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# The Social Integration of Refugees from the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in the United States (Experiences of Ethnographic Field Research)

I began my research in the United States in 2006, and have returned regularly since then to carry out ethnographic fieldwork. My research focuses on the Hungarian communities of the East Coast and the Midwest,<sup>1</sup> starting from the great wave of emigration at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It therefore covers the attitude of later arrivals, such as the 56-ers,<sup>2</sup> towards the first and second generation of Hungarian émigrés, who arrived before World War I. In the course of oral history collection and in-depth interviews, I endeavour to address each generation, which involves an examination of the living environment and everyday lives (clothing, diet etc.) of the research subjects through the study of available family documents and photographs.<sup>3</sup> When discussing the American integration of Hungarian 56-ers in the

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1 Misleadingly, 'American Midwest' refers to the fourteen states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin) west of the East Coast states. Thus, one should not look for them in the western part of America.

2 Political refugees who left Hungary in the aftermath of the suppressed anti-Soviet uprising in Hungary in October-November of 1956.

3 My first defining experience with Hungarian Americans was in 1999, when I spent six months with my family in one of the largest and most robust Hungarian communities in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Between 2006 and 2009, I spent about two and a half years doing research in the Midwest through the HAESF (Hungarian-American Enterprise Scholarship Fund). As a research fellow at the University of Indiana in Bloomington, I conducted extensive fieldwork (primarily in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and West Virginia). Between 2012 and 2015, I returned on several occasions to do research as a visiting scholar, among others at Vassar College in New York State (funded by the Klebersberg scholarship), studying the Hungarian communities of the East Coast. Of course, in addition to personal history, history from below, and oral history methods, and alongside library research, I also studied the materials of important Hungarian American archives. I spent months in the archives of the Bethlen Communities (Ligonier, Pennsylvania), the most important institution of the Hungarian American Reformed Church, and in the largest Hungarian archive, the Hungarian Heritage Center (New Brunswick, New Jersey).

present study, I try to make the model-type phenomena more tangible through the use of concrete, personal examples.<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, more than 1.5 million people claim to be Hungarian (as well), according to the latest census data.<sup>5</sup> It is worth briefly reviewing the main waves of emigration from Hungary to America, as well as the social background of immigration waves and the motivations for migration. As the majority of the 1956 refugees – more than 40000 of the 200000 Hungarians – settled in the United States, it is also important to outline the history of Hungarian immigration from the perspective of the recipient country.

In the decades preceding World War I, around 650000 to 700000 emigrants<sup>6</sup> of Hungarian nationality made up the first major wave of migration to America (Puskás 1981, 1984; Várdy 1985: 21), settling mainly in the Midwest and on the East Coast.<sup>7</sup> The earliest settlement locations – from the last two decades of the nineteenth century – were primarily coal-mining areas (Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia etc.), where the settlers worked at isolated mining sites (known as “pléz” in American-Hungarian usage – Wenks–Lauck 1913: 70). At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, “Little Hungary” districts emerged in the big cities of north-east America, such as Burnside in Chicago, Delray in Detroit, Hazelwood in Pittsburgh, and the largest of them, the Buckeye neighbourhood in Cleveland.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Hungarian workers’ colonies, numbering thousands of inhabitants, were established around the huge factories in several smaller industrial cities (McKeesport, Johnstown, Lorain, Youngstown, Akron, Uniontown etc.) (Wenks–Lauck 1913: 73–75). Members of the first Hungarian emigrant generation, with their peasant roots – comprising mostly landless farm labourers and small landowners – formed ethnic colonies in both the mining areas and urban

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4 There were initiatives in Hungarian American communities to collect data with the oral history method and through personal life histories on how the immigrants experienced the historical cataclysms and forced culture change caused by immigration. The Hungarian Communion of Friends recorded personal stories in the 1970s during their ITT-OTT meetings. In a series called Witnesses to their Times, the Bessenyei Hungarian Alumni Association asked people to give talks about their own histories. (Some of these have been published in a book.) The Cleveland Regős Scouts must also be mentioned here, who conducted personal life course interviews in and around Cleveland. The most significant material regarding Fifty-Sixers, however, comes from the interviews which on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 1956, was digitized in 2006 by the Open Society Archives as part of the Columbia University Research Project on Hungary.

5 U. S. Census Bureau: <http://factfinder.census.gov> (link is external) (2015.04.04) A very important feature of the American census is that multiple identities can be reported. One can select a total of four ethnic affiliations, i.e., the same number as one’s grandparents. Thus, about one and a half million people find it important today to account for their Hungarian origins.

6 The wave of emigration at the turn of the century was a common phenomenon in southern and eastern Europe. In the five decades preceding World War I, 25 million Europeans migrated to America, including some 2 million Hungarian citizens (Jones 1992: 361, Brownstone–Franck–Brownstone 1979: 4–5).

7 In 1922, 427000 of the 474000 Hungarians lived in the north-eastern states of the U.S., most of them in New York (95400), Ohio (88000), and Pennsylvania (86000) (Souders 1922: 55, Várdy 2000: 244).

8 For the settlement types of Hungarian immigrants, see Várdy–Várdy Huszár 2005: 195–205.

industrial districts. Everyday use of their native language and daily social interactions took place in a relatively homogeneous Hungarian environment (Balogh 2008: 12). (A Hungarian shop in the Buckeye district of Cleveland displayed the advert: “We also speak English!”)<sup>9</sup>

Another important and significant wave of migration from Hungary to the United States was the so-called *dipi* (“DP”) migration,<sup>10</sup> following World War II. The term was coined from the abbreviation of “displaced person”, referring to those – overwhelmingly political – emigrants who left their country after World War II, including around 110000 Hungarians who fled to America. However, the mass of people collectively referred to as “DPs” was far from homogeneous, while various strata were also to be distinguished in the American recipient community. There was opposition between those who left Hungary in 1945, and the groups that arrived in 1947. The Americans themselves considered the former group to be guilty of war crimes, and the latter group as one that had undergone a process of democratisation but had left before the Communist takeover in 1948. This kind of severe judgment was delivered mainly against the political and diplomatic strata: the 45-ers tended to be distrusted, while the 47-ers received a warmer welcome. According to the 45-ers “Any honest, decent Hungarian fled from the Soviets” (Várdy 2000: 458–462). Nevertheless, the “DPs” were typically intellectuals, state officials, diplomats, gendarmes, military officers, aristocrats etc., whose knowledge was difficult to “convert” into American society, while most of them were middle-aged, educated, and family-minded. These erudite, intellectual “DPs” found it hard to fit into the context of the simple, “old Americans” of peasant origin. In several of the recorded recollections, members of the peasant-rooted Hungarian communities who had become steelworkers or miners in the United States, stated: “Well, those gentlemen in their fine clothes followed us here, but we came here to get away from them.”<sup>11</sup>

The third distinct wave of emigration comprised the 1956 refugees, who likewise came to America from very different backgrounds and motivated by very different reasons from the former groups of emigrants. The different waves of emigrating Hungarians held (and shaped) a different image of the Old Country, came from different backgrounds, and therefore represented different values and attitudes. The following classic example is often mentioned by American Hungarians: the first wave of emigrants left an emperor behind in the Monarchy, and paid in crowns when they left. Those who left at the end of the Horthy era, or in the Szálasi period, left a kingdom with an admiral, and paid in pengő. The 1956 refugees, and later dissidents, left behind the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the

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9 The here presented information is the product of the fieldwork of the author.

10 Despite the fact that in Hungarian parlance the abbreviation “DP” is ambiguous, I am not averse to using it, because in the history of Hungarian emigration and in works dealing with it, it is a clear and precise term “conventionally” used in historiography and social sciences to refer to the post-World War II wave of refugees.

11 The here presented information is the product of the fieldwork of the author.

People's Republic of Hungary, and paid in forints.<sup>12</sup> (This summary in a nutshell of the changes taking place in the Old Country could be carried on into the period following the democratic changes in 1990.)

The universal model, according to which the identity construction of an individual belonging to a particular minority<sup>13</sup> can be placed within a triple-axis system of coordinates defined by the individual's relation firstly to the mother country (the Old Country), secondly to the host country, and thirdly to the narrower community, is entirely applicable in the case of the Hungarian Americans. It is worth exploring the question of the identity of the 1956 Hungarian refugees via this system of coordinates. The Hungarian immigrants of 1956 were the last great wave of "new blood" for the Hungarian American community as a whole. Although many dissidents left the country for America at a later stage, in the decades prior to the change of regime and after 1990, including both emigrants from Hungary and Hungarians living beyond the country's borders, this was more of a "seepage" than a wave. Following the 1956 Revolution, 38000 people had arrived in the United States by 1957, from the total of around 200000 refugees. According to some calculations, by the end of 1960 the number of 56-ers settling in the US may have reached around 47000. The appearance of the 56-ers further segmented and nuanced the already polarised Hungarian American community that consisted, at the time, of the "DPs" and the second, or even third, generation of "old Hungarian Americans". A minority of the 1956 immigrants had an upper- or intermediate-level education: they were typically intellectuals with degrees in the sciences or qualifications from technical schools, although the majority were skilled and unskilled industrial workers. The proportion of single people (mostly unmarried, young people) among the refugees is perhaps slightly exaggerated – according to some estimates it exceeded 80%. However, there is no doubt that the majority of the refugees were single, which in itself largely influenced the integration processes, from social mobility to marriage preferences.

The aim of the present study is not to focus on emigration to the United States in the post-revolution period, or following the change of regime in 1990, nor will it present the history of the 1956 emigrations. The various phases in the history of the flight of the 56-ers (life in the refugee camps in Austria and Germany, applications, permits, reception, journeys by air, arrival, accommodation in the Camp Kilmer Refugee Camp in New Jersey, registration, sponsorship scheme etc.) have been abundantly documented in lecture-based articles.

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12 I first heard this pithy phrasing, in the form I present here, from a retired Calvinist pastor (Balogh 2010: 153), but since then I have had the opportunity to hear it in different versions, its origin always attributed to different people. Thus, it is a true "textual folklore" product. For similar phenomena, see Jalso 2004.

13 The schema of factors shaping minority identity construction can be linked to Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker 1996), but even without the formulation of the model-making, researchers who studied Hungarian Americans have carried out their research according to the above-mentioned aspects (e.g. Várdy 2000; Nagy 1984; Fejős 1993; Szántó 1984; Papp 2008; Várdy–Várdy Huszár 2005; Balogh 2010, 2013, 2015).

When examining the 1956 emigration, it is impossible to avoid the question of what motivated the refugees to leave Hungary. Although some Hungarian 56-ers in the United States consider estimates that only 5% of 1956 emigrants had taken part in the armed struggle to be insultingly low, it is a fact that only a fraction of the 200000 emigrants fought in the Revolution. Besides escaping from retaliation, a wider circle of emigrants may have been driven by a longing for easier prosperity, better living conditions and greater freedom, possibly boosted by a youthful hunger for adventure. However, the personal recollections also reveal that grievances and bad experiences in the pre-revolutionary period in the 1950s may have contributed decisively to the mass scale of the emigration.

One example of the flight from injustice and persecution is the story of Kálmán Malmos,<sup>14</sup> and his wife Irma Gombás. I met them both in 2007, when they were living in the Reformed Church Bethlen Retirement Home in Ligonier, PA. Kálmán Malmos was born in 1928, and his wife in 1925. Although they were both from Pécs, they met in Salzburg, in the refugee camp. They both submitted an application for resettlement to the United States. They were married in Camp Kilmer in 1957, and during their journey they were drawn to each other by “the memory of many common acquaintances”, their “mutual dependence”, and, last but not least, the fact that they were from the same city, and shared “the common fate of being orphaned”. In their parallel lives, they had both “been subject to ordeals for a decade” in their youth, before the revolution. Kálmán Malmos’s father was part of the leadership of the University of Pécs under the Horthy system. After World War II he was declassified and harassed with increasing intensity. No longer able to bear the humiliation and degradation, he committed suicide at the beginning of the 1950s. Kálmán Malmos did not talk about this in his interview, nor did he mention it during our friendly personal conversations. It was only after his death in 2015 that his wife, Irma Gombás, told me the story of his father’s suicide. As a religious woman, she told me as a great secret, explaining that even she had found out only after decades of living in America, and after a long marriage, that her father-in-law had committed suicide because of the “dirty Communists”. Before that, she had only been aware that the Communists had been persecuting the family. It is hard to imagine the pain that Kálmán Malmos must have experienced, keeping the story of his father’s death a secret throughout his life, without mentioning it to anyone, and sharing it with his wife on only one occasion. Irma Gombás told me the story in tears at the age of 90, after her husband’s death, only at the end of an interview lasting several days in sessions of several hours at a time. It also turned out that Kálmán Malmos had been taken away and beaten up by the secret police in the 1950s. Irma Gombás also came from a “good family”. Her “mutti” (Maria Thomas, 1889–1950) was Austrian, having been born in Gyanafalva (now Jennersdorf, Burgenland). Her father, Ferenc Gombás (1886–1970) was from Pécs and was an officer in the army until the end of

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14 Kálmán Malmos is a made-up name. I changed the name of my informant because I provide sensitive, family and personal information about his life history that precludes identifications.

World War II. Irma Gombás had a sister, Ida (1923–2014) and two brothers, Ottó (1926–2011) and Emil (1927–). All four of them earned degrees: the girls became teachers and the boys were both doctors. When the 1956 Revolution broke out, Irma Gombás was teaching at the Fiume Street elementary school in Pécs. She joined in the evening demonstrations staged by young people and university students. Since she had access to official stamps at the school, during the revolution she provided two of her colleagues with stamped ID cards when they travelled to the town of Pápa to take part in the “Committee of Freedom Fighters”. Since the miners in Pécs needed paper to print flyers, she gave them communist books, thinking they would no longer be needed. Following the collapse of the revolution, she knew she had to escape. According to her recollections, she was brought before the People’s Court and sentenced to five years in prison in her absence.<sup>15</sup> Their mother had been dead for six years by 1956, and the elder sister Ida decided to stay at home to take care of their 70-year-old father. Irma, however, and her two brothers, escaped from Hungary. From Austria they went first to Munich, then to Camp Kilmer on separate aeroplanes. Refugees could only leave Camp Kilmer if an American citizen promised to provide work and accommodation for them – that is, if they had a “sponsor”. The “sponsor” of Kálmán Malmos and the three Gombás siblings was the former chief constable of Pécs, a “DP” who had left Hungary in 1945. In Milwaukee (Wisconsin), a distribution hub where many intellectuals, mostly doctors and engineers, were sent, Irma Gombás met up with her younger brothers again. The “family reunion” – that is, Irma Gombás’s reunion with her brothers – was even reported by the local newspaper, as the press frequently published news of “family reunions in the free world” throughout America.<sup>16</sup> The two Gombás sons were first given jobs as hospital cleaners, although a few years later they were working as doctors. Kálmán Malmos, who was qualified in engineering and technology, was able to find work as an engineer at IBM in Phoughkeepsie, New York. In this small town, the Hungarian community had a Reformed church but not a Catholic church, and despite being Roman

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15 Irma Gombás remembers: “At that time, I taught at a large school of 68 teachers in Pécs (on Fiume Road). I enthusiastically participated in the evening marches. When the “Freedom Fighters” Committee was formed, we sent two colleagues to the city of Pápa to represent Pécs. I provided them with cards with official seals since I had keys to everything because of my office. The library was also in my purview. In those days, the school received 5 thousand Forints’ worth of political communist books, which I had to sign for, but they have not been accessioned yet, only stored in the hallway. The Pécs miners requested scrap paper for flyers. I gave these books to them for pulping, saying that communist propaganda would no longer be needed. After the revolution had been crushed, I was tried in the People’s Court for these actions and, despite my absence, sentenced to 5 years in prison. But by that time I was already across the border, in the land of the free. Charge number 1: unauthorized use of seals; charge number 2: deliberately damaging the national economy. (Gombás 1997: 1–2.)

16 Irma Gombás saved the article “Refugee Sister, Brothers reunited” in her photo album. There was a photo with the article: “Dr. Otto Gombas and brother Emil greeting sister Irma”. Unfortunately, Irma Gombás cut the article out of the newspaper without saving the name and of the newspaper and the date of publication, and she no longer remembers it, only that it must have been one of the local newspapers (in or around Milwaukee, Wisconsin).



Catholics they attended the Hungarian services rather than the American ones.<sup>17</sup> Having both left Hungary with such grievances, they never returned, not even for a family visit. In their retirement, they moved to Ligonier, to the Reformed Church Bethlen Retirement Home, to spend their old age in a Hungarian environment and community.<sup>18</sup> Their yearning for Hungary is reflected by the fact that they referred to the Pennsylvanian mountains near the retirement village using the names of the mountains around Pécs: they spoke of the closest as Tettye and the further ones as Zengő, Tenkes and so on. In remembrance of the 1956 Revolution, the refugees built a chapel at the northern border of the state of West Virginia, to which they brought a small sack of earth from each of the 63 counties of historic Hungary.<sup>19</sup> Many Hungarian refugees from 1956 use the site as a burial ground. Kálmán Malmos is buried here, and Irma Gombás also wishes to be laid to rest in this spot.

Other groups left Hungary in 1956 for reasons that differed from the prosecution of intellectuals, and the grievance-driven emigration of the Malmos-Gombás couple.

I have heard countless emigration stories in which ideological or political persecution played no decisive role, but where the motivation was rather a desire for adventure in the tough years of socialism, the quest for a way out of keenly felt seclusion, and, above all, the hope of better living conditions. It may well be that these recollections, which strike a somewhat profane note in the context of the fight for freedom, have increased over time, and that earlier a reference to idealistic motivation was a stronger “expectation” from society.

The recollections of a 1956 refugee who belongs to the Hungarian community in Elyria, Ohio, reflect this thirst for adventure and experience, which was the rationally inexplicable spontaneous motivation for emigration among many young people: “We were playing cards at home in the kitchen in Újpest,<sup>20</sup> and my sister’s then date told us that a truck was coming that would take us to Austria, so should we go or not? We abandoned the card game, I was 17, we got into the truck just as we were, in trousers and a shirt, and off we went. We went because we could. It never crossed

17 The Hungarian Reformed Church in Phoughkeepsie is still in operation today. Reverend Sándor Forró, the pastor of an increasingly assimilating and shrinking parish, is 80 years old; in 2015, there were only four of us at a week-day worship service that was celebrated in mixed English and Hungarian.

18 The Hungarian Reformed Church’s Bethlen Communities, which was purely Hungarian for a quarter of a century, is rapidly losing its Hungarian character. When I first conducted fieldwork there in 2006, approx. a quarter of the residents were of Hungarian origin and I found 8-10 excellent informants. In 2015, apart from a few Hungarian members of staff and two retired pastors, only Irma Gombás spoke Hungarian.

19 The Alba Regia Memorial Chapel (Székesfehérvár Emlék Kápolna) is located in the woods on the northern outskirts of West Virginia, between the mountains, in an area past the limits of the settlement. Budapest Avenue and Tábor Street lead to it. The chapel and the cemetery were established by the Hungarian Freedom Fighters’ Federation, an association founded by Fifty-Sixer refugees. The chapel can only be visited by appointment.

20 Újpest (New Pest) the Fourth and Angyalföld (Angels’ land) is the Thirteenth district at the Northern part of Budapest on the Pest side along the Danube. These were former industrial districts with many factories and large residential estates of workers before and after the World War II and during the communist period.

my mind that I was doing it for the country, or anything else. We were young, we thought it would be fun! What did I know about the world at 17? Nothing. Or about what was waiting for me out there. Or even about where I was going. It made no difference. Then it was America. The others went, so I did too. We had the chance, they were expecting us, I found work and I've been here ever since. And a couple of friends who're still alive." I had a memorable encounter with Tibor Absolon, a Hungarian 1956 refugee, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Absolon was a "tough guy" from Angyalföld, a workers' district in Budapest, for whom emigration, as in the previous story, had no element of consciousness. He went "because he could", and because he had a thirst for adventure. His story was compelling, because in Angyalföld he had frequented a club where my eventual father-in-law played jazz music. At that time, jazz was considered a "Western blight" that was to be persecuted, or at the very least tolerated, according to socialist Hungarian cultural policy. Absolon knew the author's father-in-law, "Füles",<sup>21</sup> from the Dagály swimming pool (Budapest), because "every tough guy from Angyalföld used to go there in the summer". He reeled off the names of his old friends, including the author's father-in-law's nickname, including those who stayed behind and whom he never saw again. When I explained to Tibor that the jazz musician, "Füles", was my father-in-law, he opened up completely and we talked until dawn.<sup>22</sup> The story of Tibor Absolon, who left Hungary quite spontaneously, after only superficially weighing up the potential consequences, is entirely in line with what my father-in-law told me about how young people – mostly "working class kids" – from Angyalföld experienced the events of November 1956. I learned from him that "trucks were coming and going" in 1956, taking whoever wanted to leave Angyalföld. He changed his mind at the last minute, deciding "not to get into the truck, when his friends went". "There was someone whose brother got into the truck, but he didn't. It was a split-second decision and that was it. But it changed your entire life."

Having examined some concrete examples, and returning to the relationships between the various strata of Hungarian Americans who had emigrated at different times, we can state that the 1956 emigrants brought with them entirely different forms of social contacts than the earlier emigrant communities. Such things caused particular disgust in "DP" circles: forms of greeting, addressing the opposite sex informally, not knowing who should be addressed as "your honour", "your excellency" or "your grace", and failing to kiss someone's hand. Generally speaking – in the words of the "DPs" – it was due to this kind of vulgarity that – often in the form of a sweeping generalisation – they referred to the 56-ers as "proles". Indeed, the 56-ers were characterised by their indifference to social positions, and sometimes also by a lack of respect, which was scarcely acceptable in the authoritarian circles of the "DPs". The intellectual Malmos-Gombás couple referred to above, who came

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21 Tibor Fülemile (1929–2011), Liszt award winner, Artist of Merit, former member of the Hungarian Wind Quartet.

22 He acknowledged his trust in me by having me sit in his swimming pool until dawn, finishing off a bottle of whiskey.



from “good families” and who were “56-ers by identity”, brought with them much of the pre-war Hungarian mentality.

Their “sponsor”, who brought them out of Camp Kilmer, was the former chief constable of Pécs, whose help was given via traditional old Pécs family relations. Nevertheless, they are examples of how the 1950s changed the lives of the people of Hungary, and, although they found it hard to admit, their own lives too. By contrast, they were amazed at the extent to which the “DPs” had been preserved in the reality of the inter-war years by the American social context. In 1957, soon after leaving Camp Kilmer, they attended a ball in New York, where many Eastern European aristocrats were present. Along with the many Hungarian dignitaries, they remembered in particular a Polish count, who, with his beautiful red and white sash, ornamental tassels and all kinds decorations, was the celebrated center of the company. A few days after the ball, in Fifth Avenue, Malmos greeted them as he swept the street in front of a house in his worker’s clothes. For a long time they found it hard “to come to terms with” such things. We can mention numerous clashes of value systems that emerged in the course of encounters between the “DPs”, who had been “preserved” in America, and the 56-ers, who had “gone bad under communism”.

After 1945, technical and scientific subjects were promoted in Hungarian education as a means of enhancing the building of socialism. The knowledge of the 1956 Hungarian refugees was therefore considerably more adaptable and marketable in America than that of the “DPs”, whose qualifications were largely in the humanities. The “DPs” therefore often remained silent about their qualifications, since, as they admitted, there was no need for county bureaucrats, Hungarian lawyers or military officers, while the 56-ers slightly exaggerated their scientific and technical qualifications, and in many cases blamed their lack of language skills if they did not understand something from a professional point of view. While studying the language, they cleverly tried to figure out what it was they didn’t know, and what they had to do to “grow into their new clothes”.

Just as the different waves of emigrants each arrived from a different Hungary, naturally the host country, America, was also constantly changing. The Americans’ image of the Hungarians evolved continuously, determining how the Hungarians were accepted into their new country. The 56-ers were in a highly favourable situation, as it was after the 1956 Revolution that, for the first time, it was good to be a Hungarian in America, as Hungarians were given special and positive attention. It is worth comparing this with the fact that the first generations of Hungarians who emigrated to escape from agrarian poverty were deeply resented by the wealthier Anglo-Saxon Americans who had arrived earlier. They were mockingly referred to as “Hunkeys”, along with other immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrial accidents were typically reported in the following terms: “Last month there was a factory accident involving five people and twelve hunkeys.” (Feldman 1931: 148.) They were not even considered as humans. In contemporary works in the field of American social sciences, we come across such statements as: “These oxen-shaped people [the new immigrants] are

the descendants of those who were always backward... the new immigrants even look inferior...”, etc. (Ross 1914: 286.)<sup>23</sup> During World War I, there was a genuine media campaign against the Germans, and against the Austro-Hungarians, and the Hungarians were often depicted as Teutonic in the American newspapers.<sup>24</sup> Letters sent from Hungary were opened and censored, and Hungarians were insulted. After World War II, Hungarians were once again regarded as war criminals, thus the “DPs” were also given a negative reception. In contrast, the Hungarians of 1956 basked in the glory of the struggle against communism. Their positive appraisal was further improved by other fortunate factors. In the second half of the 1950s, the United States was experiencing an economic boom, which provided extra work opportunities for the Hungarian 56-ers, while the exaggerated Cold War atmosphere elevated the 1956 Hungarian refugees into heroes in the fight for freedom. It would be no exaggeration to say that they were backed by a mass of sympathisers in America. In terms of their integration, it is important to emphasise that they received significant financial support from both the US state and the Hungarian community, in terms of both job opportunities and university scholarships. Factories, plants and companies needing workers could take their pick from among the Hungarian refugees.<sup>25</sup> For example the head of the labor office and the congressional representative of Lorain, Ohio, a center of heavy industry, travelled together to Camp Kilmer to bring back 82 refugees to Lorain.<sup>26</sup> According to church records from a little later, there

23 The text was translated and published by Aladár Komjáthy (Komjáthy 1984: 162). Edward Alsworth Ross is the father of American sociology, his oeuvre consists of twenty-seven independent volumes and numerous studies. The book being quoted is full of apt observations of Eastern European immigrants, but he interpreted the social processes as a struggle of different races, in line with social Darwinism, the intellectual trend of his era. In this work, the values of old, Americanized Irish, English, Scottish, German, Scandinavian, and Dutch immigrants are juxtaposed with the vulgarity of the new immigrants, the Slavs, Italians, Eastern European Jews, Hungarians, Romanians, etc. He devotes pages to describing the “primitive” physical anthropological characteristics of Eastern Europeans while discussing negative personality traits and inferior behavioral patterns as ethnic specificities. (Ross 1914: 282–304.)

24 For example, an authorless article was published about which U.S. states have more than 4 million Teutons living in them. The day book. (Chicago, Ill.) April 28, 1917.

25 In records kept in Hungarian American archives, a number of entries testify to the financial assistance of Fifty-Sixer Hungarian refugees. For example, an entry in the Bethlen Communities Archive in Ligonier reads: “Beyond their means, the Hungarian Club donated \$100 in support of the freedom fighters.” 1957 entry in the Protocol of the Pittsburgh Committee (Minutes of the Grand 1957).

26 According to a report of the Reformed Church in Lorain: “Our Church has voted to donate nearly \$2000 from its own funds and from the funds of its bodies, and through its members, it has contributed thousands more to help our Hungarian blood. On behalf of the Hungarians of Lorain, the pastor travelled to Camp Kilmer with Congressman Baumhart and Labor Secretary Ward Riley and brought 82 refugees to Lorain. Half of the refugees are Calvinist. Most of them have been loyal churchgoers ever since. The Calvinists were provided temporary housing by our members free of charge. Since then, all of them, without exception, have their own home and employment. For Christmas, we provided gifts to all of them from our non-denominational Hungarian Assistance Fund, and we paid for our refugees’ food and rent until they had an income. None of them were left to fend for themselves, no one went hungry, no one had to go to a flophouse. The Roman Catholics provided similar assistance, and the pastor would like to thank FR Zoltán Demkó, the parish priest, that this work could be started and completed with mutual goodwill and in the spirit of brotherhood. Thanks be to our councils, the neighbouring American Protestant Churches, and our members, for the many gestures of love and help.” (The 1956 Annual Report. 2).

were more than a hundred workers in the city who had been recruited from among the Hungarian refugees. They established their own club and keep in regular touch with one another. As the 1956 generation ages and dies out, the once regular gatherings of 56-ers are becoming fewer and farther between. In 2015, the 56-ers in Lorian still met every week. Although at first there were around a hundred of them, and 10 years ago over a dozen, nowadays only the four or five 56-ers who are “still alive and kicking” attend the gatherings. Among the 56-ers, the simple workers found themselves at home far more easily with the old Hungarians with peasant roots, who had become factory workers in America, while the intellectuals, after a couple of decades, “compromised” and were therefore able to better cooperate with the “DPs”.

There is no doubt that, among the 56-ers’ life stories, there are some real “success stories”, of the kind not typical among the earlier groups of emigrants. As Béla Várdy aptly puts it, “the material, scientific, artistic or political success achieved in American society, and the social status associated with it, are directly proportional to the degree of acculturation and assimilation and, in turn, inversely proportional to success in remaining Hungarian.” (Várdy 2000: 451.)<sup>27</sup> Professor of history András Ludányi made some harsh observations at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s about the weakening of the Hungarian identity among the 1956 refugees who were supported by university scholarships. In connection with the operation of the Association of Hungarian Students in North America, he stated that the association was merely a channel for a brain drain, and that it fostered assimilation through the Ford and Rockefeller foundations. Among the children of 56-er intellectuals who were awarded a special scholarship, “I can count on the fingers of two hands those whose children still speak Hungarian.”

Unlike the former groups of immigrants, the 56-ers – especially the intellectuals and the younger generation – were the first to attempt to settle in large numbers in non-Hungarian neighbourhoods or their vicinity. They were less anxious about the idea of assimilation, and thus preferred to look for non-Hungarian spouses. However, in many cases the less well educated and older 56-ers with families found jobs with Hungarian help, and mostly settled closer to Hungarian neighbourhoods, thus blending in more easily with the old Hungarian Americans.

These impacts and processes within the Hungarian community can be detected in the community’s organisational life, as well as in the associations. In order to maintain their national identity and pursue a community life, the Hungarian 56-ers, on the one hand, joined Hungarian organizations that had been operating for decades, and, on the other hand, founded a number of new organizations and associations – as well as political organizations – as they felt that the community institutional structure established earlier did not provide a sufficiently diverse and appropriate framework. The Hungarian associations founded in connection with universities play a significant role. The Bessenyei Hungarian Alumni

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27 Béla Várdy’s findings are in line with the conclusions of Alexander S. Weinstock (Weinstock 1969: 98–106).

Association, which was established in New Brunswick originally for Hungarian students and teachers at Rutgers University, is an outstanding example of the organizations established by the 56-ers. Among the many others, the New York folk dance group and the American Hungarian Folklore Centrum, which were also founded by Hungarian 56-ers, are also worth mentioning.

The relationship dynamics between groups from distinct waves of emigration, and their relationships with the Old Country, tend towards the mitigation of conflicts among later generations. One good example is a family in which the daughter of a 56-er couple married the grandson of a 47-er “DP” – a former politician. After moving back to Hungary, their child became a star violinist on a Hungarian folk talent show.

*Translated by János Hideg and Zsuzsanna Cselényi*

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### **Az 1956-os menekültek társadalmi integrációja az Egyesült Államokban**

Az Egyesült Államokban több mint 1,5 millióan vallják magukat magyarnak is – legalább egy magyar nagyszülő alapján – a legutóbbi népszámlálás adatai szerint. Jelentős részüket képezi az 1956-os forradalom leverése utáni menekültek és leszármazottjaik csoportja. Az amerikai magyarok körében végzett kiterjedt terepmunkán alapuló tanulmányban a szerző megkísérel felvázolni a mintegy 40 ezer politikai menekült, zömében fiatal értelmiségi és egyetemista, illetve szakképzett és szakképzetlen ipari munkás társadalmi fogadtatását és beilleszkedését az Egyesült Államokban. A vizsgálat tárgyát képezte, hogy az 56-os, újonnan érkezők, miként viszonyultak az amerikai magyar közösségi élet intézményhálózatát kialakító korábbi kivándorlási csoportokhoz. Az 56-osok eltérő integrációs stratégiáinak elemzése kiemelten hangsúlyos szerepet kap a dolgozatban.

### **Integrarea socială a refugiaților revoluției maghiare din 1956 în Statele Unite**

Conform ultimului recensământ în Statele Unite există 1,5 milioane de persoane, care își declară identitatea maghiară, având cel puțin unul dintre bunici provenind din rândul acestei națiuni. O parte importantă a acestora reprezintă grupul refugiaților revoluției maghiare din 1956, respectiv descendenții acestora. În acest studiu bazat pe o amplă cercetare pe teren, autorul încearcă o schițare a primirii și a integrării celor circa 40 de mii de refugiați politici, în mare parte



intelectuali tineri și studenți, respectiv muncitori industriali calificați și necalificați, în Statele Unite. O atenție sporită a fost orientată spre modul în care acești noi veniți s-au manifestat față de grupurile care au sosit înaintea lor și care au format în prealabil rețeaua instituțională a vieții comunitare maghiare din Statele Unite. Un rol important este atribuit și analizei strategiilor de integrare diferite ale refugiaților din 1956.

### **The Social Integration of Refugees from the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in the United States**

According to the latest U.S. census, around 1,5 million persons declare Hungarian or partial Hungarian identity based on at least one or more grandparents. A good portion of them had emigrated from Hungary as a consequence of 1956 revolution or they are descendants of '56-ers. In the present paper, based on extensive fieldwork in the U.S. among Hungarian Americans, the author tries to sketch up how the approximately 40 thousand young Hungarian students and industrial, blue and white collar workers, who arrived to the States as political refugees, had been welcomed. The attitude toward the 'newcomers' of earlier generations of Hungarian immigrants, who largely established the institutional network of Hungarian–American community life, is an issue to highlight. The analysis of various integration strategies of '56-ers to local pre-existing communities and networks are also crucial to this research.

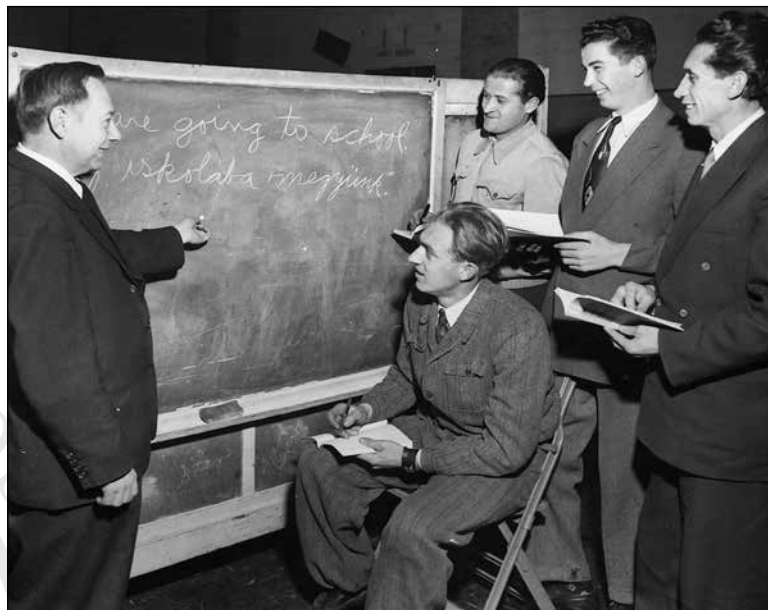
## Pictures



1. Tibor Absolon, a Hungarian Fifty-Sixer and his wife from Angyalföld, Grand Rapids (Michigan), 2008 (Photo: Balázs Balogh)



2. "Hungarians of Chicago for a Free Hungary!" – demonstration in November 1956. Chicago (Illinois) (Bethlen Communities Archive)



3. Calvinist Reverend Árpád György holds an English language lesson for Fifty-Sixer Hungarian refugee university students – Chicago (Illinois), 1957 (Bethlen Communities Archive)



4. 1956 memorial run with a crucifix – Passaic (New Jersey), 1957. In an athletic jersey with the inscription “Remember Hungary” and the Holy Crown on it (Bethlen Communities Archive)



5. Flag dedication – Chicago South (Illinois), 1957 (Bethlen Communities Archive)  
“For God, for the Homeland, until Death – Refugees of the 1956 Revolution.”