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“I cannot imagine a job which doesn’t connect me to Israel”

Variations for ethnic reintegration among Hungarian Jews¹ returning from Israel

Introduction

Looking beyond the general narrative of *Aliyah*² as simply the immigration of Jews from the Diaspora to Israel, the difficult decisions, sacrifices and failures of those who undertook this journey illustrates a more complex and nuanced reality. Hungarian *Aliyah* may be small in number but is interesting in the sense that a large majority of Hungarians³ who made *Aliyah* between 1989 and today return to Hungary or move on to another country. This may imply the difficulty of integrating into the Israeli society for the Hungarian *olim*.⁴ The high fluctuation of immigrants (i.e. moving back and forth) furthermore indicates a certain level of transnationalism. Based on my findings, I argue that globalization has had a significant impact on this group, and therefore Israeli immigration can and should be looked at within a global context, while keeping in mind the importance of Israel’s preferential immigration policy, as well as the seemingly special relationship between Hungarian Jewish immigrants and Israel. In other words, migration affects the lives of these immigrants in such a way that many begin thinking more globally, but simultaneously maintaining a cherished relationship with Israel due to Diaspora-homeland relations. To support my arguments, I will first give an overview of the motivations and intentions of some Hungarian Jews immigrating to Israel and then present the different reintegration⁵ strategies of Hungarian *yordim*⁶ who had left Israel since. The results show that both their Jewish and Israeli identities go through significant

¹ As the definition of being Jewish is ambiguous, for the sake of simplicity, I chose to use the term for everyone who is eligible for Israeli immigration. This includes non-Jews by the Jewish Law, but all my interviewees consider themselves Jewish in some way.

² Making *Aliyah* means to ascend, to go „up” to Israel.

³ The exact number of returnees is unknown, but there are estimations based on the Hungarian Statistical Office.

⁴ New immigrants in Israel. Origins from the word *Aliyah*, meaning to ascend.

⁵ Even though a few interviewees live in a third country, I will call it reintegration.

⁶ Making *Yeridah* means to descend. *Yordim* comes from this verb and is usually used in a derogatory way for Israelis who leave. In this paper I will use this term as a neutral concept to avoid the usage of return migrant which could refer to Jews who go to Israel (as opposed to return from Israel).

changes after migration and return (or leave). This is not a peculiar case as one's identification is exposed to changing environments. However, what is striking about this sample is the non-coherence between their affiliation to Israel and their Israeli identity (or lack thereof). Regarding their impact on the community, as the quote in the title suggests, Israel plays an important role in the lives of some. This supports the idea that migration enhances social transformation.

The results are based on qualitative research methods. Working for a larger project I conducted 78 personal interviews with Hungarians who made *Aliyah* since 1989, and a further 30 expert interviews with people from the field. Out of the 78 interviewees, 51 live (or lived at the time of the interview) in Israel (the *olim*) and 27 left the country (four live/lived at the time of the interview in a third country and 23 live in Hungary; they will be referred to as *yordim*). Since the interviews were elaborating on larger topics, I will only highlight the relevant parts in this paper.

Theoretical Background

Transnationalism and globalization

Migration theories have multiplied in recent years even though it was always a phenomenon; only its significance has changed. International migration is one of the first affected factors of global change, (Castles et al. 2014:1) together with social transformation and development, implying the interconnectedness between these processes. Globalization makes migration easier in multiple ways, changing the characters of immigrants (Castles 2007:40) as well as creating new types of movements, such as retirement migration or circular movement (Castles et al. 2014:7). This implies that migration is no longer unidirectional, and therefore, "intentions at the time of departure are poor predictors of actual behavior" (Castles et al. 2014, 25). Immigrants can easily change their minds and move back or move on to another destination or may even remain permanently even if the original plan was to stay temporarily.

Migration also raises the question of multiple ethnicities and transnationalism. As Portes et al. (1999) argue, migration cannot be studied anymore without examining transnationalism because in the aftermath of migration Diasporas and transnationalism were created. While Diaspora studies stress multigenerational patterns, i.e. collective identities of the second and third generation, transnational studies analyze the first generation's ties and mobility (Faist 2010). Diaspora studies focus on ties among

dispersed people (Safran 1991) as opposed to transnational studies, which addresses incorporation and transnational practices. According to Bruneau (2010), transnational communities are different from the Diaspora in their discontinuity between the immigrant and the home country; they live parallel lives. Faist (2010) also argues that in the new understanding of Diasporas any kind of dispersal is leading to their creation, therefore studying those or transnationalism raises very similar questions. Vertovec (1999) believes that the new migrants are rather transnational communities than Diasporas. Transnational studies emerged in the '90s because before the focus was either on the people at home or on the immigrants in the host country and it was time to link these two and study them simultaneously (Mazzucato 2010).

What makes someone (or a community) transnational? According to Appadurai (1996) all mobile persons are transnational. Dahinden (2010) argues that people do not have to move to develop transnational practices. Moving from a broader towards a narrower criterion, Haller and Landolt (2005) argue that the person has to feel at home in both countries. Portes et al. (1999) adds that they also have to speak two languages and make a living through regular contact. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994:7) focus on the processes, "by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and of settlement". The emphasis falls on the, "multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies". Portes et al. (1999:219) wanted to delimit the concept to, "occupations and activities that require regular and sustained contacts over time across national borders". Their focus is on regularity (excluding occasional or one-time investments) and it being an occupation as opposed to sending money to friends. Vertovec's definition (1999:447) is defined as having, "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states". He stresses the network aspect of transmigration and includes institutions, unlike Portes (2001), in his typology, wherein he differentiates between international, multinational and transnational organizational structures. International refers to the actions of nation-states, while multinational means institutional activities and transnational is the act of the individual. Castles (2007:40) expands the understanding of transnationalism by describing transnational communities, "as groups based in two or more countries, which engage in recurrent, enduring and significant cross-border activities, which may be economic, political, social or cultural". Boccagni (2010) goes back to earlier definitions, such as Portes et al., and adds

transnational social ties, which he later renames “translocal” because he finds the term too vague. This refers to ties with co-ethnics in the host country, which he found rather strong in his empirical research. It is highlighted in many that there is a triangle between the migrants, the country of origin and the country of destination (Faist 2010:14) and the focus is on the social ties and networks between them.

However, there are scholars who view the rise of transnational studies with more criticism. Foner (1997) believes that even at the beginning of the twentieth century Russians and Italians in the United States were a transnational community. Brubaker (2005:8) questions Appadurai’s (1996) and others’ claim about the “epochal shift” from the era of nation-state to the era of Diasporas. As Portes et al. (1999) argued, the novelty of it lies in the following: the regularity of the cross-border activities, the routine involvement and the critical mass. However, later he argues that transnationalism applies only to a small minority (Portes 2003). Finally, in his conclusion he states that “transnationalism represents a novel perspective, not a novel phenomenon” (Portes 2003:874).

While agreeing with the growing importance of transnationalism, there are a few questions left to be answered. First, what should we look at when analyzing transnationalism? First, Portes et al. (1999) argued that individuals should be the primary focus, which was opposed by Faist (2000) who would include organizations and networks too. Then Portes (2001) added activities initiated by members. Later Portes (2003) and Vertovec (2003) supported the idea that studying organizations and networks will allow us to better understand individuals. Boccagni (2010) looks at individuals, families and the public sphere too. In Mazzucato’s (2010) study the unit of analysis is solely the network. As opposed to scholars who take transnationalism more from an economic and political point of view (Kissan and Hunger 2010), this study will highlight the ethnic, i.e. the individual’s perspectives.

Second, if transnationalism gains ground, hence (some) immigrants live in two countries; does this make integration theories less relevant? In other words, are the concepts of transnationalism and integration contradicting or completing one another? As this study will benefit from both transnationalism and integration theories, I find it important to share the answers in more detail. Tsuda (2012) differentiates between four types of outcomes. *Zero sum* means that the immigrant either invests in transnational activities or integration. *Side by side* means the opposite, the immigrant is involved in

both, but it is an unrelated process. *Positively reinforcing* relation refers to the case where homeland engagement strengthens integration. This can happen by the resources that the individual is enriched with and decides to invest in the country of residence. *Negatively reinforcing* relation works vice versa but very unlikely to occur. Based on the combination of Tsuda's (2012) and Erdal and Oeppen's typology (2013), Dekker and Siegel (2013) reduced the number of variations by merging and excluding some of the types (due to their irrelevance), hence they arrived at a binary categorization. Integration and transnational practices are *complementary* when engagement in one country leads to the increasing engagement in the other. The idea of transnational activity strengthens integration can seem and was claimed contradictory by many (e.g. Clifford 1994) but recently the opposite argument started to appear in several articles (Karpathaki 1999, Tsuda 2012). When engagement in one country results in lower engagement in the other, they call it *substitute*.

Third, there is a debate around the relationship between globalization and nation-states. According to Kastoryano (2003), globalization and the establishment of supranational institutions have challenged nation-states. Smith and Guarnizo (1998) similarly argue that nation-states are weakened both from above, by political institutions and the media, and from below by the informal economy and activists. Soysal (1994) writes about post-national membership with regards to social integration and nation-states. The main opponents of methodological nationalism are Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) who try to shift from the nationalist paradigm by looking at social transformations from a broader, cross-border point of view. Methodological nationalism means, "the naturalization of the nation-state by the social sciences. Scholars who share this intellectual orientation assume that countries are the natural units for comparative studies, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interests with the purposes of social science" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003:576). Furthermore, they accept that societies are challenged by the native versus migrant division and assume that natives have common shared values while migrants do not. Instead of following this "container approach", migrants should be looked at not as foreigners but rather actors who connect locals with global processes (Glick Schiller 2010). And finally, the concept of the trans-migrant suggests that the construct of self-identification is also shaken by globalization. Whom do transnational migrants identify with: their co-ethnics in the

country of residence, their co-ethnics in the country of origin or the locals of the country of residence?

To conclude, I believe the transnational approach is an additional lens through which the researcher can explore different paths of integration as opposed to replacing earlier theories. This goes in line with Faist's argument, who claims that transnationalism is a third way of adaptation. While assimilation is having national citizenship and being acculturated, ethnic pluralism means multicultural citizenship and cultural retention and transnationalism stands for dual state membership and transnational syncretism (Faist 2000).

To turn our attention to the specific context of the study, in the following section I will present the debate on the uniqueness of the Israeli immigration.

The Israeli immigration policy and its uniqueness or lack thereof

The discussion about Diaspora cannot be neglected when we talk about Jews. As they are considered to be a prototype by many (e.g. Safran 1991), the question subsequently arises: can we regard immigrant Jews to Israel unique or are they like other migrants? Does being a Diaspora make them automatically ethnic returnees upon arrival to Israel?

One of the pillars of Zionist ideology is gathering of the exiles; and even after the establishment of the Jewish State the fusion of the Diasporas remained a very important part of the political agenda (Rebhun 2004). According to the original Law of Return Jews who were considered to be a Jew under the Nazi regime (where Jewish origin was understood much wider than the *halakhic*⁷ laws) has the right to return and gain citizenship.⁸ This is one of the crucial elements of Israeli immigration policy. Welcoming Jews to Israel does not only include granting citizenship (which is itself a very important factor for social integration), but the newcomers are also given a so-called absorption basket. This was composed of a certain amount of cash, offered services (a five-month long Hebrew language and cultural training), and social subsidies (Paltiel et al. 1997). Some additional help in the form of financial support for opening business, special help to particular sectors; vocational training and retraining are also available (de Tinguy 2003:

⁷ *Halakha* is the Jewish religious law. Only those people can be considered *halakhically* Jews who have Jewish mother or have converted to Judaism (according to the rules).

⁸ It is important to note that being an Israeli and being accepted as Jewish by the Israeli State are not coming hand in hand. As the state and religion are not separated in Israel, not being accepted as Jewish by the State can lead to a disadvantaged position.

120-121). However, the assistance varies according to the pace and the period of immigration. With the increase in number, the absorption basket declined (Doron and Kargar 1993:500), which clearly had an impact on the immigrants—especially those who make *Aliyah* only because it is a given opportunity. It can happen that immigrants are promised a certain amount of support at home that turns out to be less when they arrive.

The question of ethnic return is a heated topic. Israel is one of the few countries that tries to “lure home” eligible people with its preferential immigration policy, which impacts the decisions of migrants. As Portes and Borocz (1989) suggest, assimilation and absorption are facilitated if there is an ideological affinity between the migrants and the host society, which is supposedly the case for the returning or ethnic Diaspora. In the case of Israel, opinions range on a wide scale. On the one end we find de Tinguy (2003), among others, who represents a more radical opinion when she claims that returning migrants cannot be considered migrants. Brubaker (1998:1049) shares these arguments when he writes (specifically about Russians who go “back” to Israel) that they are not labor migrants: “ethnicity plays a crucial role in engendering, patterning and regulating these flows”. His theory is important here because he challenges the term by calling this phenomenon “ethnic unmixing”. Tsuda (2009(1)) is in-between when he emphasizes both aspects of ethnic return: the economic considerations as well as the ideological attachment. In other words, he claims that preferential immigration policies play an important role in the decision making of a migrant (Tsuda 2009(2):3), but on the other hand, “ethnic ties and affinities channel migrant flow” even if they do not *determine* it (2009(2):21).

On the other end of the spectrum we find Shuval’s position (1998) who claims the contrary when she challenges the idea of the uniqueness of Jewish migration to Israel. She places it into a larger context and compares Israel’s role as a receiving country rather than a symbolically permeated destination of the returning Jewish diaspora. One of her arguments is the presence of illegal foreign workers in Israel, another one lies in the immigrants’ motivations, which are influenced by economic, politic and cultural trends (Shuval 1998). There are two interrelated arguments: the uniqueness of the policy itself and the motivation of the immigrants. Regarding the first, the Israeli preferential immigration policy is not unique as Germany also introduced a similar ethnic-based law, but it is no longer in practice (Joppke and Roshenhek WP 2001; Shuval 1998). However,

the absorption program of the 40s was “unparalleled in history” (Skeldon 1997:136). As for the motivations, they are complex and differ by country and period.

My argument is that globalization has had a significant impact on Hungarian immigration represented in my sample. Therefore, while it is important to keep in mind Israel’s preferential immigration policy, I believe that Hungarian Jews making *Aliyah* can be compared to other immigrants. In the next section I will present the details of my research and it will be followed by the findings.

About My Research

Methods

The research was conducted in several phases: it started with a pilot project (Surányi 2013) and later it evolved into a bigger research project. As the field (Hungarian Jewish immigration after 1989) is almost completely untouched – only small research projects have been conducted by students working on their Master theses (see Váczi 2014 and Weinberger 2013) – a qualitative research approach was the most suitable means for data collection for this project. The sample was built up in several phases. By now it consists of two subgroups; those living in Israel and those who went back to Hungary or moved on to another country. Altogether I conducted 78 personal and over 30 additional expert interviews. The flexibility and iteration of the research design (suggested by many, e.g. Rubin and Rubin 1995) led to the massing of this big sample size.

Regarding sampling, I employed a combination of snowball and maximum variation sampling techniques (Patton 2002). The interviewees were chosen from a sampling frame (reached with the help of informants) based on both socio-demographical (age, gender, type and place of settlement in Israel and in Hungary) and topic-driven factors (level of religiosity, length of stay, date and time of *Aliyah*, etc.). The selection process was repeated each time with the enlargement of the sample; it is thus heterogeneous (see below).

The interviews were semi-structured, and their length ranged from 30 minutes to 5.5 hours, averaging one hour per interview. Most of them were conducted face-to-face in Israel and Hungary (some via Skype). To improve the quality of the interviews (Kowal and O’Connell 2014; Patton 2002), I chose to transcribe them myself (in English). For analysis, I used one of the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analyser Software (MAXQDA). The

guiding themes centered on their ethnic, religious and social identities, other aspects of integration, and motives for making *Aliyah*.

The sample

Different periods of migration can lead to various integration strategies. This is what Rumbaut (2007:381) calls “period effect” in his research, which was conducted in the USA. Looking at the numbers of Hungarian *olim* between 1989 and 2010 (see Appendix 2), we can see that at the beginning of the 1990s, enthusiasm for making *Aliyah* was peaking. The change in numbers throughout the years is not completely arbitrary: the strategies of the Jewish Agency⁹ to promote *Aliyah* among potential *olim* and the rules of making *Aliyah* began to change over the years.

Furthermore, Rumbaut found that age at the time of migration also affects one’s integration. This is known as the “cohort effect”. He coined the term 1.5 generation migrants referring to immigrants who arrive in the receiving country under the age of 18 (Rumbaut 2007:348). He also differentiates between other age cohorts according to one’s life stage. An immigrant between 25 and 34 is someone who has completed their education and is at the beginning of his or her career and is at the peak childbearing age, whereas between the age of 35 and 54 people have years of working experience, have children and are motivated to look for possibilities for their children, but not likely to give up their language, customs and identity. Above 55 people are towards the end of their career and most likely follow their children if they migrated (as was the case in my sample as well). This age cohort is least likely to learn and acculturate (*ibid.*). Moreover, the importance of age is stressed specifically in this context because it determines whether one has to go to the army or not – which is an important factor regarding integration.

As Table 1 shows, in my sample all age cohorts can be found with the overwhelming majority from the second group (18-24). This is due to the preferential policy that granted students the ability to study almost for free. This is also a more mobile age when return is still easier. Among the *yordim* there are only four interviewees from the next cohort (25-34) and none from the older cohorts. Out of the six 1.5 generation immigrants, four left Israel and two lives there.

⁹ Organization which – among other things – facilitates the process of *Aliyah*.

Table 1: Age at first Aliyah by subgroups, n=78

Age at Aliyah	18-	19-24	25-34	35-54	55+	Total
<i>Olim</i>	2	22	19	6	2	51
<i>Yordim</i>	4	19	4	0	0	27

The length of stay is relevant as well (Skeldon 1997), especially when we look at the *yordim*. As Table 2 shows, it varies among them. While among the *olim* the longer stay is more typical, the *yordim* is evenly distributed within the first three categories, only the decade-long stay is underrepresented. This is due to the fact that the longer one stays, there is less chance for return.

Table 2¹⁰: Length of stay by subgroup, N=78

Length of stay	1-2yrs	3-5yrs	6-10yrs	11+	Total
<i>Olim</i>	2	4	12	33	51
<i>Yordim</i>	8	9	7	3	27

One of the research-led variables is whether one was brought up with a strong Zionist¹¹ education/socialization, i.e. going to one of the Zionist youth movements or having a Zionist family background. It becomes relevant when analyzing their attachment to Israel after their return. A bit less than half (13) of the interviewees had this kind of background.

Findings

In order to illustrate how globalization affects Hungarian Jewish immigrants' lives and why I argue that the Israeli migration can and should be looked at from a global perspective, I will start off by sharing their motives for immigration and their intentions to stay (or lack of it). Having given a picture of the whole sample, I will then narrow down the analysis to the *yordim*. Their reasons for leaving Israel, their level and ways of attachment to Israel and whether they consider going back or not and finally their changing ethnicities will be presented. This will be followed by a discussion and then a conclusion.

¹⁰ This figure shows the accumulated years spent in Israel. For example, Interviewee (24) made *Aliyah* in 1995 lived there for one year and then went back to Israel in 2014 and lives there since.

¹¹ I offer the following working definition of Zionist ideology: someone (or an institution) who believes that Jews constitute a people and their real homeland is Israel.

“I never left because I didn’t like my life there, I just wanted to step out from my comfort zone and to try something else.”^{12, 13} – Motives and intentions at migration in the whole sample

The preferential immigration policy lead to attracting Jews to Israel from the Diaspora who might have never thought of leaving their country before. In my sample the use of this opportunity was the most frequently mentioned reason for migration. This and the fact that Zionism was only the second most popular motive for moving to Israel indicate that Israel is becoming a destination country like others, with the difference that it offers help at the beginning. Had it not been for the support, many of my interviewees would have not taken this step or would have gone to another country. Many highlighted this,

Basically, when I decided to leave from home, it seemed an obvious decision from financial, logical and all other point of view. To start from zero, say, in England, you have to buy the ticket; you have to get there. I could walk to Berlin, but you know... They gave me a ticket here; they assured the first step of throwing out roots and everything so the whole story was much more logical. And laziness is in it as well, I think (laughs).¹⁴

(Interviewee (20), male, 20 years old at *Aliyah*, Israel)

The fact that several of them went there (partially or only) for ideological reasons and left Israel since shows the hardships of Israeli integration and the economic difficulties. We will see several examples.

Even though the answers to the question whether they were planning to stay in Israel or not at the time of immigration might be retrospective, the results are telling. As Table 3 illustrates, in both samples only a slight majority wanted to stay in Israel for good.

Table 3: Intention of staying by subgroup, n=78

Intention of staying	Yes	No	Total
<i>Olim</i>	28	23	51
<i>Yordim</i>	15	12	27

¹² Interviewee (23), female, 20 years old at *Aliyah*, Israel

¹³ Interviewees will be presented by ID number, gender, and age at first *Aliyah* and residence at the time of the interview.

¹⁴ The interview excerpts are in their original format, translated from Hungarian. The signs indicated are explained in the Appendix.

Apart from the title, which also illustrates what this actually means, here is another example of how fluid this type of immigration can be,

Interviewer: Was there a moment when you decided to leave Hungary for good or this was a process?

Interviewee (1), female, 25 years old at Aliyah, Israel: It was never for good. It was like I knew that I want to do the PhD there, so I did my PhD. Then I knew that I want to go to do post-doctorate somewhere and again my two supervisors helped me to go to America, but I knew that I want to come back because I was looking for a job in the Yad Vashem¹⁵. And it was always like- it continued. And by now- /I am already there for some time (laughing).

Additionally, 14 out of the 78 interviewees moved to Israel twice, meaning that they moved back to Hungary at least once. Depending on the definition, 5 to 10 interviewees can be considered transnational. Some of them moved back and forth between the two countries, maintaining flats and/or working in both. Of those who live in Israel, seven were not sure about staying (Since the time of the interviews, one of them has already moved back to Hungary and another to another country). Out of the 27 *yordim*, six are considering moving back to Israel and three others can imagine their lives anywhere.

Interviewer: And are you planning to go back?

Interviewee (52), male, 20 years old at Aliyah, Hungary: Well, I am open to every possibility. If it turns out that way, why not. I see that the Israeli economy works, the Hungarian doesn't.

This quote is a perfect example of the impact of globalization on migration because it shows how uncertain immigrants' futures are. Furthermore, even though he is a committed Zionist who does not consider himself Hungarian but only Jewish, from this quote it is clear that his calculations regarding his future are more rational than ideologically ridden. This is also the case regarding his motives for moving back to Hungary.

The possibility to move between countries has been facilitated by technological and communications development; this was hardly a feasible option for those Jews who moved to Israel at the beginning of the 20th century – at least to this extent. However, there are several circumstances that make one more flexible than others. One's profession is a very important factor. In my sample, interviewees with a high-tech background, or

¹⁵ The Holocaust Museum in Israel.

those who are working for a multinational company – often speaking several languages – seem to be much more flexible than others. Interestingly, age does not determine the interviewees' paths: in some cases the interviewees mentioned age as an obstacle, but it was more about the person's circumstances than age itself (such as having children and an established career), while in other cases it did not seem to be a problem, e.g. moving back and forth at the age of 58.

While this sample is not representative, it is important to underline that the results are supported by the expert interviews and are typical of the whole sampling frame from which I chose my interviewees (including over 300 Hungarian Jews who once made *Aliyah*). The high level of fluctuation of Hungarian Jewish immigrants points to two directions: the influence of globalization and its consequences on the one hand, and the tangible and sensitive relationship between the Diaspora and Israel on the other. The two phenomena might seem contradictory at first, but both are affecting this group increasing its complexity. The next section will focus on those who left Israel.

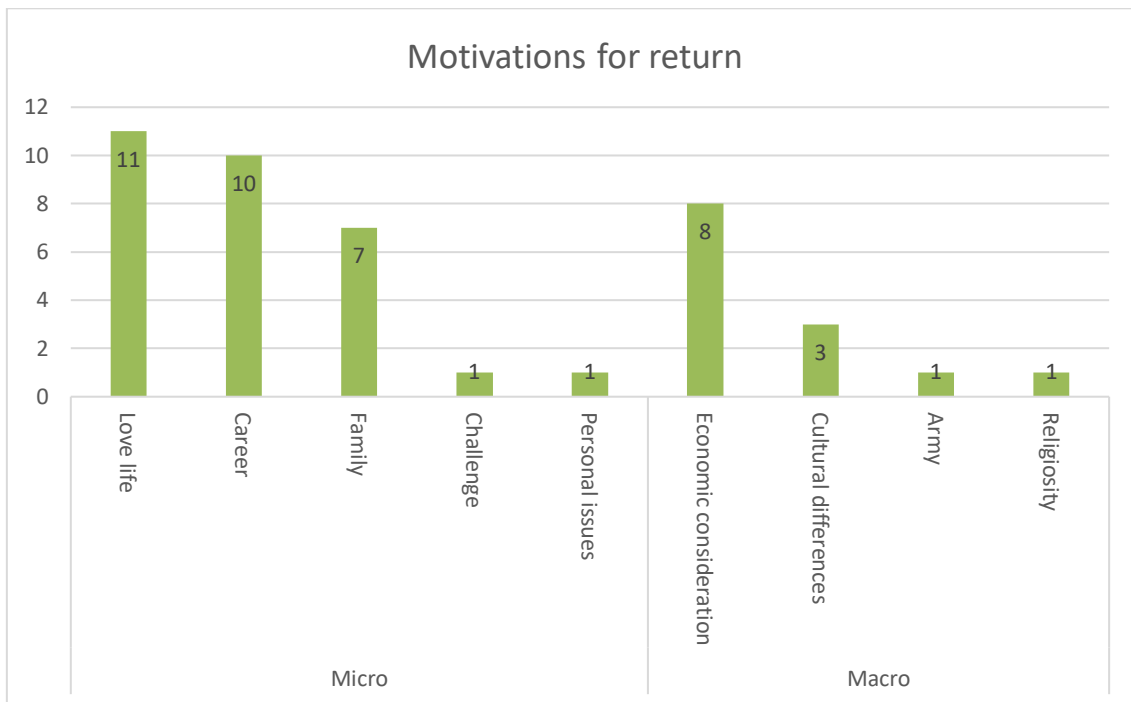
“... and that's how I got stuck here”¹⁶ – motives and circumstances of leaving Israel

What made some Hungarian *olim* leave Israel and what were the circumstances? I divided the reasons into two larger groups: those on the structural (macro) level and those on the individual (micro) level. The former refers to motives that are rather personal, whereas the latter covers those that are connected to the state. As Figure 1 shows, personal reasons were more frequent.¹⁷

¹⁶ Interviewee (55), male, 18 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary

¹⁷ The reasons on Figure 2 are aggregated: one person could mention a combination of them.

Figure 1: Motivations for return, N=27 (multiple answers possible)



Love life: out of the 11 cases, in eight instances the interviewee had a Hungarian partner for whom he or she wanted to leave regardless of where the relationship had started. Many of them went there without the intention of staying, but even those from the sample stayed less than planned because their Hungarian partners wanted to go back to Hungary. Some others fell in love with Hungarians who lived in Hungary at that time. The rest (three) escaped from a relationship that they had in Israel.

The second most frequently mentioned reason fell in the category of **career**, which covers several issues. Two interviewees were offered a job in Hungary, two of them wanted to study at the university (one was accepted before she left to Israel and kept her place) and the other one did not want to study in Hebrew (although she knew the language), but this was not the main reason for her to leave. The other six had no vision and this is related to their motives for making *Aliyah*. As one of them said,

They demobilized me wonderfully. [...] And then it was like, you know, and then- I lived in Israel approximately for the fourth year and then this point came "what now?" Shall I go back to the dentistry again?

(Interviewee (55), male, 18 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary)

Dentistry was not his profession so after having served in the army, he did not know what to do in Israel. He went there eagerly because of Zionism, but once the compulsory phase ended, he was left without guidance. On the other side of the coin there are those who

knew very well what they wanted to do even though they could not practice their profession in Israel,

I don't live in Israel not because I don't like Israel or I don't know, I had enough of Israel, but I came back to America because I make music.

(Interviewee (53), female, 20 years old at *Aliyah*, USA)

Music was mentioned as a difficulty by another interviewee (43, female, 22 years old at *Aliyah*, Israel) who lives in Israel as well, but she thinks about leaving for the same reason. **Family**, in one instance, was the sole motives of an interviewee who wanted to take care of her mother to go to Hungary. The interviewee ((58), female, 33 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary) said after her mother dies ("closes her eyes"), she will go back to live in Israel. She also keeps a flat there supporting her intentions. In the other six cases it was only an additional motive. Sometimes there was a family emergency that pulled them back, and sometimes the parents (especially the mother) insisted and tried to lure them back. This is how one of my interviewees sees this phenomenon,

I have several acquaintances who were pulled back very strongly by their parents. So "oh, it is very difficult to buy a flat in Israel." "No problem, we will buy you a flat here in Budapest." (Whispering) "Oh, if you don't /come home, we don't buy (laughing)."

(Interviewee (66), male, 19 years old at *Aliyah*, Germany)

Similarly, another interviewee said,

And I had an amount in case I want to buy a flat once and my mum offered that they are selling flats and buying in Hungary, there is some money left so if I think, I should give what I have, they will give what they have, they will buy a flat and we should move to Hungary. Well, I don't have to say twice, unfortunately I wasn't sure about my partner and my life there and in general, so we moved back to Hungary.

(Interviewee (57), female, 20 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary)

Personal problems were mentioned by one interviewee who went through difficult changes – mostly related to other circumstances, such as suffering from mental problems. In her case the vision was also lacking, which phenomenon was referred to earlier – although in this instance it was not due to the promotion of *Aliyah*. Lastly, the category of **challenge** means that the person needed a change of environment. In the following case the move was preceded by a period of long preparation,

I wanted to bring new energy into my life. And I could change many things, small things around me. I know that I can change that shabby, err, floor to a new floor or I don't know. And then I said of course I can do these things, to what extent it can be important,

to what extent my life remains the same after than it was before and then I decided that maybe to spray new energies into my life, for that I need to change something very essential. And then I decided that “ok, then I move to Europe”.

(Interviewee (66), male, 19 years old at *Aliyah*, Germany)

From the macro grouping of motivations, **economic considerations**, which were touched upon above, means that the person found it easier to make ends meet in Hungary than in Israel. For example,

I started to calculate how much I get for having been at service in the field, how much extra money it is and other savings and it turned out that IBS¹⁸ is cheaper than an Israeli college if I count the surviving and tuition fee and other costs. I tried to be very rational.

(Interviewee (52), male, 20 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary)

Along with rational decisions, **cultural differences** also belong to the macro grouping because they are connected to the differences between the two countries as opposed to the interviewees' personal lives. Some could not bear the Israeli lifestyle, mentality and behavior, “*I knew that I don't want to live in Israel because it is not Europe*” (Interviewee (68), female, 21 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary); or, “*Listen, from year to year I feel that I can simply handle them [Israelis] less and less*” (Interviewee (54), female, 23 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary). Elaborating on cultural differences is not the purpose of this paper, but it is a very crucial point concerning integration, according to many of the interviewees. Israel, like any other country, is not for everybody. **Army** and **religiosity** were mentioned in this context by only one interviewee.

What is conspicuous about the interviewees' stories is that altogether seven interviewees said they did not plan to stay in Hungary; they just got stuck, i.e. the return was not preceded with a long process of preparation to leave Israel for good; rather going to Hungary temporarily until they could sort out what was necessary. For example, one interviewee (49, male, 19 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary) only went to Hungary to make sure his girlfriend was safe and got stuck there while her girlfriend went back to Israel later on,

And when we finished school, [...] this is when the First Intifada¹⁹ started. And it was a problem. For me it was less of a problem than for my girlfriend. We looked out and the place was burning. It was a very wicked story. She was afraid and she wanted to come

¹⁸ International Business School: a university in Budapest

¹⁹ Palestinian uprising (1987-1993). He meant the Second Intifada which was around that time (2000-2005).

home. And I had bad consciousness. I made a question of consciousness out of bringing her home and to put her- and this is what happened. I took her, brought her home, "there you go", to the parents, "your daughter is here, take her, close her into a cage and protect her" (being cynical), err... because she was very afraid.

Being stressed and concerned about constant warfare in Israel (or not feeling secure) is a recurring issue in both samples. However, altogether the general reason for leaving Israel was rather related to something on the personal level, and often it was not planned. Instances when the interviewee only bought a one-way ticket happened mostly where there was a love story involved and/or they got job offers.

Diaspora – homeland relations? Attachment to Israel after return

Several of the return migrants maintained a relationship with Israel. One interviewee (58, female, 33 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary) is a transnational returnee who has flats in both countries and travels frequently, another interviewee (3, male, 6 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary) is also moving back and forth. At the time of the interview, Interviewee (3) had just moved back to Hungary with no certain plans. Interviewee (58) said the following, *"When I am very depressed from the things here home, [I buy a] plane ticket and I go because I must be there"*. For others, maintaining a relationship with Israel means that they are either working or have worked for Israelis. For some they must be connected to Israel no matter how,

That is true that I cannot imagine a job, which doesn't connect me to Israel. Ever since I came back to Israel or when I wasn't there at the moment: before, under or after the Aliyah, it always had to connect me either to the language or the job position or to Israel itself what I do.

(Interviewee (57), female, 20 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary)

For others, the emphasis was on the use of Hebrew on a daily basis,

So, I couldn't imagine not to teach now in an Israeli school - in a Jewish school where I have Israeli colleagues with whom I can speak in Hebrew, and in that style and like that. I need that.

(Interviewee (70), female, 31 years old at *Aliyah*, Germany)

For one interviewee (63), female, 19 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary), knowing Hebrew was an advantage for finding a job:

When I first looked for a job, it was a very good opportunity that I know Hebrew. Since I have no experience in anything else because I wasn't working for ten years but I know Hebrew, this was my advantage, I could find a job with that.

Another way to maintain a certain level of Hebrew was to teach the language or read books. These tactics were also popular in my sample. In terms of cultural consumption, listening to Israeli music was very important in several cases, especially immediately after return.

Visiting Israel was also a hot topic. Some interviewees go there often either because they have relatives, or they find opportunities to go there. There are a few who cannot enter Israel (for a certain period) because they escaped from the Israeli army. Others do not have the means to go there, especially those with little children,

Interviewer: *And do you go to Israel since?*

Interviewee (49), male, 19 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary: *I was in Israel three times since. But not that often. It is a lot of money (slang). I have a five-year-old son so money goes to different directions but I like to be there a lot and I cannot /wait to go again (excited) but-*

Interviewer: *And what do you do there?*

Interviewee (49): *I visit pals, friends and relaxing.*

The goals of the visits were usually similar. Regardless of the frequency of their visits, when I asked about it, almost all of them became sentimental. However, longing for Israel does not necessarily equate to wanting to live there. The following quote expresses this duality very well,

Interviewer: *But you don't think about moving back?*

Interviewee (60), female, 24 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary: *No. (sighs) (2) /At this moment, no.*

Interviewer: *But why?*

Interviewee (60): *(7) Because I don't wish to live there. To go there for one or two weeks and to walk and to see my family members there and some of my old friends who are still there, yes, but I don't wish to /wake up there a month or a year later (laughing). No.*

Many of the interviewees maintain a cherished relationship with Israel in one way or another. The next section will explore the relationship (or lack thereof) between the attachment to Israel and the interviewees' Israeli identity.

„I am obviously not an Israeli and it [Israel] is obviously my home”

Several interviewees have the intention of going back to Israel and some can imagine their lives in any country. Furthermore, one of those with the intention of going back has the “unhidden plan to go there for retirement”, which is a new type of mobility. However, even among those who live in Hungary, there were some who regard Israel as an escape country. The motto was, “if things get worse in Hungary” – referring to the worsening political and economic situation. Out of the four who live in a third country, one does not exclude the idea of going to Israel at some point in her life but cannot imagine staying there forever. The other three are not sure about their future, but Israel is not among their plans (yet one of them lives there at the moment). This already indicates a certain level of flexibility. However, Israel as an option for seeking “refuge” carries other significance as well. It reflects the special relationship between the Diaspora and the homeland.

I definitely don't consider it my home. Of course, if there will be trouble in Hungary, it would be nice if we could go somewhere (laughing) and they would accept us but there won't be, it won't happen.

(Interviewee (68), female, 21 years old at *Aliyah*, Hungary)

As opposed to this interviewee, many of those who are not planning to go back still consider Israel their home.

Interviewer: *And to what extent do you consider Israel your home?*

Interviewee (54), female, Hungary: *It is so interesting because at the same time I consider it that without question marks. So absolutely obviously. It is bloody interesting. I never thought about this that I am obviously not an Israeli and it is obviously my home. Hungary is (7) well, I don't know. It is not my home like Israel. Not like that.*

For this interviewee (66, male, 19 years old at *Aliyah*, Germany), who lived in Israel for more than twenty years, Israeli-ness is not separate from Israel being his home,

Interviewer: *And to what extent do you consider it your home?*

Interviewee (66): *Absolutely. Israel is my home and it probably won't even change. Even- ok, I live now in Berlin and then I don't know where I will live, nothing is final but probably I will be home only in Israel. This would be difficult to change.*

Interviewer: *If they ask you, what do you say, what is your nationality?*

Interviewee (66): *Israeli. Where did you come from? From Israel. (2) Which is not just literally true but that's how I feel.*

For some others Israeli-ness is contextual,

Interviewer: And to what extent do you consider it your home? Or to what extent do you think about yourself as an Israeli?

Interviewee (60), female, 24 years old at Aliyah, Hungary: Well, this is interesting. I think about myself as an Israeli when an attack reaches Israel in the news. Or you know there are forums and they start badmouthing Israel, straight away the big Israeli comes out from me but otherwise, no. (2) Yeah. And when there are these Independence Day demonstrations, I always go to them and I'm always proud and everything but in the everyday life, no.

And of course, there were a few that do not think they should have more attachment to Israel than the fact that they lived there,

Interviewer: And then you don't consider Israeli your home either?

Interviewee (64), male, 22 years old at Aliyah, Hungary: As much as Israeli is the home of Jews, then yes. And obviously I have much more attachment to it than an average Hungarian Jew have because I lived there, and I know more or less how it is.

This attitude was found among those who either lived there for a very short period, did not get Israeli citizenship (went there with a visa), or left Israel before enlisting for the military. The role of the army works the other way too; those who were soldiers tend to have a stronger Israeli identity. Additionally, a very few of them regard themselves as cosmopolitan,

I consider myself a cosmopolitan in general and I regard myself a cosmopolitan so I'm not attached to any country to be like somehow, I have sentimental threads towards Israel but- err, but if I lived in Israel, as opposed to many of my acquaintances in Israel if they told me "here is a job, you have to work in Russia", I would go without thinking. Wherever is my family and living, my work, this is where my home is and where I feel good. Whoever wants to, can find a way to feel good anywhere.

(Interviewee (48), male, 20 years old at Aliyah, Hungary)

Discussion: Attachment and Changing Ethnicity in the Course of Return

Looking at the trajectories of the interviewees' lives, we can find variation along almost every aspect (starting from their life in Hungary through moving to Israel until they arrived at their last destination and whether they want to stay there or move on). This

means that it is hard to pin down whether one is attached to Israel because their integration was successful, or because they had a strong Zionist background in Hungary, or they stayed long enough to develop strong feelings of attachment. The opposite was also represented in the sample; not longing for Israel turned out because of the individuals' unsuccessful integration or for many other reasons. Here are some examples of the more clear-cut paths.

Interviewee (59) had no relation to Jewishness and Israel in her childhood; hence she used the preferential policy as an opportunity to make *Aliyah*, which also led to her becoming interested in her religion. Israel later became her home even though she did not feel well integrated. Now she is considering moving back. Unlike her, Interviewee (60) received Jewish socialization through participation in a youth movement in her childhood. In Israel she went through a religious period and ended up staying there over seven years and now she is not longing for Israel, nor does she consider it her home. In another case, Interviewee (51) who – coming from the countryside – had no connection to Jewishness and also used the opportunity to move to Israel where he lived for nine years. He developed a strong attachment to Israel through the army and, according to his perception, was very well integrated. On a theoretical level he would go back to Israel, but he most likely will not live there again. Finally, Interviewee (53) had a very strong Zionist background and always wanted to make *Aliyah*. She lived in Israel for shorter periods throughout the years and now lives in a third country because of her profession but considers Israel her only home.

However, to focus on social transformation and their changing ethnicity, here I will highlight some important links regarding the issue. To bring social change to the forefront – even if only on the micro level – the emphasis is on those who developed Israeli identities or affiliation to Israel compared to those whose lives go on as if they were not living in Israel (these individuals are a minority in my sample). As I argued before, Israeli-ness and longing for Israel do not necessarily coincide; therefore, they have to be looked at separately. It became clear from some of the interviews presented above that considering Israel as a home country strongly corresponds with having served in the army. However, there might be differences in the serving unit: Interviewee (51) emphasized that being in a fighting unit had an impact on him because he had to fight for the country. Another way to be attached to the country can come from the fact that the person never felt at home in Hungary – mostly due to Anti-Semitic incidents. One

interviewee (50, female, Hungary) feels that Israel is more her home than Hungary despite an unsettling experience in Israel. A third way to develop feelings for Israel as a home country is when the person is brought there at a young age (the 1.5 generation) and stayed there for a longer period of time. While Interviewee (3), who went through Israeli socialization because he was taken at the age of six and returned to Hungary almost twenty years later, considers both countries his home, Interviewee (56), who was also taken to Israel at a young age but stayed only one year, became strongly disillusioned with Zionist ideology. Interviewee (62) was similarly taken at a young age and stayed for many years, but because he is not able to visit the country, he does not consider it his home country anymore. Neither of the latter two interviewees had the chance to serve in the army. Therefore, it might be safe to assume that it is rather the role of the army than the age of the individual at the time of migration or the length of stay in these cases. The connection between the process of integration and attachment to Israel can go both ways. Those who struggled for their survival with hard work and those who “had it easy” could both be attached. Some interviewees who no longer consider Israel their home are still attached to it in some ways; either through listening to Israeli radio, music or by working for an Israeli company.

Regarding their ethnic self-identification²⁰ after return, the picture was very diverse. Eight interviewees considered themselves solely Hungarian, two considered themselves as Central European or European, five interviewees called themselves cosmopolitan, eight reported on hybrid identities, and four of them are Zionists. When someone identifies only with **Hungarian** and (Central) European identity, it can be traced back to two reasons in my sample: either they had a bad experience with or in Israel (not being able to visit or being disillusioned with its politics), or they could not adjust to the “Israeli mentality”, as the interviewees called it. That is also why European identity came up in the interviews in contrast to Israeli identity, which is non-European according to them. For example: “Well, I think this is a wild world. We cannot bear it. For a European it is difficult.” (Interviewee (50), female, 21 years at *Aliyah*, Hungary)

Cosmopolitans are people who do not like the national concept (i.e. do not identify with any of the countries and refuse to define themselves in ethnic terms) and can imagine their lives almost anywhere. However, Interviewee (48) while claiming, “the whole world

²⁰ The answers reflect the interviewees’ answer to the question „how would you identify yourself ethnically?”

is my home” also added, “I do regard Israel my home. I do regard Hungary my home. I don’t even want to think about if I had to take part in a conflict between the two countries, most likely I would stand on the Israeli side but rather nowhere”. The fact that one is not insisting on a place where he or she lives anymore is the consequence of the migration experience. The attachment that a person – calling himself cosmopolitan – can maintain for Israel may be a sign of the Diaspora-homeland relationship.

A **hybrid** identity means the mixture of the two; they are both Israeli and Hungarian. Some specified that it depends on the place. Interviewee (3) – despite a general attitude I found in the whole sample – said that in Israel he is Israeli and in Hungary he tries to be a Hungarian. Israeli-ness manifests in two ways: through the Israeli passport, which is in the possession of almost all my interviewees (except two who travel to Israel with a visa) and by adjusting to the “Israeli mentality”. Interviewees who regard themselves as **Zionists** are the ones with a strong Zionist ideology, but economic considerations are more influential than any ideological affinities, and therefore they do not live in Israel.

Conclusion

Based on their motivation to move to Israel, most of my interviewees cannot be regarded as ethnic returnees; they did not go to Israel out of some ideological drive, but rather for pragmatic reasons. However, if it were not for the Israeli preferential immigration policy, which offered support to the (eligible) newcomers, many would not have taken this step. Therefore, it is safe to claim that the uniqueness of the Israeli policy played a role to this extent.

The level of fluctuation (mostly between the two countries) indicates that the Hungarian *olim* behave like other regular migrants being influenced by the globalized world. This notion here refers mostly to high levels of mobility. Other aspects of globalization, such as lower costs of transportation and communication, can be captured by the transnational lifestyles found in some cases. It needs to be added that quoted scholars differently view transnationalism. Taking the broader understanding of transnationalism, such as feeling at home in both countries, can be easily found in my sample. Speaking both languages and having a regular economic, social, political and cultural cross-border activities are rarer. However, it needs to be stated that signs of the Diaspora-homeland relationship were also found in my sample.

Zionist Jews are those for whom life is easier (i.e. more convenient) in Hungary but there is a constant longing for Israel. The combination of being globalized migrants and cherishing an emotional attachment towards Israel can both be present. There are certainly a variety of reintegration strategies and most of their lives are affected by their migration experience. Some of them even bring social change by defending Israel in different forums like Interviewee (60), who expressed her “situational” Israeli identity or others who work for Israeli companies and teach Hebrew to other Hungarians.

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<https://sierra.ceu.edu/search/?tCEU+Nationalism+Studies+master+theses+%3B+2013%2F21/tceu+nationalism+studies+master+theses+++++2013++++++21/-3%2C-1%2C0%2CE/frameset&FF=tceu+nationalism+studies+master+theses+++++2013++++++21&1%2C1%2C>
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Appendices

1. Appendix

(3) text: 3 second pause

text-: interrupting their own sentences

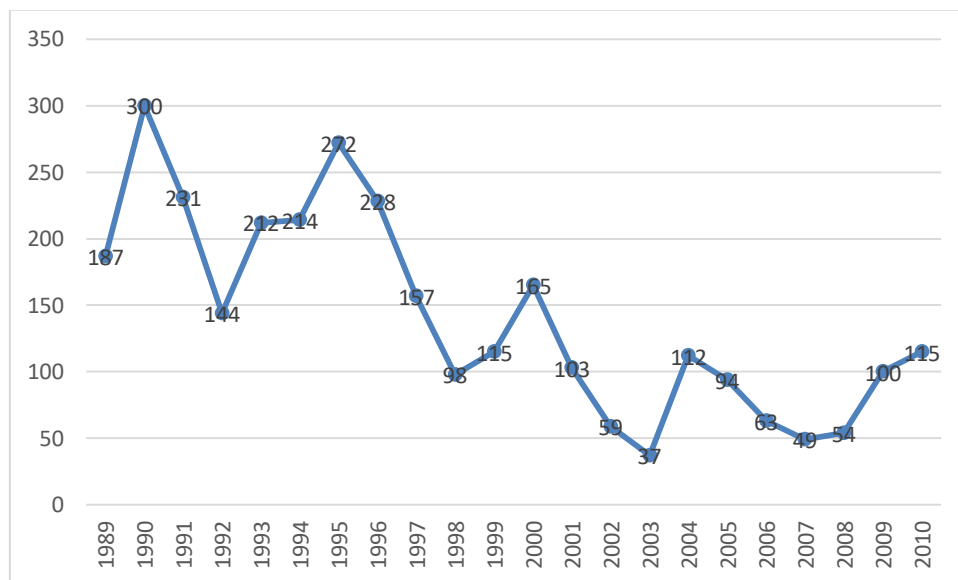
/ text (in English): says it the way it is indicated (e.g. in English, laughing, smiling, etc.)

text... : not finishing a sentence

Bold: emphasizing something

2. Appendix

The Hungarian Aliyah in numbers, 1989-2010



Source: data received from the Jewish Agency via email.