intensified anxiety of the Orthodox leaders can be seen. This time the editors did not note that they do not agree with the author. The attacks on Zionism were becoming more personal; however, none of the aforementioned articles dealt thoroughly with the Hungarian Zionist movement, nor did they condemn the Hungarian members. This is true to the articles of the *Zsidó Híradó* as well.

As a conclusion and summary I want to stress that despite the religious attitude to the idea of returning to Zion preceding emancipation and the Hungarian conservative religious leaders who stressed the necessity of Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel and thus had a determining impression on the Zionist movement, after 1897 the representatives of official Orthodoxy announced that the denomination discouraged Zionism. As the support of the movement grew and Hungarian Zionism gained more popularity, Orthodox journalists started to use more radical expressions, with which they not only attacked Zionism, but also tried to convince the members of their denomination that the movement was a sinful initiation, which would destroy religious Jewry.

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<sup>222</sup> Gábel, “Cionista kongresszus”, 7.



## 5. The Zionist Responses

### 5.1. Reaction of Zionists to denominational press

The Hungarian Zionist movement was supported by two main Jewish newspapers issued in Budapest and the members of the movement also published some journals which at least for a period of time emanated their ideology. As the movement had no state support, and it also lacked an extended social basis, it was quite rare that two or more journals were run at the same time. The leaders of Zionist circles often decided to take the responsibility and publish a newspaper, so depending on which group issued them, the journals mirrored various opinions.

The first papers to take up the case of Zionism were *A Jövő* [The Future] and *Ungarische Wochenschrift*. Originally neither of them was a Zionist journal but they let the floor to the writers of the movement, thus contributing to the spread of their ideas. The first real Zionist paper was *Zsidó Néplap* [Jewish Popular Paper], edited by Lajos Dömény and Ármin Bokor from Makkabea and published from 1904 for a year. Bokor took an active role in this task, as he edited another newspaper, *Zsidó Élet* [Jewish Life], which was not long-lived (1907). The official paper of the Hungarian Zionist Association was also initiated in 1907 under the title *Magyarországi Cionista Szervezet* [Hungarian Zionist Association]. It was published for 4 years. In 1908 Bettelheim started his own paper, entitled *Pressburger Jüdische Zeitung* which later became *Ungarische Jüdische Zeitung*. Last but not least, in 1911 *Múlt és Jövő* [Past and Future] appeared on the scene, representing cultural Zionism.

Here a compilation can be found selected in order to show the opinions and attitude of every journal; how they reacted to the attacks of Neolog and Orthodox newspapers. The

articles are in the chronological order of the issuing of the papers. The basis of selection was the relevance of argumentation, significance of the author and the mirroring of the movement's inner debates.

### 5.1.1. The first one to support Zionism

The first newspaper that became interested in the Zionist discourse was *Ungarische Wochenschrift*. The publication of *Ungarische Wochenschrift*<sup>223</sup> started on October 1, 1895, and it was maintained until January 1918. The editor of the weekly was Gyula Gábel, who actively took part in the movement. His journal wore the label “Organ für die socialen und religiösen Interessen des Judenthums,” so it tried to embrace the broadest topics in order to win as many readers as possible.

The *Ungarische Wochenschrift* took a stand for Zionism from the beginning. Several articles were published in order to gain publicity for the movement and also to explain its aims to the public. In 1899 Bernát Singer<sup>224</sup> wrote a series of articles in which he defended Zionism against the accusation that it was unpatriotic. The series ran under the title *A cionizmus a hazafiság szempontjából* [Zionism from the point of view of patriotism] and collected a range of arguments to prove that the two do not exclude each other.

In his first article, Singer placed Zionism into historical context, claiming that although anti-Semitism occurred only in cold feelings towards the Jews in Hungary, it took on the form of aggression in other countries, and also manifested itself in laws against the Jews. He claimed that it was necessary not to close one's eyes when his brethren were being persecuted:

<sup>223</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 33 (pps. 62-64). Editorial office: Budapest, Lajos u. 189.

<sup>224</sup> Bernát Singer (1868-1916) rabbi of Tapolca and Szabadka; his articles were published in most of the major contemporary Jewish newspapers. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 791.

Although we are devoted sons of a happier homeland, is it allowed to turn away from our unlucky brethren in faith, who experience anti-Semitism not only in the disaffection of feelings. Should not we leave behind every humane, noble feeling, if we denied our help and empathy from those who came into almost desperate situation because of their religion in other countries?<sup>225</sup>

Singer counted on the feelings and on the common sense of his readers and continued with the description of the circumstances of Russian Jews, above who “the sword of Damocles hangs,” as due to local laws they might be ordered to leave their homes at any point, “the homeland which they love even in their misery.”<sup>226</sup> The situation was similarly bad in Romania, where “the people as well as the government have plenty of rope to step up against them as »aliens«.”

Singer admitted that all of these atrocities did not have any effect on the Jews living in Hungary; however, they still could awake the attention of them. He found the aims of Zionism (founding a new state outside of Europe, where most of the European Jews would be settled) justified, which would put an end to the “Jewish Question.” His final question pointed out a contradiction: the leaders of Zionism could count on the goodwill of most of the European powers; still, the Jews themselves were against it.

The second article was published on April 28, one week after the first one. In this Singer touched upon the problem that was raised by Orthodox press: “One of the serious charges was that from religious point of view we should not advocate the idea of Zionism... How? Our religion would prohibit what was initiated and enthusiastically supported by conservative rabbis?”<sup>227</sup> Singer tried to rationalize the religious objections, and seek for a common basis which could be shared by all Jews. He referred to Judaism which taught that

<sup>225</sup> Bernát Singer, “Cionizmus a hazafiság szempontjából,” [Zionism from the point of view of patriotism] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, Appendix, April 21, 1899, vol. 5. issue 15. pp. 1.

<sup>226</sup> Singer, “Cionizmus,” 1.

<sup>227</sup> Bernát Singer, “A cionizmus a hazafiság szempontjából: okai, céljai, ellenségei és ezeknek az ellenvetései,” [Zionism from the point of view of patriotism: its reasons, aims, enemies and their objections] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, Appendix, April 28, 1899, vol. 5. issue 16. pp. 1.

easing others' suffering was an obligation: "our sacred and noble duty is not to disappoint our brethren when they need our help the most."<sup>228</sup>

The author questioned the legitimacy of Orthodox reasoning by investigating the elements of the Zionist idea: he found that neither the work of settlement was forbidden, nor the return to the Holy Land. The only way of getting back Palestine that was not allowed was by force. He subtly pushed aside the argument that with the coming of the Messiah redemption would lead Jews back to Eretz Israel by reminding of the argument's ancient origin and its cultural role through the centuries, which made it irrelevant from modern, political point of view. Here his important reasoning was that Zionists emphasized from the beginning that they "did not head Zionism because of the prophecies of prophets or for the materialization of any kind of messianic events, only because of the desolate status of Jewry."<sup>229</sup> Thus Zionism was separated from religion and its worldly goals won justification according to Singer.

The rabbi admitted that he would neither emigrate to Palestine, nor would he encourage any Jew in Hungary to do so, but "we want to make an effort so that those can go there whose staying in their current dwelling place was made impossible by special regulations on the one hand and economic and social oppression on the other hand."<sup>230</sup> It becomes clear that patriotism had nothing to do with Zionism according to him, and they were not opposing each other, so the Jews of Hungary did not need to defend themselves against such accusations as being unpatriotic.

The *Ungarische Wochenschrift* paid attention to bring out non-Jewish voices concerning Zionism: in June 1899 a Roman Catholic priest, Endre Csóri was asked to give opinion in the journal. Even the title refers to the main message of the article: *Cionizmus – emberszeretet* (Zionism – philanthropy). The starting point of the article is the appreciation

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<sup>228</sup> Singer, "A cionizmus," 1.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. 1.

of the Jewish people: their ancient roots and their moral, spiritual heritage. This heritage gave the legitimacy for them to still feel connected to their former land, where their ancestors were buried. Despite keeping their love for Zion, “they stick to the land on which they live, which they are always ready to protect with their blood, wealth and life.”<sup>231</sup>

Csóri, after dividing the feelings of patriotism and the longing for Eretz Israel moved to the usual argument used by most authors who tried to fend off the charge of Zionism being unpatriotic. He compared Zionism to Christian philanthropy, which was the strongest reason for its existence according to him. He finished his article by claiming “It cannot be a reason for scandal if a public but rightful home will be created for the ridden of the Jewish people.”<sup>232</sup>

The manifestation of Csóri brought forth various opinions. In the end of September Rónai himself wrote a longish article under the title “Félrevezetett philosemita” [Misled philo-Semite], in which he appreciated that the voices of Christian personalities are given space in Jewish newspapers, but at the same time he warned his associates not to wait for “Zolas, Picquarts, Endre Csórys and Árpád Zemplénis”<sup>233</sup> to work instead of the Jews when it came to their inner fights and defense of their standpoints. This warning went out not only to the Zionists, but also to the editors of denominational papers, referring to Zempléni’s article in *Egyenlőség*. Rónai stressed the danger of Christians “giving lessons to us on Jewish religious tradition” which might lead to them becoming ridiculous.<sup>234</sup>

After the introduction Rónai turned to Zempléni’s article and analyzed it, providing answer to his arguments at the same time. He took Zempléni’s article as mockery which made fun of saving the Jewish people from persecution calling it “dreams”. However, Rónai

<sup>231</sup> Endre Csóri, “Cionizmus – emberszeretet,” [Zionism – philanthropy] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, June 30, 1899, vol. 5. issue 29. pp. 1.

<sup>232</sup> Csóri, “Cionizmus – emberszeretet,” 2.

<sup>233</sup> János Rónai, “Félrevezetett philosemita,” [Misled philo-Semite] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, September 29, 1899, vol. 5. issue 36. pp. 3.

<sup>234</sup> Rónai, “Félrevezetett philosemita,” 3.

did not ascribe this assault to Zempléni, but to *Egyenlőség*, who “instigated” Zempléni to write the article. The writing continues with the criticism of Zempléni’s metaphor concerning Palestine as a touristic spectacle, which is “not more than sparkling emptiness, which, without the touch of criticism, cracks because of its own contradiction.”<sup>235</sup> Rónai’s counterargument was that Athens and Rome, to which Zempléni compared Palestine belonged to the Greek and Italian nations and states, thus Palestine also had to belong to a nation and a state. “And what harm would it cause to Christian »visitors« to see a small state organization or society in the Holy Land that consists of the fortunate conciliation of Eastern and Western civilization.”<sup>236</sup> Rónai here put great emphasis on the commitment of Jews to Palestine.

In the end of his article, besides assuring the public that Zionists did not want Hungarian Jews to emigrate, Rónai analyzed Zempléni’s worries concerning Jews leaving Europe, which, according to him might cause damage to European culture. Rónai sarcastically wrote:

So is the Jew really an indispensable ingredient of European culture? I also think in my vanity. But Mr. Z. should ask the 15 million inhabitants of our homeland, or no – ask only the Hungarian speaking part of it: which part of it shares his flattering opinion? Be calm, Mr. Z: those and that kind of our people, who are needed for European culture, are willing to stay in Europe for a long time.<sup>237</sup>

Rónai’s fight with *Egyenlőség* did not cease with answering Zempléni’s article. In 1902, after the Fifth Zionist Congress (Basel, 1901) he complained in the columns of *Ungarische Wochenschrift* that the Neolog journal gave account merely on the chairman’s lamenting that Hungarian Jews were unsympathetic to Zionism, but it silenced about the serious discussions of the congress.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>235</sup> Rónai, “Félrevezetett philosemita,” 4.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>238</sup> János Rónai, “Kinek kell pirulnia?” [Who needs to flush?] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, March 7, 1902, vol. 8. issue 7. pp. 2.

Among the several articles published in defense of Zionism, one called the attention to England, where “the best of our blood stand on the lead of this movement, whose patriotism not only cannot be doubted but they match Lord Chamberlain and Roseberry in patriotism.”<sup>239</sup> The author of the writing also pointed out that Zionism could not increase anti-Semitism since anti-Semitism existed even before the movement, for instance in the form of the Tiszaeszlár trial.<sup>240</sup>

It seems contradictory that the journalists of *Ungarische Wochenschrift* had to enumerate reasons why Zionism should be taken seriously even five years after the First Zionist Congress; however, the editor of the weekly published an article in April 1902 exactly with this purpose. Gábel referred to a writing in *Egyenlőség*, whose author, József Vészi parliamentary representative a few years ago had been supporting the movement, but seemingly changed his mind and called it a whim and a dangerous lie in *Egyenlőség*. Gábel argued that “it is not dangerous because it does not attack anyone, but assists and aids; and it is not a lie as it has a real basis in the warm feeling of the hearts and fervent desire of millions; the hearts of millions do not give a leap to lies.”<sup>241</sup>

This idealization of Zionism legitimized the movement as a common intention of crowds of Jews who lived under the oppression of East European states. Gábel raised the feeling of unity of Jews all over Europe not only in this question but also in the case of being a nationality: although Jews were true to their homeland, they still lived there as a minority and had to have connection with other groups of their own ethnicity, may they live thousand miles away.<sup>242</sup> Gábel stressed the following sentences with bold letters: “Jewry is thus not only a religious notion, not only a denomination, but a race. A race, that wants to live and last even after its thousand-year long suffering, anguish and road lit by the fire of

<sup>239</sup> Emil R. “A sionizmus,” [Sionism] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, January 24, 1902, vol. 8. issue 4. pps. 1-2.

<sup>240</sup> “A sionizmus,” 2.

<sup>241</sup> Gyula Gábel, “Cionizmus magyar földön,” [Zionism on Hungarian ground] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, April 18, 1902, vol. 8. issue 16. pp. 1.

<sup>242</sup> Gábel, “Cionizmus magyar földön,” 2.

the stake, drenched with a sea of tears.”<sup>243</sup> Gábel pushed aside the accusations that Zionism is unpatriotic as a misleading attempt of Vészi, and stressed the humanitarian aims of Zionism and also that Hungarian Zionists did not want to initiate nationality politics. Later in the same year Gábel dedicated another article to the “Hungarian Zionist credo,” according to which there were two Zions: one in the ancient homeland and one where the Jews lived; and the Zionists clung to both of them.<sup>244</sup>

The editors of *Ungarische Wochenschrift* also used the tactics of asking well-known personalities to express their opinion in the weekly, which could have a bigger impression on the readers due to their authority. In accordance with this aspiration Ármin Vámbéry<sup>245</sup> was requested to write an article, which he did in the form of a letter addressed to Gábel. Vámbéry supported Zionism openly and in his public letter he admitted this: “Zionism set a noble, philanthropist target in the help of persecuted, oppressed Jewish people who are deprived of every right. Because since I arrived home from Asia I have not known bigger and more hateful lump among the highly valued European cultures than anti-Semitism.”<sup>246</sup> Vámbéry continued with the appreciation of Zionist aims and with throwing back the attack of them being unpatriotic. “It is a commanding obligation of every Hungarian Jew to support a thing that places duty on the Hungarian Jew but does not count on direct profit [...].”<sup>247</sup>

Another illustrious member of Jewish society, József Kiss,<sup>248</sup> the poet also manifested his thoughts in 1902 in *Ungarische Wochenschrift*. He regarded those who opposed Zionism “stupid of good faith” or “heartless.” He added that the enemies of Zionism were

<sup>243</sup> Gábel, “Cionizmus magyar földön,” 2.

<sup>244</sup> Gyula Gábel, “Diadal,” [Victory] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, July 11, 1902, vol. 8. issue 27. pp. 2.

<sup>245</sup> Ármin Vámbéry (born as Wamberger Hermann, 1832-1913), orientalist, university teacher, member of the Magyar Tudományos Akadémia [Hungarian Academy of Sciences]; also known for his Oriental journeys. He was admittedly a Zionist. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 938.

<sup>246</sup> Ármin Vámbéry, letter, *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, May 30, 1902, vol. 8. issue 21. pp. 1.

<sup>247</sup> Vámbéry, letter, 1.

<sup>248</sup> József Kiss (1843-1921) famous contemporary poet, editor of *Képes Világ* and *A Hét* [The Week], who wrote both about Jewish and Hungarian national topics. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 483-484.



those non-Jews who want to push back the Jews softened and scared with the blame of unpatriotism into such conditions [deprived of rights] in their country and those Jews who, like Russian and Romanian rich Jews and the anti-Semitic Jewish eager-beavers of civilized countries, want to secure privileges for themselves on the cost of their brethren.”<sup>249</sup>

These harsh words depict the contemporary inner tensions of European Jewish society and the fears that still lived in some of them: the fear of anti-Semitism (even of Jewish anti-Semitism) and of being dispossessed of rights.

The last analyzed article was written by Vilmos Vázsonyi,<sup>250</sup> an influential Jewish politician. Vázsonyi depicted Zionism as a languorous, noble enterprise, which has incorrect aspirations and thus would never succeed. Its followers forgot that “who has wings should carry them under his coat.”<sup>251</sup> As a consequence Zionism suffered from the attacks of both Jews and anti-Semites. Vázsonyi saw quite clearly the position of the movement in contemporary society: “In Zionism two opposing elements of religious romanticism and modern enlightenment united specifically.”<sup>252</sup> Religious romanticism means in this case the longing for Zion, which still composed a part of Orthodox prayers, while enlightenment led to the unfolding Jewish nationalism.

Gyula Gábel, the editor of *Ungarische Wochenschrift* broke with mainstream Hungarian Zionist circles, which event appeared in the weekly too. He published an article, addressed to Ármin Bokor and Lajos Demény, in which he commanded them with strong expressions to avoid initiating a newspaper which would denigrate Hungarian Zionism by introducing it as a Jewish nationalistic political movement.<sup>253</sup> This last article was the starting point of a battle of words between two groups, which resulted in Gábel becoming insignificant in the movement.

<sup>249</sup> “Kiss József a cionizmusról,” [József Kiss on Zionism] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, June 20, 1902, vol. 8. issue 23-24. pp. 1.

<sup>250</sup> Vilmos Vázsonyi (born as Weiszfeld, 1868-1926), lawyer, politician, founder of Demokrata Kör [Democratic Circle], Minister of Justice of the Esterházy government and Minister of Franchise of the Wekerle government. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 942.

<sup>251</sup> Vilmos Vázsonyi, “Zsidó keresztetek,” [Jewish crusaders] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, November 21, 1902, vol. 8. issue 45-46. pp. 1.

<sup>252</sup> Vázsonyi, “Zsidó keresztetek,” 2.

<sup>253</sup> Gyula Gábel, “Vissza! Vissza,” [Back! Back!] *Ungarische Wochenschrift*, April 19, 1904, vol. 10. issue 18. pps. 1-3.

### 5.1.2. *A Jövő*<sup>254</sup>

*A Jövő* [The Future] was the other newspaper which (after the initial aversion) supported Zionism. The weekly was issued only for one and a half years, (January 1897 – June 1898) its editor was Gyula Weiszbürg.<sup>255</sup> In the “social and scientific denominational weekly” articles concerning Zionism were published frequently. Here a sample of articles written by Weiszbürg, János Rónai and Bernát Singer will be presented.

Weiszbürg’s first article that openly sided with Zionism was written in September 1897. At first the editor wanted his readers to get familiar with the idea, and addressed the issue from the point of view of its patriotism, mentioning logical arguments that brought the movement closer to his public. On the one hand he admitted that although it would have been easier not pay attention to Zionism, still he could not turn away from the fact that his brethren were dying outside Hungary. On the other hand he maintained that “we are not ready to change home from one day to another, like changing an uncomfortable coat to a more comfortable one [...]”.<sup>256</sup>

Weiszbürg felt empathy for the persecuted, who “suffer martyrdom for their faith not once but every day.” According to his account these Jews lived in misery due to their religion. For them the Jewish state could have been a solution. Setting up the new state did not mean that Hungarian Jews had to immigrate there. Moreover, as Weiszbürg argued, even if they did, was that a reason to call them unpatriotic? He pointed out that many people were proud of famous Hungarians living abroad; then the question could be raised: why should the Jews be called treasonous in a similar case? In the end of his article Weiszbürg

<sup>254</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 40 (pp. 68), editorial office: Budapest, Deák Ferenc square 6.

<sup>255</sup> Gyula Weiszbürg (1866-1919), rabbi and secretary of the Israelite denomination of Pest, editor of *A Jövő* and *Hitközségi Szemle* [Denominational Review].

<sup>256</sup> Gyula Weiszbürg, “A cionista törekvések,” [Zionist aspirations] *A Jövő*, September 10, 1897, vol. 1. issue 35. pp. 1.

mentioned that nothing could stop anti-Semitism: neither assimilation, nor patriotism, being rich or being poor, and in this he mirrored Herzl's ideas about Jew-hatred. Philanthropy was the only thing that was effective against it, according to him.<sup>257</sup>

The *A Jövő* served as the main forum for Rónai's circle to publish news concerning the Zionist movement and also to react to writings in denominational journals. The rabbi of Tapolca, Bernát Singer took up his pen and participated in the debate not only in *Ungarische Wochenschrift* but also in *A Jövő*. He maintained the judgment that aiding East European Jews was an obligation and not a sin of those who lived in better circumstances. The charge that Zionists were cosmopolitans, which in this case curiously meant the feeling of togetherness with other Jews, did not come up for the first time and Singer's reasoning aimed to turn this argument backwards: "you say that the Jewish feeling cannot spread beyond the Carpathians and we are not allowed to aspire to other than being satisfied with our own prosperity and tear up every fraternal bond that attaches us to world Jewry."<sup>258</sup> Besides blood that bound them together, Singer also pointed out that Palestine was a sacred place and location of pilgrimages not only for the Jews. This made the argument that Jews "should not love it" invalid. The conclusion of the article is that the affection for Zion would never cease in Jews, as "from the vow they made on the banks of Babylon we are not set free on the banks of the blonde Danube."<sup>259</sup>

The first writing published on János Rónai contained his speech given at the First Zionist Congress. Here he delineated the situation in Hungary: how Jews were treated, and perceived by non-Jews. The most intriguing parts of this speech are the following three sentences: in the first one he claimed that "the enemies of Hungarians found out the legend

<sup>257</sup> Weiszbürg, "A cionista törekvések," 2.

<sup>258</sup> Bernát Singer, "Ferdítések és ferdeségek," [Slantings and skewnesses] *A Jövő*, November 5, 1897, vol. 1. issue 43. pp. 3.

<sup>259</sup> Singer, „Ferdítések és ferdeségek,” 3.

that without the Jews Hungary would go bankrupt.”<sup>260</sup> This rumor coincided with the pressure put on Jews in the multiethnic territories of Hungary where they were considered to be the promoters of Magyarization. Obviously such an innuendo could lead to tensions between Hungarians and Jews, which also indicates the controversies of assimilation.

The second sentence that calls for attention is that “I think that there is no ground for active Zionism in Hungary.”<sup>261</sup> Rónai clearly saw the conditions in Hungary, and knew well that the striving for assimilation and Magyarization were too strong in many Jewish communities which meant a barrier in the way of Zionism. Finally, Rónai’s insight and the problems of the Jewish population of Hungary can be seen in the last sentence: “the streaming in of Russian and Polish Jews can be set back and the crowds of Jews living in the North Eastern part of our homeland can be removed successfully only with the instruments of Zionism.”<sup>262</sup> From these statements the reader may feel that there was a strong opposition between the newly immigrating Jews and those who lived in the country since at least one or two generations. It is unclear, whether Rónai wanted to get rid of “Russian and Polish Jews” and that was the main reason why he supported Zionism, or simply found humanitarian goals attracting.

Rónai, in his first article published in *A Jövő*, tried to find a standpoint acceptable to every Jewish denomination and community in Hungary. He referred to Sámuel Kohn chief rabbi’s words: “social Zionism has legitimacy,” but set up the condition that Jewish communities had to join their forces and act effectively for the sake of their brethren.<sup>263</sup> Rónai expected an extended social movement for helping persecuted Jews, collecting goods for them and keeping in touch with other organizations that worked for the same aims.

<sup>260</sup> “Rónai üdvözlése a kongresszus felé,” [Rónai’s greeting of the Congress] *A Jövő*, November 12, 1897, vol. 1. issue 44. pp. 4.

<sup>261</sup> “Rónai üdvözlése,” 4.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>263</sup> János Rónai, “Értsük meg egymást!” [Let us understand each other!] *A Jövő*, September 17, 1897, vol. 1. issue 36. pp. 1.

Rónai also answered the article of Adolf Soltész, who accused the Zionists of glorifying the Saxons as a “nationality that triumphantly resisted alien oppression.” Rónai wrote straightly that it was a lie, as “It is not true that I or any Hungarian Zionist considered the Saxons as oppressed, resisting alien oppression.”<sup>264</sup> Here Rónai tried to clarify the question of ethnic movements: obviously in his interpretation Zionist Jews did not support the dissatisfaction of other ethnicities, however, they considered cultural autonomy acceptable.<sup>265</sup>

### 5.1.3. Zionist newspapers

In the last section of this chapter articles from five major Zionist journals will be analyzed. The first of them, *Zsidó Néplap*<sup>266</sup> [Jewish Poplar Paper] was launched in April 1904; its editors were Lajos Dömény and Ármin Bokor. They could not maintain the journal for a long time; it ceased to exist in the next year, nevertheless it laid the foundation for later Zionist press.

The *Zsidó Néplap* advertised every Zionist event, provided domestic and foreign news, reported on newly founded Zionist groups, arranged central issues and bureaucracy, gave account on the achievements of the Zionist Association. Appeals to the readers were frequent, first of all in order to find new readers and followers, who could organize new Zionist groups.<sup>267</sup> As the editors were founders and members of Makkabea, they also published the terminal reports of the association.

The enlightening articles concerning Zionism published in *Zsidó Néplap* were written mainly by members of the Makkabea. They argued against the unpatriotic accusations and popularized the movement. In July 1904 Ábrahám Éber, for instance, claimed that

<sup>264</sup> János Rónai, “Hazaárulás?,” [High treason?] *A Jövő*, November 12, 1897, vol. 1. issue 44. pp. 2.

<sup>265</sup> Rónai, „Hazaárulás?,” 2.

<sup>266</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 59 (pp. 79), editorial office: Budapest, Erzsébet square 7.

<sup>267</sup> See for instance *Zsidó Néplap*, May 20, 1904, vol. 1. issue 4. pps. 10-11.

“Palestine is practically speaking uninhabited, so there is none to whom the plan of the Zionists may cause a headache. This deserted wilderness is inhabited by 200,000 people at the moment, approximately the half of them are Jews.”<sup>268</sup> This exaggeration of the numerical data of the local population<sup>269</sup> seems even more overwhelming when the reader faces the following statement in another article: the Zionists want “no more than six million hard-working, satisfied, free Jewish people living on that soil.”<sup>270</sup>

After Herzl’s death the Hungarian Zionists were forced to clear up misunderstandings concerning Herzl’s personality. They published a writing after the appearance of *Egyenlőség*’s appreciation of the Zionist leader. According to it Szabolcsi circulated untruth about Herzl when he stated that Herzl did not find the propagation of Zionism in Hungary desirable. The author confuted this charge with a letter that was written personally by Herzl saying that his report given to Szabolcsi was consciously adulterated. “In the end of the letter he encouraged the Hungarian leaders not to ascribe any significance to Szabolcsi’s article and keep up agitation tirelessly.”<sup>271</sup>

The battle between Zionists and Neologs did not end here. The journalists of *Zsidó Néplap* had to provide answers to later articles too. In some cases the authors used cynical phrases in order to ridicule their opponents. Dávid Ábrahám, for instance, started out his article with the following sentence: “Although we know it well that we do an unnecessary work, when we are dealing with this column-long set of words [published in *Egyenlőség*] compiled in a tricky way, but if we manage to show with what people cannot be disciplined

<sup>268</sup> Ábrahám Éber, “Cionizmus,” [Zionism] *Zsidó Néplap*, July 2, 1904, vol. 1. issue 3. pp. 8.

<sup>269</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century the number of the population of Palestine rose to 800.000 and besides the majority of Sunni Muslims, Bedouins, Christians and 85.000 Jews, lived there. Data from: Ruth Kark – Joseph B. Glass, “The Jews in Eretz-Israel/Palestine,” in *Israel: The First Hundred Years*, edited by Efraim Karsh (London: Frank Cass, 2000.) 77.

<sup>270</sup> “Mit akar hát a cionizmus?,” [What does Zionism want?] *Zsidó Néplap*, May 20, 1904, vol. 1. issue 4. pp. 1.

<sup>271</sup> “Szabolcsi igazságszerete,” [Szabolcsi’s love for justice] *Zsidó Néplap*, August 5, 1904, vol. 1. issue 15. pp. 8.

against Zionism, dealing with it will have some profit at least in a negative sense.”<sup>272</sup> The article then tried to separate Zionism from religion, claiming that faith in the Messiah cannot serve as an argument against the movement, as Zionism did not aim to offend religion. According to the author the two had nothing to do with each other.

The mission of *Zsidó Néplap* was taken over by *Zsidó Élet*,<sup>273</sup> [Jewish Life] which was also edited by Ármin Bokor. This paper was short-lived; it appeared only in 1907 as a “literary, social and economic weekly.” The *Zsidó Élet* was also maintained by Makkabea members Leó Singer and Niszon Kahan. They carried on with the work started in *Zsidó Néplap* by propagating Zionism and answering the accusations emerging in other denominational journals.

The “Zionist credo” concerning the two homelands appeared in one of the articles of the newspaper. It may deserve attention here, as the author used the parallel of the roles of Hungary and Palestine compared to mother and stepmother. The conclusion drawn from it is that the love for Palestine and Hungary do not exclude, but strengthen each other.<sup>274</sup> Thus those who were good patriots could become strong citizens in the planned new state.

*Zsidó Élet* was followed by a journal entitled *Magyarországi Cionista Szervezet*,<sup>275</sup> [Hungarian Zionist Association] which was the official monthly journal of the Hungarian movement. Its editor was Lajos Bató between 1907 and 1910. The journal joined the previous two in the tradition of confuting the charges of denominational papers. Obviously the most important enemy was *Egyenlőség*.

It is interesting to observe that even fourteen years after the First Zionist Congress, some Jewish journalists circulated false news concerning the movement, claiming that it had come to an end, which may be the consequence of the aspiration to weaken it. In April 1911

<sup>272</sup> Dávid Ábrahám, “A messiási hit – a cionizmus ellenérve,” [Messianic faith – the counterargument of Zionism] *Zsidó Néplap*, October 21, 1904, vol. 1. issue 26. pp. 1.

<sup>273</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 69 (pps. 85-86), editorial office: Budapest, Király street 1.

<sup>274</sup> “A kétféle hazafiság,” [Two kinds of patriotism] *Zsidó Élet*, May 10, 1907, vol. 1. issue 17. pp. 3.

<sup>275</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 70 (pps. 86-88), editorial office: Budapest, Arany János street 33.

József Schönfeld<sup>276</sup> published an article in which he stated that the letter to which the journalist of *Egyenlőség* referred as evidence to the movement's end was signed by Rabbi Jakob Meir, who was a Zionist leader and by the grand rabbi of Thessaloniki who had been ignored in the last local election because of his Zionist commitments.<sup>277</sup> This article shows that the debates around Zionism were still strong and that the still small and rather weak movement had to struggle with the giant *Egyenlőség* in order to gain more popularity.

Last but not least the cultural wing of Zionism was represented by *Múlt és Jövő*<sup>278</sup> [Past and Future], a monthly journal of eminent standards. *Múlt és Jövő*, the “Jewish literary, artistic, social and critical journal” was edited by poet József Patai.<sup>279</sup> Besides theoretical questions, practical issues concerning aiding missions and settlement were also touched upon in this journal. Patai tried to achieve the biggest publicity for Zionism, and his goal was that “Jewish self-consciousness of the Jewish intelligentsia must be developed with Jewish literature, arts and sciences, because only those can be conscious Jews, before whom Jewish knowledge is not alien [...]”<sup>280</sup> *Múlt és Jövő* became one of the most influential journals not only in Jewish circles, thus it also served as a good agent for Zionist propaganda.

All in all, despite the constant attacks of the Jewish denominations of Budapest and their newspapers, the members of the Hungarian Zionist movement persistently published their opinions and collected new members for their aims. Although Zionism remained weak in Hungary, it still existed and survived even the shock of the First World War.

<sup>276</sup> József Schönfeld lawyer, founder of Makkabea, translator of Herzl's *Judenstaat*, played an active role in the Hungarian Zionist movement.

<sup>277</sup> József Schönfeld, “Az »öreg« Egyenlőség felsülése,” [The mistake of »old« Egyenlőség] *Magyar Cionista Szövetség*, April 12, 1911, vol. 5. issue 7. pp. 110.

<sup>278</sup> Scheiber, *Magyar zsidó hírlapok*, no. 87 (pps. 100-102), editorial office: Budapest, Podmaniczky street 15.

<sup>279</sup> József Patai, writer and poet, teacher in Budapest. Founder of *Magyar Zsidó Könyvtár* [Hungarian Jewish Library], wrote for *Egyenlőség*. Data from: *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon*, 685.

<sup>280</sup> József Patai, „Belső és külső egység,” [Inner and external unity] *Múlt és Jövő*, June, 1912, vol. 2. issue 6. pp. 228.



## Conclusion

In Hungary Jewish population lived through a prospering period from the second half of the nineteenth century. They received legal rights, participated in the everyday life of the Hungarian nation and the liberal atmosphere facilitated their prosperity. Tolerance and being able to take part in intellectual and economic activities arouse the feeling of safety and belonging to the host nation. Assimilationist tendencies remained strong despite the first signs of racial anti-Semitism, which remained insignificant until the end of the First World War. It is not surprising thus that Jews living in Hungary were loyal to the state and many of them Magyarized in their language and culture.

The main aim of Zionism was the re-foundation of Israel in the territory of Palestine in order to provide shelter for those Jews who were persecuted or whose legal rights were restricted. The final goal was, however, the gathering of every Jew living in Diaspora and achieving political autonomy. This seemed to be an impossible undertaking and also a ridiculous dream in the eyes of most of the Jews living in Hungary. They saw no real basis for the claims of the Zionists, and no possibility to the foundation of a new state. Besides, exchanging a country where they were able to live in modern, comfortable circumstances and where they could finally enjoy the fruit of their struggle for emancipation to a territory where they would have had to build out civilization showed no perspective to the Jews. The prayers and vows of the Orthodox Jews about returning to Jerusalem were only symbolic and had merely cultural, but no practical significance. Moreover, many Jews hurried to prove their faithful patriotism to the state when Zionism first appeared.

The aforementioned reasons were complemented with the Orthodox claim that redemption was reserved exclusively to God and no human beings could initiate it. Both the

Orthodox and the Neologs stated that Zionism and patriotism towards the Hungarian state excluded each other, as a person could not be loyal to both Jerusalem and Hungary at the same time. The great emphasis laid upon the Hungarian homeland and loyalty to the Hungarian state shows how Jewish identity transformed during the nineteenth century: Jewish group consciousness shifted to Hungarian nationalism, and assimilation, integration into the host society became the most important missions and expectations.

The first Zionists of Hungary came from multiethnic parts of the country, which phenomenon can be explained with the pressure put on them by local minorities whose national movements had just started. Due to identification with the Hungarian cause and hostility caused by this, Jews who lived in these territories were more receptive towards Zionism. However, it took a long time for the movement to spread in the country, which process was set back by its shortcomings: there was no strong, charismatic leader who would take leadership into his hands, and the first Zionist groups were dispersed throughout Hungary, lacking a firm center.

The followers of Zionism had to face the attacks of Jewish denominations as soon as they declared their ideologies for the first time. They had to fight back the accusations of being unpatriotic, being unfaithful to the Hungarian state, trying to take over the role of God, and chasing unobtainable dreams. Due to the constant fight the Zionists were forced to re-identify themselves and their goals constantly, which led to the support of humanitarianism, helping the persecuted and abandonment of political goals. Aiding the Jews of Russia and Romania was accepted even by the previously hostile Neolog and Orthodox denominations of Budapest.

The discourse that took place between Orthodox, Neolog and Zionist press indicates first of all the vivid cultural life of Budapest Jewry, and the readiness of Jewish denominations to express their opinions openly, which is also a sign of reliance on the host society. On the

other hand all three participant groups showed a firm loyalty towards the Hungarian state and this loyalty was accompanied by patriotic feelings. The assimilationist contract was kept by the Jews, which is the main reason why the political aims of Zionism were abandoned even by Hungarian Zionists.

The Zionist movement slowly took its place in the Hungarian Jewish cultural and political field; however, it could not collect many followers due to the social and political status of the Jewish population in Hungary. Nevertheless, this situation changed after the watershed of the First World War, and the next period brought about such changes that not only assisted but necessitated the existence of Zionism in Hungary.

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