

# Women's work: human rights, gender and social class in Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century

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Szerafin Thinagl (bottom left) and the graduation class in pharmacy, Ferencz József University, Kolozsvár (Cluj), Austria-Hungary, 1903

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## 1 Introduction

In 'Firona', a short story originally published in the Hungarian literary journal *Nyugat*, in 1910, the eponymous heroine falls pregnant while working as a maid in a small provincial town.<sup>1</sup> The scattered references in the story to chestnut trees, hills and mines suggest that the town in which the story unfolds is Nagybánya where the story's author, Józsi Jenő Tersánszky, spent the early years of his life. When Tersánszky published 'Firona', Nagybánya lay in the Austro-Hungarian empire. With the redrawing of borders after the First World War, Nagybánya together with a large tranche of territory was ceded to Romania.<sup>2</sup> Today the town, which has become the administrative and legal centre of Maramureş county, is generally known by its Romanian name, Baia Mare.

In Tersánszky's story, Firona cannot remain in domestic service once her pregnancy is discovered. Although scolded by her mother and railing against Pitu, the lover who abandoned her, we are told that Firona 'didn't suffer more shame and bitterness than is customary amongst girls who share her fate'.<sup>3</sup> The jaunty tone of this remark suggests that pregnancies out of wedlock were neither especially uncommon nor a source of everlasting disgrace, particularly amongst the poorer classes.

In Tersánszky's starkly unsentimental story, which won him immediate fame, Firona gives birth to a baby boy. Leaving the child in the care of her mother, Firona finds work as a *napszámos*, or casual labourer, on building sites. However, Firona is visibly coarsened by her new life:<sup>4</sup>

The dirty, heavy work of a *napszámos* greatly altered the woman. In the mornings she went off to the building sites looking slovenly and dishevelled. Later, she took every kind of ragged, sclerotic *napszámos* to be her lover. In the evenings she went drinking with them in the shops that sold pálinka and two or three of them would accompany her, singing all the while, on the dark footpaths beneath the vines.

The availability of work on building sites comes to an end with the heavy, persistent rains of autumn. Following the death of her mother, Firona and her little boy are left to fend for themselves in the old woman's house. Mother and child are saved from destitution by a bow-legged miner who marries Firona. Although he is kind and good-humoured, Firona comes to loathe the misshapen miner for whom, unlike Pitu her feckless ex-lover, she can never feel romantic love.

As Tersánszky's story vividly illustrates, women from the poorer classes faced a limited range of occupational choices in the Hungarian sector of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. If, like Firona, a woman fell pregnant, her choices were fewer still. In effect, her only hope of economic security and social respectability lay in finding a husband.

At the turn of the twentieth century, poverty and social class were not the only factors that limited women's career choices in Hungary. Women from middle and upper-class families also faced a stifling set of legal and extra-legal restrictions. Their effect was to deny the overwhelming majority of Hungarian women the opportunity to complete a high school

1 J Tersánszky, *A kegyetlen primadonna* (Budapest: Osiris-Századvég 1995) 8.

2 L Kontler, *A History of Hungary* (Palgrave Macmillan 2002) 341–44.

3 Tersánszky (n 1) 9.

4 *Ibid* 9.

education (a prerequisite for university studies),<sup>5</sup> to register for various subjects at university, or to pursue a number of careers, including the legal profession and the civil service.<sup>6</sup>

As noted by Deborah Simonton, the 'economic infrastructure of where women lived' also had a significant bearing on the range of available work.<sup>7</sup> In relative terms, much of Hungary was economically underdeveloped. Working women outside Budapest and some of the more dynamic cities, such as Nagyvárad (today's Oradea), were mostly employed on the land or in domestic service.

As elsewhere in Europe, during this period, gender inequality also expressed itself in the political sphere. Women in Hungary – as in East Central Europe (ECE) more generally – were not permitted to vote in national elections or, except in very limited circumstances, to stand for public office.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the inter-war period, women's voting rights in Hungary remained heavily circumscribed. The right of Hungary's women to vote in national elections on the same terms as men was not recognised until after the Second World War.<sup>9</sup>

This article explores women's work in Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century and the use of law in defining or, more properly, limiting the occupational and economic choices available to women. From 1867 until 1918 a large swathe of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), amounting to well over three times the size of present-day Hungary, was governed from Budapest within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian empire.<sup>10</sup> Hungarian law was applicable throughout this region.

Drawing on materials held in the Romanian National Archives, the article presents a case study of women's work in Máramarosziget, now the Romanian town of Sighetul Marmăției, in the early 1900s. Like Tersánszky's fictional heroine, most working women in Máramarosziget, or Sighet, were employed in domestic service or as *napszámos*, while smaller numbers earned a living as midwives, hawkers, seamstresses, nurses, washerwomen etc. Whatever form it took, women's work was almost invariably badly paid and of low status.

However, materials in the Romanian archives suggest that a small but significant minority of self-employed women came to exercise an important role in the commercial and economic life of Sighet by the turn of the twentieth century. In particular, women owned and managed a wide variety of successful businesses, including a brothel, a bath-house, numerous inns and an enterprise manufacturing suitcases.<sup>11</sup> Women in Sighet also

5 The first Hungarian high school for girls opened in 1896. See J Szapor, 'Sisters or Foes: The Shifting Front Lines of the Hungarian Women's Movements, 1896–1918' in S Paletschek and B Pietrow-Ennker (eds), *Women's Emancipation Movements in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford UP 2004) 189, 197. Consequently, the pool of young women in Hungary who were sufficiently well educated to register at university or to undertake professional training was extremely limited.

6 Before the First World War, women's work in Britain and in Western Europe was also subject to numerous legal and extra-legal restrictions. See G Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain since 1840* (Taylor & Francis e-Library 2007), pts One, Two; D Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work* (Taylor & Francis e-Library 2003).

7 Simonton (n 6) 181.

8 Szapor (n 5) 198–200; J Malečková, 'The Emancipation of Women for the Benefit of the Nation: The Czech Women's Movement' in Paletschek and Pietrow-Ennker (n 5) 180–82; B Lorence-Kot and A Winiarz, 'The Polish Women's Movement to 1914' in Paletschek and Pietrow-Ennker (n 5) 206, 215.

9 See 4.§(1), Act VIII of 1945, available (in Hungarian) at <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=8215](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=8215)>.

10 On the transformation of the Habsburg Empire into Austria-Hungary in 1867, see R Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c 1765–1918* (Macmillan 2001) 188–90.

11 See eg *Máramarosziget Város III oszt. Kerestadó kivetési lajstroma* (1902, 1903, 1906), Arhivele Naționale Maramureș, Primăria Orașului Sighet, Registre operative ale fondului, fond. nr. 46, inventar nr. 793, registrul nr 292/1902, 296/1903, 309/1906.

played a prominent role in the local economy as landlords, renting out houses or land.<sup>12</sup> To some degree, property, capital and business knowhow compensated for deficiencies in women's social status and legal rights, permitting a stratum of women to enjoy a significant measure of economic autonomy and personal freedom.

Women's growing involvement in the commercial life of Sighet, as elsewhere in Hungary, had been made possible by significant changes in Hungarian private law in the latter half of the nineteenth century. While women remained subject to legal and extra-legal disabilities in the *public* sphere,<sup>13</sup> they achieved full equality with men in terms of their *private law* rights.<sup>14</sup> Women, like men, could own and manage real and moveable property, enter into contracts and engage in commercial transactions of various kinds.

The extension of private law rights to women in Hungary in the second half of the nineteenth century should not be seen as the expression of a commitment to gender equality. Rather, it represented one element in a concerted effort to develop a modern, capitalist economy in the Hungarian sector of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.<sup>15</sup>

Relatively little has been published, particularly in English, on women's work in Hungary or in the CEE area in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>16</sup> This is part of a wider phenomenon. While the literature on women's history in the UK and in Western Europe has been described as large and expanding,<sup>17</sup> 'Eastern European women's history has been little explored.'<sup>18</sup> For example, Katalin Fenyves has asked rhetorically, 'Why a comprehensive history of Hungarian women is unwritten to date?'<sup>19</sup>

Scholars' inattention to gender issues in Hungary and in the CEE, until quite recently,<sup>20</sup> has been due to several factors. In the transition from communism there has been a tendency

12 See eg *Általános Jövedelmű Pótadó kivétési lajstroma 1902 évre*, Arhivele Naționale Maramureș, Primăria Orașului Sighet, Registre operative ale fondului, fond. nr. 46, inventar nr. 793, registrul nr. 291/1902.

13 J Acsády, 'Remarks on the History of Hungarian Feminism' (1999) 26 *Hungarian Studies Review* 59, 60–62; J Albisetti, 'Portia Ante Portas: Women and the Legal Profession in Europe, ca 1870–1925' (2000) 33 *Journal of Social History* 825, 838, 844, 847, 848.

14 M Katona, *A Mai Érvényű Magyar Magánjog Vezérfonala* (Pozsony and Budapest: Stampfel Károly 1899) 11.§; E Csekő, 'A korlátozott előjog. Virilista nők Szekszárd r.t. városban a XX. század első évtizedeiben' in M Láczy (ed), *Nőke és férfiak . . . avagy a nemek története* (Nyíregyháza: Nyíregyháza Főiskola Gazdaságtudományi Kar 2003) 197, 198.

15 A Csizmadia, K Kovács and L Asztalos, *Magyar állam- és jogtörténet* (Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó 1998) 377.

16 See, however, Acsády (n 13). See also J Acsády, 'A varázstalanító emancipáció mítosza' (edited extract from the author's PhD dissertation submitted to Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest 2005) at <[www.csepeleli.com/kotet/csepeleli60\\_acsady\\_judit.pdf](http://www.csepeleli.com/kotet/csepeleli60_acsady_judit.pdf)>; Paletschek and Pietrow-Ennker (n 5) pt IV; M Feinberg, *Evasive Equality: Gender, Citizenship and the Limits of Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1950* (University of Pittsburgh Press 2006) especially chs 1–4; K Fenyves, 'When Sexism Meets Racism: the Numerus Clausus Law in Hungary' (2011) 4 *E-Journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association* 1; M Fidelis, 'Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation: Polish Women Intellectuals in the Cultural Construction of Female Gender Roles, 1864–1890' (2001) 13 *Journal of Women's History* 108. See also the sources cited in D Simonton, 'Introduction: Writing women in(to) Modern Europe' in D Simonton (ed), *The Routledge History of Women in Europe Since 1700* (Routledge 2006) 1, 11 fn 4.

17 J Purvis (ed), *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945: An Introduction* (Routledge 1997) 1.

18 Fidelis (n 16) 109.

19 Fenyves (n 16) 14.

20 For English-language literature on women's rights in the CEE region in the post-communist era, see eg J Jaquette and S Wolchik (eds), *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe* (Johns Hopkins UP 1998); *Women 2000: An Investigation into the Status of Women's Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights 2000); 'Bending the Bow: Targeting Women's Human Rights and Opportunities' (Open Society Institute 2002) at <[www.soros.org/initiatives/women/articles\\_publications/publications/bendingbow\\_20020801/bending\\_the\\_bow.pdf](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/women/articles_publications/publications/bendingbow_20020801/bending_the_bow.pdf)>; J Lukic, R Regulska, D Zavirsek (eds) *Women, and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe* (Ashgate 2006).

to subordinate feminist concerns to supposedly more urgent tasks, including economic development, democratisation and combating racism.<sup>21</sup> Previously, during the socialist era, feminist issues were frequently marginalised by communist regimes that, in seeking a monopoly over political and social debate, shut down or appropriated feminist movements.<sup>22</sup>

The comparative neglect of gender issues in the CEE region has also stemmed from the inaccessibility of key source materials.<sup>23</sup> During the socialist period, scholars, especially from Western countries, often encountered stiff bureaucratic hurdles in trying to gain access to official archives in the CEE area. In communist Romania, for example, the admission of a foreign researcher to the National Archives was considered a matter touching on Romania's political and security interests, requiring the express permission of the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>24</sup>

A re-assessment of women's work in Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century is particularly timely. Feminist scholars have drawn attention to the *deterioration* of conditions facing women throughout the CEE region, whether in the workplace or in the political sphere. According to Judit Acsády, a sociologist at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the end of state socialism has precipitated a serious worsening of the position of women.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Einhorn and Sever argue that, '[w]omen in this process of transition have undeniably fared badly':

The disproportionately high female share of unemployment, together with a widespread revival of nationalist and traditionalist ideologies, has had the effect of relegating women once more to the domestic sphere and has led to their growing desocialization. In this sphere women are subject to increasing violence and discrimination in the climate of frustration and social inequality often associated with a competitive marketplace.<sup>26</sup>

Post-communist law, with its rhetorical emphasis on gendered justice, racial non-discrimination and the universal enjoyment of human rights, masks a less comfortable reality. Since 1990 the prospect of genuine equality both inside and outside the workplace has *receded* for large segments of society in the CEE area, particularly for women and for Europe's largest ethnic minority, the Roma.<sup>27</sup>

The difficulties that women face are often compounded in countries with conservative religious traditions, such as Poland. Lorence-Kot and Winiarz emphasise that 'Polish society continued and continues to view women primarily as wives and mothers' and that 'whatever gains Polish women have made with respect to their personal rights and freedoms . . . they continue to be squeezed into an old social formula'.<sup>28</sup>

The re-emergence of nationalism as a powerful political ideology across much of the CEE area has also reinforced patriarchal tendencies. As Katherine Verdery notes, nationalist political movements have encouraged efforts to 'reconfigure' the family, 'compelling women back into the nurturing and care-giving roles "natural" to their sex and restoring to men their

21 B Einhorn and C Sever, 'Gender and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe' (2003) 5 *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 164, 171.

22 Acsády, 'A varázstalanító emancipáció mítosza', n. 16 above, 11–14; Feinberg (n 16) 219–21; K Guenther, *Making Their Place: Feminism After Socialism in Eastern Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2010) 32.

23 Simonton, 'Introduction: Writing women in(to) Modern Europe' (n 16) 2.

24 Information supplied to the author by a retired senior archivist in Romania.

25 Acsády (n 16) 19–20.

26 Einhorn and Sever (n 21) 164.

27 K Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton UP 1996) 79–82; I Pogány, 'Pariah Peoples: Roma and the Multiple Failures of Law in Central and Eastern Europe' (2012) 21(3) *Social and Legal Studies* 375.

28 Lorence-Kot and Winiarz (n 8) 206.

“natural” family authority’.<sup>29</sup> Thus, legal norms of non-discrimination and equal rights, which have been incorporated into the domestic law of post-communist states, are sharply at odds with conservative social, religious and political currents in many of these societies.

At the turn of the twentieth century, legal and social norms were much more closely aligned in Hungary than they are today. As previously indicated, Hungary’s women were formally excluded from the political sphere as well as from studying various subjects at university. These legal prohibitions reflected entrenched beliefs within Hungarian society concerning the appropriate role of women. Nevertheless, the liberalisation of women’s private law rights in Hungary, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, permitted a class of women to emerge who were able to exercise a substantial degree of personal autonomy and to play a significant role in the economic life of the country.

## 2 Law and women’s work in Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century

### (A) THE EXCLUSIONARY ROLES OF LAW, ‘BIOLOGY’ AND RELIGION

At the turn of the twentieth century in Hungary, as in much of Europe, law and bureaucratic practice served as instruments for the virtual exclusion of women from the political sphere and from various professions, as well as for the partial exclusion of women from higher education.<sup>30</sup> In effect, women faced a range of legal disabilities simply on account of their gender.

To a large extent, these disabilities reflected widely held assumptions about the unequal distribution of intellectual and other qualities between the sexes, as well as entrenched beliefs concerning the ‘natural’ role of women.<sup>31</sup> For example, Géza Somogyi, a Protestant clergyman writing in Hungary, in the late 1870s, warned that emancipation and higher levels of education were twin evils that could distract women from their primary function of raising children.<sup>32</sup> Somogyi also argued that women’s physiological characteristics demonstrated that they were intended for a life of domesticity.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in a pamphlet published in Budapest, in 1902, a Catholic Bishop, Béla Mayer, asserted that university education conflicted with God’s preordained responsibilities for women and that educated women were ‘unnatural’.<sup>34</sup>

Various professional associations also voiced concern at the prospect of women studying medicine, pharmacy etc.<sup>35</sup> For example, the Association of Hungarian Pharmacists warned that, if women were permitted to become pharmacists: ‘[m]any [male] customers would choose a particular pharmacy solely because of the physical allure of the pharmacist, reducing the pharmacy to the level of a coffee house or a *patisserie*’.<sup>36</sup>

Despite such opposition, Hungary’s Minister of Education issued a decree in 1895 authorising universities to admit female students to degree courses in the faculties of medicine, pharmacy and the arts.<sup>37</sup> In the following years, women were also enrolled for courses in subjects including mechanical engineering, chemical engineering and

29 Verdery (n 27) 80.

30 Simonton (n 6) 241–45; R Vinen, *A History in Fragments: Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Abacus 2002) 139, 143.

31 Acsády (n 16) 4.

32 Ibid 5.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid 5–6.

35 M Péter, *Az erdélyi gyógyszerészet magyar vonatkozásai* (Cluj: Az Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület kiadása 2002) 284.

36 Ibid.

37 Fenyves (n 16) 5.

architecture.<sup>38</sup> However, as discussed below, women were not permitted to register for degrees in law until 1946.

Notwithstanding passage of the 1895 decree, there remained serious obstacles to women's access to higher education in Hungary. As indicated above, there were very limited opportunities for women to obtain a high school certificate, a prerequisite for enrolling at a university. Hungary's first gymnasium for girls did not open until 1896, a year *after* women had gained the right to study at university.<sup>39</sup>

Academically ambitious young women, unable to enroll at a gymnasium, could only pursue university studies if their parents could afford to hire private tutors to prepare them for the school-leaving certificate.<sup>40</sup> A few dozen privately educated young women took the school leaving certificate each year.<sup>41</sup>

The bulk of young women in Hungary, like their male counterparts, completed just four years of compulsory education at an *elemi* or primary school before commencing work.<sup>42</sup> However, a growing proportion of girls went from the *elemi* to a *polgári*, or middle school, for an additional four years of study.<sup>43</sup> Girls who continued their education beyond this point mostly enrolled at teacher training colleges.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, although the 1895 decree formally permitted women to study in certain university faculties, resistance within the liberal professions and in the universities was intense, resulting in shifting bureaucratic restrictions, including quotas.<sup>45</sup> In August 1919, the Faculty Committee of Budapest's Medical School tried to *reduce* the number of female students who were admitted,<sup>46</sup> while only four female students were enrolled at Budapest's University of Technology between the academic years 1920/1921 and 1929/1930.<sup>47</sup>

The partial or total exclusion of women from certain university faculties, until 1946, had a massive impact on the scope of women's work in Hungary. In particular, the formal bar on women registering as law students at Hungary's universities, *reaffirmed* in a decree in 1927, had far-reaching consequences.<sup>48</sup> In pre-Second World War Hungary, a law degree was not only the route into the legal profession, it was also a prerequisite for entry to the civil service.<sup>49</sup> Academically able women, who might otherwise have opted to become lawyers or civil servants, were obliged to choose less prestigious and less well-paid jobs as schoolteachers, librarians or clerical workers.

In 1946, as part of wide-ranging social and economic reforms, Hungary's Parliament passed an Act that swept away virtually all of the remaining restrictions on women's access to higher education.<sup>50</sup> In accordance with the 1946 Act on the Admission of Women to

38 M Palasik, 'Women at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics' (Conference Paper, Charles University, Prague, 2003) 2–5, at <goliat.eik.bme.hu/~hronszky/pmea.doc>.

39 T Dobszay, 'Magyarország Kulturális Élete a Dualizmus Idején' in A Gergely (ed), *Magyarország Története a 19. Században* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó 2003) 460, 472.

40 Szapor (n 5) 195.

41 Fenyves (n 16) 5.

42 Dobszay (n 39) 466.

43 Ibid 472.

44 Ibid.

45 Fenyves (n 16) 5.

46 Ibid 6.

47 Palasik (n 38) 7.

48 Fenyves (n 16) 12.

49 Ibid 5.

50 Act XXII of 1946 is available (in Hungarian) at <www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=8240>.

Universities and Colleges, women were to be admitted to *any* university or institution of higher education, other than to schools of divinity.<sup>51</sup> The Act also stipulated that admission requirements for women applicants should be identical to those for men.<sup>52</sup>

In 1948, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law prohibiting discrimination against women seeking employment in the public sector.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the statute prohibited all forms of discrimination that prevented women from obtaining the qualifications necessary to join any profession or to pursue any occupation.<sup>54</sup> However, limited exceptions were made for restrictions on female employment that could be justified by reference to the protection of women's health or that were based on women's 'physical capacity'.<sup>55</sup> Religious institutions were also exempted from compliance with the statute.<sup>56</sup>

With the passage of Act XXII of 1946 and Act XLIII of 1948 women gained virtual equality with men in terms of their freedom to study any subject at university or to choose any occupation or profession, subject to having the appropriate academic qualifications. However, these freedoms did *not* translate into gender equality, whether in the workplace or in the political sphere. Katherine Verdery notes that, despite the egalitarian rhetoric of the communist regimes that governed the CEE region for most of the post-war period until 1989, 'the structure of power and the larger division of labor in the socialist family remained decidedly gendered'.<sup>57</sup> As Verdery emphasises:<sup>58</sup>

... the state apparatus was heavily masculine. The core sectors of socialism – the bureaucracy itself, heavy industry, the army, and the apparatus of repression – were almost wholly male, especially at the apex . . . In the state bureaucracy, women overwhelmingly held clerical and secretarial functions . . . Women were indeed brought into political office, but generally at lower levels and in areas deemed appropriately female: education, health care and culture.

In its affirmation of gender equality, socialist law neither reflected nor greatly influenced the gendered character of CEE societies. This disparity between legal prescription and social and economic reality became *more* not less pronounced with the passage of time. For example, from the mid-1950s, gender was *reintroduced* as a criterion in employment policies in Hungary. Women tractor drivers, who had been the quintessential symbol of female emancipation only a few years before, were now viewed as the victims of an overly dogmatic application of socialist ideology.<sup>59</sup> The numbers of women working in other traditionally masculine occupations declined sharply.<sup>60</sup> As Verdery notes, with reference to socialist Romania, gendered distinctions were apparent in almost every sector of the economy:<sup>61</sup>

... in Romanian industry in 1985, 42 percent of the labor force was female, but women formed 80 percent of textile workers, 50 percent of those in electronics, and 30 percent of workers in machine construction; among white-collar occupations, women formed 43 percent of persons employed in science but 65

51 Act XXII of 1946 (n 50 above) 1.§(1).

52 Ibid 1.§(2).

53 2.§(1), Act XLIII of 1948. The statute is available (in Hungarian) at <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=8215](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=8215)><http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=8325>>.

54 Ibid 2.§(1).

55 Ibid 5.§.

56 Ibid.

57 Verdery (n 27) 66.

58 Ibid 66–67.

59 E. Tóth, *Kádár Leányai: Nők a szocialista időszakban* (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely 2010) 70.

60 Ibid.

61 Verdery (n 27) 67.

percent of employees in the more 'feminine' jobs in culture, education, and the arts and 75 percent of health care workers.

### (B) THE INCLUSIONARY ROLE OF LAW

As indicated above, public law was heavily gendered in Hungary, as in Europe more generally, at the beginning of the twentieth century. By contrast, Hungarian private law extended full equality to women.<sup>62</sup> Crucially, women's economic equality had ceased to be contingent on their marital status. Thus, *A Guide to Hungarian Private Law in Force Today*, published in 1899, stated:<sup>63</sup>

The financial independence of women is a fundamental principle of marriage law and flows from the freedom of the individual. A woman retains control over her personal property after entering into marriage and continues to manage her own property unless she chooses to entrust this responsibility to her husband. In the latter case, a woman may decide [at any time] to resume the management of her own property without having to offer any reasons.

In the event of divorce or of the dissolution of a marriage, a woman was entitled to the return of any property that she had brought with her into the marriage as well as of any property that she had acquired independently of her husband during the course of their married life.<sup>64</sup> Profits accruing from a wife's assets belonged to her alone.

The law relating to dowries also bolstered the financial independence of women whose marriages had broken down. Although the provision of dowries was discretionary, any dowry received by a husband had to be returned in full to the person who had given it in the event of a marriage coming to an end.<sup>65</sup> Frequently, parents, in providing their daughter with a dowry, would stipulate that the money was part of her inheritance.<sup>66</sup> Thus, in the event of the marriage breaking down, the dowry automatically became the property of the wife.

The process of extending full private law rights to women in Hungary had begun with the adoption of Austria's *Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, or Civil Code, in 1853.<sup>67</sup> The process culminated with the passage of Act XXIII of 1874 on the Age of Majority of Women.<sup>68</sup> This stipulated that, in Hungary, unmarried women attained adulthood at the age of 24 and that, 'all rights associated with adulthood shall enter into force' from this point.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, 'adulthood' rather than gender became determinative of women's private law rights. Married women were deemed to have attained adulthood on marriage irrespective of their age.<sup>70</sup>

With the passage of the 1874 Act women acquired the same private law rights and capacities as men in the territories administered by Hungary. Thus, women, like men, 'enjoyed full legal capacity, could manage their property, enter into contracts and participate in economic life'.<sup>71</sup> These measures preceded, by several years, the passage of the 1882 Married Women's Property Act in Britain. The 1882 statute finally invested married women in England and Wales with the same rights and capacities as their peers in

62 Katona (n 14) 11.§; Csekő (n 14) 198.

63 Katona (n 14) 11.§.

64 Ibid 100.§.

65 Ibid 98.§.

66 Ibid.

67 Csekő (n 14) 198; Csizmadia et al (n 15) 379–82.

68 For the text of Act XXIII of 1874 (in Hungarian), see <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5635](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5635)>.

69 Ibid 1.§.

70 Ibid 2.§.

71 Csekő (n 14) 198.

Austria-Hungary, that is, to buy, own and sell property and to pursue legal claims independently of their husbands.<sup>72</sup>

The following case study of women's work in Sighetul Marmației suggests that a significant minority of women were able to take full advantage of these new economic freedoms by the early years of the twentieth century. Such women played an active and increasingly important role in the commercial life of towns such as Sighet. By contrast, the overwhelming majority of working women in Sighet, as in other towns in Hungary, lacked capital and commercial knowhow and had received only a minimal education. Like Tersánszky's fictional heroine, Firona, such women had to accept whatever work they could find. In practice, women's occupational choices were frequently limited to domestic service, casual labouring, hawking fruit, working as washerwomen or prostitution.

### 3 Women's work in Sighet at the beginning of the twentieth century: a case study

#### (A) SIGHET AND MARAMUREȘ AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Sighet, known as 'Máramarossziget' in Hungarian, was the county town of Máramaros in the Hungarian sector of the Dual Monarchy.<sup>73</sup> In comparison with much of Austria-Hungary, Máramaros was poor and economically underdeveloped. A significant part of the county was mountainous or heavily forested, leaving insufficient land for the cultivation of crops. As emphasised in a report drawn up in 1900 by the *Főispán*, the most senior Crown official in Máramaros,<sup>74</sup> which was subsequently summarised in a local newspaper, substantial quantities of wheat, rye and barley had to be imported at considerable expense to feed the local population.<sup>75</sup> According to the same source, the most profitable sectors of the region's economy were the timber trade and the extraction of salt from local mines.<sup>76</sup> However, the salt mines and most of the timber belonged to the Crown. Consequently, the bulk of the profits from these ventures did not remain locally.

A national census conducted in 1891 found that the population of Máramaros comprised 268,281 persons of whom 122,528 were native Ruthenian speakers,<sup>77</sup> 33,610 native Hungarian speakers, 45,679 native German speakers, and 64,957 native Romanian speakers.<sup>78</sup> In reality, most of the 'German speakers' identified by the census were Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox Jews whose mother tongue was Yiddish,<sup>79</sup> a form of High

72 S Steinbach, *Women in England 1760–1914* (Phoenix 2005) 272–73.

73 The county is now known as Maramureș in Romanian.

74 Appointed directly by the Emperor on the recommendation of Hungary's Minister for the Interior, the *Főispán* was the government's chosen representative in each county rather than a member of the permanent civil service. See B Mezey et al, *Magyar Alkotmány Történet* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó 2002) 348. The *Főispán* exercised far-reaching powers over every public institution in the county with the exception of the judiciary. The *Főispán's* powers extended, inter alia, to suspending any public official whom he suspected of negligence or malfeasance. Ibid 348–49.

75 *Máramarosi Híradó*, 17 January 1900.

76 Ibid.

77 On the Ruthenian language and Ruthenian national consciousness, see P Magosci, 'The Rusyn Question' (1995) 2–3 *Political Studies* 221. See also T Kuzio, 'The Rusyn Question In Ukraine: Sorting Out Fact from Fiction' (2005) XXXII *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 1.

78 G Varády, 'Máramarosmegye' in *Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia Irásban és Képpen* vol VI (Budapest: A Magyar Királyi Államnyomda Kiadása 1900) 437, 443.

79 Ibid.

German written in Hebrew script. Since the late eighteenth century the number of Jews in Maramureş had grown steadily, fuelled by immigration from Galicia.<sup>80</sup>

As the census figures indicate, the two largest linguistic communities in Maramureş were the Ruthenians and the Romanians. In the course of the nineteenth century these communities, most of whose members adhered to the Greek Catholic confession, developed an increasingly strong sense of national consciousness.<sup>81</sup> While 'nationality' and 'citizenship' are often treated as synonyms, particularly in the English-speaking world, this is far from the case in the CEE area, where *nationality* is seen as expressing an individual's sense of cultural, linguistic and political identity.

A census held in 1900 found that the population of Sighet comprised 16,901 persons.<sup>82</sup> Of these, 12,658 affirmed Hungarian as their mother tongue, 2329 spoke German, 1697 Romanian and 701 Ruthene.<sup>83</sup> In addition, there were smaller numbers of Slovak, Croat and Serb native speakers, while a total of 37 persons fell into none of the above categories.

However, these statistics are at least partially misleading. The bulk of the native German speakers in Sighet were Jews whose mother tongue was Yiddish. In addition, although 12,658 residents of Sighet identified Hungarian as their first language, a significant proportion of these were Jews for whom Hungarian was their mother tongue.<sup>84</sup> This is clear from the fact that no fewer than 6375 of Sighet's residents – amounting to almost 38 per cent of the population – declared in the census held in 1900 that they were Jewish by religion.<sup>85</sup>

Although Hungarian law at the turn of the twentieth century treated religious affiliation as *irrelevant* to questions of linguistic or national identity, Hungarian society was less scrupulous. Despite the passage of an emancipation law, in 1867,<sup>86</sup> Jews remained subject to varying degrees of discrimination unless they converted to Christianity. For example, Jews were much less likely than non-Jews to secure jobs in the state or local bureaucracy, in the judiciary, in the prosecution service or in the army, sectors that were seen as the preserve of the Hungarian middle and, especially, of the upper-middle class.<sup>87</sup> In these circumstances, many of Hungary's Jews continued to opt for careers in industry and commerce, where they were well established.<sup>88</sup>

Although deeply divided on religious, political and other grounds, Jews constituted the largest single confessional group in Sighet by 1900. According to the census held in that year, 6375 persons identified themselves as 'Israelite', that is Jewish, by religion.<sup>89</sup>

80 P Wrobel, 'The Jews of Galicia under Austrian-Polish Rule, 1867–1918' (2002) 29 *Galizien German Descendants Newsletter*, at <[www.jewishgen.org/galicia/html/jews\\_of\\_galicia.pdf](http://www.jewishgen.org/galicia/html/jews_of_galicia.pdf)>.

81 I Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 2003) 114–19.

82 *A Magyar korona országának 1900 évi népszámlálása*, Budapest 1902–, 304, in Arhivele Naționale Maramureş, fila nr. 304.

83 *Ibid* 305.

84 By contrast, conservative Jews, who were much more numerous in the northeast and east of 'historic' Hungary, were wary of integration with non-Jews and of surrendering their distinct culture and identity. Such Jews remained faithful to their Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox roots. See eg R Patai, *The Jews of Hungary* (Detroit: Wayne State UP 1996) 322–24.

85 *A Magyar korona országának 1900 évi népszámlálása* (n 82) 305.

86 For the text of the emancipation law see Act XVII of 1867, available (in Hungarian) at <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5318](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5318)>.

87 F Fejtő, *Hongrois et Juifs* (Paris: Éditions Balland 1997) 156–58; I Pogány, 'Poets, Revolutionaries and Shoemakers: Law and the Construction of National Identity in Central Europe During the Long 19th Century' (2007) 16(1) *Social and Legal Studies* 95, 103–05.

88 Fejtő (n 87) 162–64.

89 *A Magyar korona országának 1900 évi népszámlálása* (n 82) 305. The second largest denominational group in the town comprised Greek Catholics (4586) and the third largest Roman Catholics (4314).

Given the size of Sighet's Jewish population, it follows that a large proportion of the town's working women were also Jewish. Although a minority enjoyed middle-class incomes and lifestyles, most belonged to the poorer classes, in common with the overwhelming majority of Sighet's Jewish residents. Working Jewish women in Sighet made a living, variously, as market vendors, seamstresses, midwives, domestic servants and as casual labourers or *napszámós*.<sup>90</sup>

Most working women in Maramureş, as in Hungary more generally, worked from necessity rather than choice. As emphasised by Katalin Fenyves: 'in 1900, more than two thirds of Hungarian women over the age of 14 were not married, which most of the time meant that they had to support themselves'.<sup>91</sup>

The following analysis of women's work in Sighet is divided into two parts. In part 3(b), the article examines the range of work available to women from the poorer classes in Sighet at the beginning of the twentieth century. In part 3(c), the article considers the variety of work undertaken by middle and lower-middle class women in the town in the early 1900s.

### (b) POOR WORKING WOMEN IN SIGHET AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Drawing a line between 'poor' and 'other' working women in Sighet is a difficult and, to some degree, arbitrary exercise. There are almost infinite gradations of 'poverty' and 'wealth', while such notions are, to some degree, inherently subjective. However, at the turn of the *twentieth* century, various occupational categories were associated with modest incomes and low social status. This was true, for example, of domestic servants and casual labourers, groups who did not pay personal income tax directly.<sup>92</sup> Consequently, women who earned a living as *napszámós* or as household servants are included here in the category of poor working women.

With respect to other predominantly female, or non-gendered, occupations, the threshold of 'poverty' used in this article is that of women paying *less* than 10 korona income tax annually. In 1902, by way of comparison, carpenters in Sighet were taxed, variously, at 14 to 34 Korona income tax, cabmen at 12 to 24 Korona income tax, barbers at 17.60 to 55.24 Korona income tax, butchers at 21.80 to 313.60 Korona income tax, doctors at 30 to 60 Korona income tax and midwives at 4 to 12.60 Korona income tax.<sup>93</sup> The average income tax paid by some 15 midwives working in Sighet was just 6.9 Korona.<sup>94</sup>

90 Records of illegitimate births in Sighet, at the beginning of the twentieth century, show that a large proportion of Jewish single mothers were working as domestic servants, as *napszámós* or in some other menial capacity. In 1900, for example, 15 out of 57 mothers who gave birth to illegitimate children in Sighet were Jewish. Of these, four worked as *napszámós* (entry nos 162, 412, 602 and 654), five were employed as maids or cooks (entry nos 233, 305, 500, 508 and 569), one was a fruit seller (entry no 537) and one a seamstress (entry no 667). The remainder of the single Jewish mothers had no listed occupation (entry nos 524, 548, 584, 658). See *Magyar Anyakönyv* (Sighet, 1900), Arhivele Naționale Maramureş, Colecția Matricole Confesionale, fond nr. 19, inv. nr. 24, registrul nr. 8/1894–1923, Baia Mare - nașteri. As is clear from Table 5 below, in 1902 Jewish women also featured prominently amongst low-income, self-employed women in Sighet subject to 3rd Class Personal Income Tax.

91 Fenyves (n 16) 5.

92 In accordance with Act X of 1883, *napszámós* were exempted from paying personal income tax. See Act X of 1883, available (in Hungarian) at <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=6088](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=6088)>. Although domestic servants were subject to income tax, this was usually paid on their behalf by their employers.

93 See, variously, entries 3–11 (carpenters), 17–58 (cabmen), 208–18 (barbers), 552–66 (butchers), 587–99 (doctors), *Máramarosziget Város III oszt. Kerestadó* (1902) (n 11).

94 *Ibid* entries 808–24.

In most cases, poor working women in Sighet had received a perfunctory education, at best. Not infrequently, these women were illiterate. Attendance at *elemi* or primary school had been compulsory in Hungary since the passage of Act XXXVIII of 1868.<sup>95</sup> However, as indicated above, primary school consisted of only four classes. At the age of ten many children, girls as well as boys, entered the job market.<sup>96</sup>

In addition, levels of school attendance were strikingly uneven. For example, illiteracy amongst ethnic Romanians in Hungary, in the first decade of the twentieth century, was estimated at 50–60 per cent and amongst Ruthenes at 70 per cent.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, poor working women in Sighet and Maramureş, a significant proportion of whom were of Romanian or Ruthene ethnicity, often lacked even a basic education. For the most part, these women could only hope to find work as domestic servants, washerwomen or casual labourers.

### (i) Registers of births in Sighet and the surrounding area

From 1895 an annual register of births, or *Anyakönyv*, was compiled by each municipality in the Hungarian portion of the Dual Monarchy.<sup>98</sup> The *Anyakönyv* records the name, place of birth and religion of every newborn child's parents as well as the occupation of the father. However, in cases where a child was illegitimate at birth and where the child's father declined to acknowledge paternity, the *Anyakönyv* lists the occupation of the mother. Consequently, registers of births for Sighet and for other towns in the region, including Baia Mare, can tell us much about the work that was available to single women from the poorer classes in Maramureş and in neighbouring counties at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Tables 1–3 provide details of the occupations of single mothers who gave birth in Sighet in 1898, 1899 and 1900, as listed in the town's registers of births. Table 4 lists the occupations of single mothers who gave birth in Baia Mare in 1900.

Table 1: Occupations of unmarried mothers in Sighet, 1898<sup>99</sup>

Occupation of mother	Number of single mothers
Household servants (cooks, maids)	20
<i>Napszámos</i> or day labourers	11
Washerwomen	3
Seamstress	1
Restaurateur	1
No listed occupation	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>

95 For the text of Act XXXVIII of 1868 (in Hungarian), see <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5360](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5360)>.

96 Dobszay (n 39) 466.

97 Ibid.

98 Previously, the task of maintaining records of births, marriages and deaths had been the responsibility of the various religious denominations.

99 See *Magyar Anyakönyv* (Sighet, 1898), Arhivele Naționale Maramureş, Colecția Registre Stare Civilă, fond nr. 743, inv. nr. 1371, reg. nr. 104/1898.

Table 2: Occupations of unmarried mothers in Sighet, 1899<sup>100</sup>

Occupation of mother	Number of single mothers
Household servants (cooks, maids)	30
<i>Napszámos</i> or day labourers	10
Fruit hawker	1
Seamstresses	3
No listed occupation	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 3: Occupations of unmarried mothers in Sighet, 1900<sup>101</sup>

Occupation	Number of single mothers
Household servants (cooks, maids)	22
<i>Napszámos</i> or day labourers	18
Washerwomen	2
Hospital nurse	1
Fruit hawker	1
No listed occupation	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>

Table 4: Occupations of unmarried mothers in Baia Mare, 1900<sup>102</sup>

Occupation	Number of single mothers
Household servants (cooks, maids)	18
<i>Napszámos</i> or day labourers	6
Washerwomen	3
Basketweaver	1
Seamstress	1
No listed occupation	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

As is clear from Tables 1–4, most unmarried mothers were working when they fell pregnant. Almost without exception, these women had poorly paid, physically strenuous jobs that required little or no education. A significant proportion of the single mothers earned a living as *napszámos*: 22.44 per cent, 19.6 per cent, 31.57 per cent and 19.35 per cent, respectively. However, domestic servants constituted by far the largest single occupational group amongst the unmarried mothers: 40.81 per cent, 58.82 per cent, 38.59 per cent and 58.06 per cent, respectively.

The preponderance of household maids and cooks amongst the single mothers suggests a correlation between domestic service and sexual exploitation. As Viktor Karády has pointed out, domestic servants in Hungary were generally young, impressionable and unsophisticated; they often came from villages and rural settlements and lacked friends or relatives in the towns where they mostly found work. These considerations, as well as the

100 *Magyar Anyakönyv* (Sighet, 1899), Arhivele Naționale Maramureș, Colecția Registre Stare Civilă, fond nr. 743, inv. nr. 1371, reg. nr. 105/1899.

101 *Magyar Anyakönyv* (Sighet, 1900) (n 90).

102 *Magyar Anyakönyv* (Baia Mare, 1900), Arhivele Naționale Maramureș, Colecția Registre Stare Civilă - exemplarul II, fond. nr. 743, inventar nr. 1371, registrul nr. 6/1899–1900, Baia Mare – nașteri.

fact that they lodged with their employers, rendered female domestic servants peculiarly susceptible to sexual exploitation.<sup>103</sup>

The exposure of domestic servants to sexual and other forms of abuse emerges quite clearly from statistics of suicide for the period. For example, amongst female domestic servants in Budapest in the first decade of the twentieth century, levels of suicide were more than *ten times* higher than amongst *napszámos* and almost *three times* higher than amongst factory workers.<sup>104</sup> These figures suggest that domestic servants were subject to extremely high levels of stress, harassment and social isolation.

The comparatively large numbers of female *napszámos* who fell pregnant outside marriage also calls for explanation. Female *napszámos*, like the fictional Firona, belonged to one of the very lowest strata of society and may have been less constrained by the rigid social conventions that governed female sexuality amongst the middle classes and amongst the 'respectable' poor, that is, peasants, household servants and industrial workers.

## (ii) personal income tax files

At the turn of the twentieth century, officials in every town in the Hungarian portion of the Dual Monarchy maintained personal income tax files. In accordance with Act XXIX of 1875, there were *four* classes of personal income tax.<sup>105</sup> *Napszámos* or casual labourers, domestic servants, factory workers, shop assistants, office clerks and various other poorly paid occupational groups were subject to 1st Class Personal Income Tax. This was calculated in the form of a 'head' tax rather than as a proportion of the employee's earnings.<sup>106</sup> The tax was paid by employers, who could then deduct it from their employees' wages.<sup>107</sup>

Owners of real property, including land and buildings, were subject to 2nd Class Personal Income Tax.<sup>108</sup> As discussed below, records for Sighet show that a significant number of women earned very substantial sums from renting out property. Some of these women were amongst the most affluent members of the community.

Civil servants, local government officials, clergymen, teachers and others in permanent employment and in receipt of a regular salary were subject to 4th Class Personal Income Tax, which rose to a maximum of 10 per cent on annual earnings.<sup>109</sup> However, as explained in part II(a) above, as a consequence of wide-ranging restrictions on women's education and on their entry into various sectors of employment, very few women, other than teachers, were subject to 4th Class Personal Income Tax during the period in question.<sup>110</sup>

Significantly, well over 100 women are listed in the 3rd Class Personal Income Tax files compiled in Sighet in the early 1900s. Persons subject to 3rd Class Personal Income Tax ranged from tinsmiths, musicians, market stall-holders, midwives and rag and bone men, at one end of the socio-economic spectrum, to lawyers, doctors, pharmacists and successful

103 V Karády, *Zsidóság és társadalmi egyenlőtlenségek, 1867–1945* (Budapest: Replika Kör 2000) 151–53.

104 Karády (n 103) 154–55.

105 See Act XXIX of 1875, available (in Hungarian) at <[www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5684](http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3&param=5684)>.

106 *Ibid* 2, 7§§.

107 *Ibid* 11§. In 1883, as noted previously, *napszámos* were exempted from this tax. See Act X of 1883 (n 92).

108 See 2, 7§§, Act XXIX of 1875 (n 105).

109 *Ibid* 2, 26§§.

110 In any event, the 4th Class Personal Income Tax files for Sighet, for the period under consideration, are missing from the National Archives in Baia Mare. The files may have been lost in transit from Sighet to Baia Mare, in the course of transferring the county archives, or they may have been destroyed in Sighet during or shortly after the Second World War. According to a former archivist, Soviet troops, who were stationed in Sighet at the end of the war, tore pages indiscriminately from the archives to use as cigarette paper, to light fires and for other purposes.

traders at the other. The tax was levied on self-employed persons other than those subject to 1st or 2nd Class Personal Income Tax. The 3rd Class Personal Income Tax files for Sighet convey a sense of the variety of occupations that were available or, equally importantly, *unavailable* to women in this period.

As the data in Tables 5 and 6 and in the corresponding footnotes suggests, *ethnicity* as well as *gender* played a significant role in determining the occupations available to – or favoured by – particular segments of the working population of Sighet. The large number of German (ie Jewish) names amongst the self-employed women listed in Tables 5 and 6 reflected the heavy concentration of Jews in many branches of commerce and industry in Sighet, as in Hungary more generally. As discussed above, this distinctive pattern of economic activity was the consequence of several factors. In the first place, Jews were not welcome in the army, the judiciary and the state bureaucracy. The latter, in particular, had become the preserve of the Hungarian lower gentry. In addition, despite a gradual broadening of vocational opportunities for Jews in Hungary, following passage of the 1867 emancipation law, many Jews preferred to remain in trades or occupations with which they or their families were already familiar.<sup>111</sup>

Sighet's 3rd Class Personal Income Tax files for the years 1900 and 1901 are missing from the archives in Baia Mare, likely casualties of the chaos that descended upon the region in the latter stages of the Second World War. However, the 3rd Class Personal Income Tax file for 1902 lists 1006 persons.<sup>112</sup> Of these 102, a little more than 10 per cent, are women.<sup>113</sup>

It is clear from the file that many occupations were heavily gendered. With just a single exception, *all* of Sighet's tinsmiths, carpenters, timber merchants and cattle butchers were male.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, *all* of the town's doctors, pharmacists and lawyers were men, even though women had been permitted to study medicine and pharmacy (but not law) at Hungarian universities since the mid-1890s.<sup>115</sup> The situation remained unchanged two years later; there was not a single woman amongst Sighet's physicians, pharmacists and lawyers in 1904.<sup>116</sup> By contrast, all of the midwives and seamstresses in Sighet – occupations that were of low status and that were badly paid – were female in 1902 and in 1904.<sup>117</sup>

The first female pharmacist to qualify in the Hungarian sector of the Dual Monarchy, Szerafin Thinagl, graduated from the Ferencz József University in Kolozsvár (now the Romanian city of Cluj) in 1903.<sup>118</sup> The first female doctor to qualify at a Hungarian university, Dr Sarolta Steinberger, obtained her diploma in Budapest in 1900.<sup>119</sup> However,

111 Pogány (n 87) 103–07.

112 *Máramarossziget Város III oszt. Kerestadó* (1902) (n 11).

113 Because of their multiple commercial interests, two of the women, Mrs Antal Szkankó and Szabina Almási, are listed twice each. See entry nos 408, 431 (Mrs Antal Szkankó) and entry nos 221, 471 (Szabina Almási) *ibid.*

114 Of 14 cattle butchers (ie *mészáros*), one was female. See *ibid* entry no 564 (Mrs Mihály Sreiner).

115 The piecemeal and controversial opening up of higher education in Hungary to women is discussed above, pt 2(A).

116 See *Máramarossziget Város III oszt. Keresetadó kivétési lajstroma* (1904), Arhivele Naționale Maramureș, Primăria Orașului Sighet, Registre operative ale fondului, fond. nr. 46, inventar nr. 793, registrul nr. 304/1904.

117 For details of the tax paid by midwives in Sighet see entry nos 808–24, *Máramarossziget Város III oszt. Keresetadó* (1902) (n 11). The midwives paid varying amounts of income tax (in Korona): 12.60, 5, 6, 12, 6, 6, 6, 6, 5, 5, 12, 4, 6, 4, 8. For details of the tax paid by seamstresses in Sighet see *ibid*, entry nos 929–33. The seamstresses paid the following amounts of income tax (in Korona): 2, 2, 6, 8, 4. Details of the income tax paid by midwives and seamstresses in Sighet, in 1904, are available at *Máramarossziget Város III oszt. Keresetadó* (1904) (n 116), entry nos 622–29 (midwives) and nos 716–18 (seamstresses).

118 Péter (n 35) 285.

119 J Honti, 'Száz éve végzett a budapesti egyetemen az első orvosnő' (15 September 2000) 1(1) *Semmelweis Egyetem újság*, at <[www.ujzag.sote.hu/se200001/20000112.html](http://www.ujzag.sote.hu/se200001/20000112.html)>.

as indicated above, lingering prejudice against the notion of women pharmacists and doctors, a series of shifting bureaucratic obstacles and the late development of Hungarian secondary education for girls severely limited the number of women who were able to study pharmacy, medicine or other subjects at Hungary's universities, particularly before the First World War.<sup>120</sup>

Some of the self-employed women listed in Table 6 were extremely successful. However, they represent only a small *minority* of self-employed women in Sighet. As is clear from Tables 5 and 6, most of the town's self-employed women had relatively modest incomes. Overall, working women in Sighet – comprising large numbers of domestic servants and *napszámós* as well as much smaller numbers of teachers and self-employed women paying 3rd Class Personal Income Tax – were poor, even by the standards of the day.

As indicated above, poor or low-income working women are defined in this article as women working in occupations such as domestic service or casual labouring (*napszámós*) as well as self-employed women paying *less* than 10 korona income tax annually. Wherever possible, the actual tax, that is, 'Decided Tax', paid by individual women is listed in Tables 5 and 6 rather than the 'Estimated Tax', as previously calculated by tax officials. However, in cases where no tax was eventually levied, for whatever reason,<sup>121</sup> the Estimated Tax is given.

Table 5: Occupations of low income, self-employed women in Sighet subject to 3rd Class Personal Income Tax, 1902<sup>i</sup>

Occupation	Number of women	Decided Tax in korona
Bakers <sup>ii</sup>	2	6, 6
Bookbinder <sup>iii</sup>	1	4.68
Lessees (land) <sup>iv</sup>	2	0.30, 0.10
Lessees of orchards, kitchen gardens etc <sup>v</sup>	12	1*, 3*, 0.40*, 1.5*, 1.5*, 0.25*, 0.30*, 5.50*, 1*, 0.30*, 0.50*, 0.1*
Market stall-holders <sup>vi</sup>	4	4, 4, 4, 4
Midwives <sup>vii</sup>	14	5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 5, 5, 7*, 5.40*, 4, 6, 4, 8
Miscellaneous ie illegible <sup>viii</sup>	2	6, 6
Pork butchers ( <i>hentes</i> ) <sup>ix</sup>	7	6.40, 6.40, 2, 7.20, 5*, 3, 7.40*
Seamstresses <sup>x</sup>	5	2, 2, 6, 8, 4
Tobacco vendors <sup>xi</sup>	2	0.34, 4.86
Vendor of stewed vegetable dishes ( <i>főzelék</i> ) <sup>xii</sup>	1	8
Women's hairdresser <sup>xiii</sup>	1	8
<b>Total<sup>xiv</sup></b>	<b>53</b>	

\*denotes Estimated Tax

120 The impediments to the education of women doctors and pharmacists at Hungary's universities, after 1895, are discussed above, pt 2(A). The outbreak of the First World War had a positive impact on attitudes towards the education of women. Under the exigencies of war, restrictions on the admission of women to study pharmacy and medicine were considerably relaxed. Péter (n 35) 287–88.

121 Such reasons could include the death of a self-employed person *before* personal income tax was levied for the year in question or the collapse of a taxpayer's anticipated profits.

**Notes to Table 5**

- i *III oszt. Keresetadó Kivetési lajstroma 1902 évre* (n 11).
- ii Ibid entry nos 427, 430 ( Mrs Jakab Hovits, widow; Mrs Ferenc Renyák).
- iii Ibid entry no 520 (Mrs József Haan).
- iv Ibid entry nos 77, 127 (Mrs János Fekete, widow; Mrs Ferenc Zékány, widow).
- v Ibid entry nos 134, 136–37, 142, 157, 159–61, 170, 172, 178, 189 (Mrs János Bodnár, widow; Mrs József Budaházy; Mrs József Csek; Mrs Sándor Darvay; Leona Joódi; Mrs Erzsébet Lányi; Mrs Róza Lendrai; Mrs Gábor Magos, widow; Mrs János Schneider, widow; Mrs György Schroff, widow; Mrs Mihály Tamás, widow; Mrs József Pálfi, widow).
- vi Ibid entry nos 440, 444–45, 463 (Mrs Rifke Davidovits, widow; Mrs Mózes Feürvorker, widow; Mrs Mózes József Fisch; Mrs Judáh Szöbel).
- vii Ibid entry nos 809–18, 820–24 (Mrs Gál Csiszár, widow; Mrs Lipót Ferenczi; Mrs Gusztáv Ilnicki; Mrs Sándor Karantai; Mrs Péter Kelemen; Mrs Imre Kiss; Mrs Lipót Lóvinger; Mrs Ferencz Mentel; Mrs Lajos Patai, widow; Emma Todorovics; Mrs Sándor Verőczi, widow; Mrs István Veres; Francziska Weiser; Regina Viner).
- viii Ibid entry nos 506, 573 (Francziska Saüer; Mária Yakubinyi).
- ix Ibid entry nos 408–09, 411–13 (Mrs Antal Szkankó; Mrs György Szénási; Mrs Mária Pelenta; Mrs József Tóth; Mrs Miklos Antal; Teréz Hampigel).
- x Ibid entry nos 929–33 (Erzsébet Tevicki; Háni Kertenbaum; Matild Kirchmayer; Mrs Gábor Magos; Mrs Leopold Madler).
- xi Ibid entry nos 310, 312 (Mrs Áaron Szimovics; Ms Kati Wiesel).
- xii Ibid entry no 368 (Mrs Joel Lax).
- xiii Ibid entry no 340 (Ms Teréz Klein).
- xiv One of the women listed in Table 5, Mrs Antal Szkankó, is also listed in Table 6 as she had two separate sources of income, one of which was much more lucrative than the other.

**(C) MIDDLE AND UPPER INCOME WORKING WOMEN IN SIGHET AND THE SURROUNDING  
AREA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

**(i) 3rd Class Personal Income Tax**

As indicated in Table 5, more than half of the self-employed women in Sighet subject to 3rd Class Personal Income Tax earned comparatively little, although some of these women may have had supplementary sources of income. By contrast, a number of self-employed women listed in Table 6 were financially successful. Of the 50 women in Table 6, 12 paid more than 40 Korona income tax in 1902.

It is clear from the figures in Table 6 that the highest-earning, self-employed woman in Sighet was Szabina Almási, who ran the town's brothel. Together with a second woman, Mrs Imre Egyed, Szabina Almási also co-owned a bath-house and bar. On the assumption that Szabina Almási had a 50 per cent share in the bath-house, she paid a total of 340 Korona personal income tax in 1902. This suggests an income that was high even by the standards of the most affluent members of the local community. By way of comparison, in the timber trade, which was one of the most lucrative businesses in Sighet, only a partnership formed by two timber merchants, Glasner and Schüller, paid more taxes than Szabina Almási.<sup>122</sup> The third most successful timber merchant in Sighet, Zsigmond Klein, paid 225 Korona income tax,<sup>123</sup> while the next most successful, a partnership of two businessmen, paid 295.85 Korona income tax.<sup>124</sup> Sex, like timber, was a valuable commodity in Sighet at the turn of the twentieth century.

<sup>122</sup> III oszt. Keresetadó Kivetési lajstroma 1902 évre (n 11) entry no 327 (Glasner and Schüller). The partnership paid 1928 korona income tax in 1902.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid entry no 332 (Zsigmond Klein).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid entry no 334 (Krauer and Kaufman).

The data in Table 6 and in the accompanying footnotes indicates that a substantial proportion of the better earning, self-employed women in Sighet were Jewish. For example, almost *all* of the women who owned bars in the town had German ie Jewish names.<sup>125</sup> The comparatively large number of Jews amongst the more successful, self-employed women in Sighet is explicable by the fact that Jews had been largely free to pursue careers in commerce and industry, in Hungary, while many other sectors of employment had been partially or totally closed to them.<sup>126</sup> Consequently, many Jewish women would have grown up in families where close family members (fathers, husbands etc) were shopkeepers or traders. Such women were much more likely than their non-Jewish peers to inherit a business or to decide to go into business themselves. And, having done so, they were much more likely to be successful.

As indicated in Table 6 and in the accompanying footnotes, a sizeable proportion of the higher earning, self-employed Jewish women in Sighet were widows. In many cases, these women ran businesses in which they had previously worked alongside their husbands, gaining valuable commercial experience.

By contrast, the relative under-representation of non-Jewish women amongst the more successful, self-employed females listed in Table 6 stemmed, at least in part, from the fact that commerce and industry were generally deemed unsuitable occupations by Hungary's Christian middle and, in particular, upper-middle class. As noted by François Fejtő, the Christian upper-middle class in Hungary preserved an essentially 'feudal mentality'.<sup>127</sup> Men from this sector of Hungarian society, particularly those who did not own landed estates that could assure them an adequate income, favoured careers in the state bureaucracy. Women from this privileged class were expected to content themselves with a purely domestic role as wives, mothers and home-makers. As emphasised by Katalin Fenyves, *most* working women in Hungary, in the early 1900s, were either unmarried or widowed. Thus, 'women often were expected to leave their jobs immediately after marriage in order to, on the one hand, fulfil their maternal function and on the other, not to take jobs from men'.<sup>128</sup>

Table 6: Occupations of middle and upper income self-employed women in Sighet Subject to 3rd Class Personal Income Tax, 1902<sup>i</sup>

Occupation	Number of women	Decided Tax in korona
Bakers <sup>ii</sup>	1	16
Bar-owners <sup>iii</sup>	16	48.97, 70.90, 30, 29.74, 10, 16, 27.89, 48.10, 50, 20, 68.41, 14.96, 27.25, 35.77, 19.16
Barber <sup>iv</sup>	1	25*
Brothel keeper <sup>v</sup>	1	300
Butcher (beef etc) <sup>vi</sup>	1	21.80
Cabbies (1 or 2 horses) <sup>vii</sup>	6	12, 12, 12, 12, 12, 24
Chimneysweeps <sup>viii</sup>	2	30, 15
Contractor, supplying domestic servants <sup>ix</sup>	1	15
Estate agent <sup>x</sup>	1	23.35

125 See n iii to Table 6 below.

126 Fejtő (n 87) 156–58, 162–64.

127 Ibid 163; Patai (n 84) 367.

128 Fenyves (n 16) 4.

Grain merchants <sup>xi</sup>	2	35, 10
Manufacturer of suitcases <sup>xii</sup>	1	21.36
Midwives <sup>xiii</sup>	3	12.60, 12, 12
Mill owners <sup>xiv</sup>	2	30, 30
Miscellaneous ie illegible <sup>xv</sup>	1	20
Owner of bath-house, with attached bar <sup>xvi</sup>	1	80
Owner of engineering firm <sup>xvii</sup>	1	100
Owners of restaurant, with attached café, bar etc <sup>xviii</sup>	2	100, 52.42
Pastry maker (mézes kalácsos) <sup>xix</sup>	1	26
Tobacco vendors etc <sup>xx</sup>	2	219.88, 42.10
Vendor of stewed vegetable dishes ( <i>főzelék</i> ) <sup>xxi</sup>	1	10
Wool merchant <sup>xxii</sup>	1	15
Watchmaker <sup>xxiii</sup>	1	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	

\*denotes Estimated Tax

#### Notes to Table 6

- i *III oszt. Keresetadó Kivetési Iajstroma 1902 évre* (n 11).
- ii Ibid entry no 431 (Mrs Antal Szankó).
- iii Ibid entry nos 470, 775, 477, 482–84, 486, 490–91, 495, 497, 502–05 (Mrs Mayer Brandstein; Mrs Jakab Gojd; Mrs Aurel Junger; Mrs Adolf Krámer, widow; Berta Kronstein; Mrs Iszák Lax, widow; Laura Lorber; Mrs Volf Róth; Róza Schnébalg and Mrs Dávid Lax; Záli Schwarcz; Czáli Szuk; Czili Weisz; Chive Weisz; Róza Weisz; Mrs Chaim Wisder).
- iv Ibid entry no 212 (Mrs Mór Lichtenberg, widow).
- v Ibid entry no 221 (Szabina Almási).
- vi Ibid entry no 564 (Mrs Mihály Sreiner).
- vii Ibid entry nos 26, 31, 39, 46, 48, 56 (Mrs Alter Hoch; Mrs Lieb Klein; Mrs Herczli Sachter, widow; Mrs József Sámuel, widow; Mrs Mayer Spiczter, widow; Mrs János Lebnicki, widow).
- viii Ibid entry nos 420, 424 (Mrs László Demkó, widow; Mrs János Zablahovsky).
- ix Ibid entry no 254 (Letti Rozner).
- x Ibid entry no 195 (Mrs Leó Altman).
- xi Ibid entry nos 544, 546 (Ilona Lieberman; Mrs Léb Steinmetz).
- xii Ibid entry no 468 (Mrs Bertalan Weisz).
- xiii Ibid entry nos 808, 811, 819 (Julia Balázs; Julia Gáspár; Mrs Gusztáv Schreiner).
- xiv Ibid entry nos 549–50 (Mrs Mihály Fodor; Mrs Lajos Sipos).
- xv Ibid entry no 574 (Anna Pakler).
- xvi Ibid entry no 471 (Mrs Imre Egyed – Szabina Almási is listed as co-owner of this establishment. However, she has already been recorded in Table 6 as the owner of the brothel).
- xvii Ibid entry no 567 (Mrs Mihály Balthazar).
- xviii Ibid entry nos 968–69 (Róza Zombory, Mrs Salamon Teüchman).
- xix Ibid entry no 571 (Mrs István Pap).
- xx Ibid entry nos 308, 309 (Ms Fani Halpert; Mrs Janos Halmik).
- xxi Ibid entry no 366 (Mrs Baruch Fisch, widow).
- xxii Ibid entry no 378 (Mrs Hankel Kaufman).
- xxiii Ibid entry no 584 (Mrs Rosenthál and partner).

## (II) INCOME FROM RENTING OUT PROPERTY OR LAND

As indicated in Table 7, a number of women in Sighet earned substantial sums from renting out property or land. These women, many of whom were widows, played an important role in the local economy providing, variously, rooms, apartments, houses or land for rent. It is clear from records held in the archives that a large proportion of the population of Sighet lived in rented accommodation, often in overcrowded and squalid conditions. Frequently, an entire family occupied a single room in a boarding house.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to renting out property or land women, such as those listed in Table 7, provided regular work for maids, housekeepers, woodcutters, gardeners and chimney sweeps, as well as for an assortment of craftsmen, including carpenters, glaziers, roofers, plasterers, plumbers etc. Women who rented out property or land constituted a significant source of employment in a region that was notably poor and underdeveloped, in comparison with much of Austria-Hungary, and in which seasonal work was commonplace. In view of the higher life expectancy of women, many of Sighet's *rentier* class were widows, as confirmed by Table 7.

The extent to which women who rented out property or land were directly involved in the day to day management of their assets cannot be determined from information in the tax files. However, it is reasonable to assume that, to varying degrees, many of the women listed in Table 7 would have taken some measure of responsibility for the running of their properties, whether by overseeing the collection of rents, the choice of tenants or the upkeep of houses, outbuildings, fences etc.

In contrast to running an inn or a shop, for example, renting out land or houses, particularly if all of the physical labour and much of the day-to-day administration were delegated to others, represented a socially acceptable form of economic activity for middle or even upper-middle class women in Hungary at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly widows or spinsters. Unlike most ordinary commercial transactions, renting out land or property was seen as an acceptable way of conserving a family's assets as well as a perfectly legitimate means of producing additional income.

Table 7: Selection of women in Sighet who derived a significant income from renting out property or land, 1902<sup>130</sup>

Name of taxpayer	Decided Tax on earnings from renting out property (in korona)	Decided Tax on earnings from renting out land (in korona)
Klára Kahán	390.66	
Mrs Bertalan Szabó, widow	268.80	
Mrs János Papp, widow	227.58	
Mrs János Szabó, widow	231.62	99.29
Mrs Pál Timár, widow	136.20	60.30
Mrs Ferenc Kahán	273.28	4.99
Esther Asztalos	62.72	123.79
Mrs Joachim Pál, widow	1,481.53	49.71

129 For example, in 1902, a dwelling at 86 Fecske utca, Sighet, was owned by a religious studies teacher, Jenő Bányai. The building, which the author has seen on visits to Sighet, is a modest-sized villa. According to the tax files for 1902, the residents of the dwelling comprised the owner as well as the following persons: the widow Seregi (housekeeper); Mari (the maid); tenants – János Kondrai (unemployed waiter) and wife; János Komáromi (carpenter) and wife; Mór Lebovics (shoemith) and wife; Mihály Turicska (woodcutter); see *I-II oszt. Sziget Város Keresetadó Kivetési listroma 1902 évre*, fila nr. 287, inventar 793, fond nr. 46, Arhivele Naționale Maramureș, 140. The number, names or ages of any children that would also have been living in the building, together with their parents, are not given in the tax files. However, it is known that at least some of the tenants had children. For example, Mór Lebovics, who happens to be the author's great grandfather, had two daughters by the date in question.

130 *Általános Jövedelmű Pótadó kivetési listroma 1902 évre*, Arhivele Naționale Maramureș (n 12).

#### 4 Conclusion

In Margit Kaffka's novella, *Színek és Évek* (*Colours and Years*), originally published in Budapest in 1912, the heroine, Magda, reflects on her younger self as the wife of a lawyer in a small provincial town. Magda shares a comfortable apartment with her husband and a live-in maid. However, despite her apparent good fortune and anxiety to fulfil the role of a dutiful wife, Magda finds life empty and monotonous, an endless round of tedious domestic chores:<sup>131</sup>

It's been like this for a year now, almost exactly the same every day. I get up in good time and, panting and straining, work my way through the little, three room apartment. In the sitting room, I dust all the porcelain objects on the little shelves. Then I start in the kitchen. I clean the table-lamp, polish the silver, arrange the cups and saucers, tidy everything away and sweep out the room. Before noon, I beat the carpets, polish the doorknobs, prepare vegetables for lunch and harry the maid. I instruct her, nag her and keep my eyes on her while she works. Is this how it's always going to be from now on? Why yes, for the rest of our lives.

By contrast, Jenő, Magda's husband, leaves the apartment each day, 'breakfasted, satisfied, smiling', a freshly lit cigar in his mouth, having run his eye over the newspaper.<sup>132</sup>

Like most wives of that era Magda lives vicariously, through her husband. Magda's notion of fulfilment is to see Jenő achieve the success that she craves for him. For Magda, a husband's professional or material achievements are the ultimate testament to a wife's skill, as well as her deepest source of satisfaction. For example, Magda recalls how, as a young wife, she 'cried out softly, clapped her hands and threw [her] arms' around her husband's neck when he told her that he expected to be appointed *Alispán*, or sub-prefect, of the county:<sup>133</sup>

I felt that all my dreams and ambitions were to be realised and that there was nothing more that I could wish for after this . . . Yes, I thought to myself, a woman can accomplish anything with a man. A woman can get everything she needs or desires through a man, provided that she instils enough confidence in him, badgers him and employs all her stubbornness and feminine wiles. After all, isn't that a woman's true role?

The notion that a woman could be professionally successful in her own right simply does not occur to Magda. Such unorthodox ideas are beyond her powers of imagining.

For most middle and upper-middle class Hungarian women, like Magda, the *emancipatory power* of Hungarian law, which had invested the country's women with full equality by 1874, was incomparably weaker than the *inhibitory power* of social convention. Married women, particularly middle and upper-middle class married women, were expected to be decorative companions, home-makers, mothers, not autonomous human beings with the same rights, freedoms and ambitions as their husbands.

For the overwhelming majority of middle-class married women in Hungary, at the turn of the twentieth century, their personal and professional lives were defined by family pressure, social convention and religious dogma rather than by abstract legal rights. *In principle*, Hungarian law of the period endowed women with wide-ranging economic and commercial freedoms as well as the possibility, however notional, of pursuing university

<sup>131</sup> M Kaffka, *Színek és Évek* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó 2007) 48.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

studies and of joining professions including medicine and pharmacy. *In practice*, the education available to most middle-class Hungarian women, in the early 1900s, was only sufficient to prepare them for a life of child-rearing, the efficient management of their households and, in their leisure hours, the perusal of romantic novels. At the turn of the twentieth century, the provision of secondary education for young women in Hungary remained hopelessly limited. Along with the factors mentioned above, this prevented many women from taking advantage of their legal rights and of realising their aspirations of achieving 'professional' status:<sup>134</sup>

In 1890, the overall number of women of professional classes was 26,792, 0.3 percent of the whole female population, while the number of professional men was 155,850 in the countries of the Hungarian Crown, including Croatia and Slavonia. However, this data is misleading in as much as many of the above women of professional classes were midwives (almost ten thousand) or governesses, the latter coming mainly from abroad. A decade later, 1.5 percent of all working women had intellectual careers (33,873) . . .

For women from poorer families, particularly widows and unmarried women, the situation in Hungary, at the turn of the twentieth century, was entirely different. Economic necessity rather than boredom or the quest for intellectual fulfilment drove poorer, single women to seek work. As indicated above, the gendered nature of law and bureaucratic practice in this period severely inhibited women's access to higher education, to the professions and to careers in public service, while permitting or even encouraging poorer women, *who constituted the overwhelming majority of women in Hungary*, to take physically strenuous, tedious and badly paid jobs as domestic servants, *napszámos*, washerwomen etc. In effect, lower-class Hungarian women, like Tersánsky's Firona, had to work to support themselves until they could assure their future – and that of their children – by attracting a suitable marriage partner.

Ultimately, most middle-class women in Hungary, as elsewhere in Europe, were also dependent on finding a husband. In *Színék és Évek*, Magda's social and economic status rests almost entirely on her successful, ambitious lawyer husband. Despite the economic and social gulf that separates them, Firona and Magda are alike in their abject dependency on their respective partners.

Nevertheless, as evidence from the Romanian National Archives suggests, a minority of middle-class women in Sighet, many of whom were widows, enjoyed substantial economic autonomy and a reasonable or even handsome standard of living. These women owned and managed a range of businesses that included mills, shops, restaurants, bars, concessions, a bath-house and a brothel. As indicated above, a large proportion of these self-employed women were Jewish, a consequence of centuries of legal and de facto constraints imposed by host societies on the occupational choices available to Jewish communities in the CEE area. Contrary to the familiar anti-Semitic trope, Jews' over-representation in commerce and industry was not so much the consequence of freely determined individual choices as the legacy of centuries of systematic exclusion from most other forms of work and numerous constraints on Jewish ownership of land.<sup>135</sup>

Although still denied the right to vote or to stand for election, at the turn of the twentieth century, a substantial number of women in Hungary achieved striking levels of

<sup>134</sup> Fenyves (n 16) 4.

<sup>135</sup> See eg P Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (Harper & Row 1988) especially 311, 319. See also, the sources cited in n 87.

personal autonomy, self-esteem and social recognition through the medium of Hungarian private law, which afforded them equal rights with men. The economic independence and commercial success of such women, most of whom were self-employed, compensated for their lack of public law rights, including the right to vote or to stand for election, and for a prevailing social climate that remained heavily gendered.