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AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Trauma Processing and "Prolonged Social Traumas" in the World of a Synagogue

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ABSTRACT

The first question addressed in this study is how to resume everyday life in a synagogue community following the cataclysm of the Shoah and how different aspects of this relaunch can be interpreted as an attempt to process the trauma of the Holocaust, either on an individual or group level. The second part of the paper revolves around the symptoms of "prolonged social trauma" in the dynamics of the changed community during the 1970s and 1980s and those of religious life in the field under study. In this case, the area in question represents a narrow locality, the Páva Street Synagogue and its community in Budapest between 1945 and 1989. Changes in the life of the community are brought to the fore via interviews using the oral history method along with press and archive sources. The Páva Street Synagogue in Ferencváros is one of the "periphery synagogues" of Budapest, where religious life with different intensities can be considered almost continuous. The synagogue, built with public funding and inaugurated in 1924, was used as an internment camp in the second half of 1944. Following the liberation of the ghettos and camps, community life began again a few months after the persecution. Between 1945 and 1956, this resumption involved a series of steps, including the physical rehabilitation of the synagogue environment and the organization of its daily routines. The events of 1956 created further difficulties for the community: the building was damaged once again and the community disintegrated. Although everyday life resumed, the symptoms of trauma manifested in the 1970s and 1980s as the community dwindled and its members grew older, leaving generations missing from the synagogue.

KEYWORDS

Jewry, synagogue, Holocaust, Shoah, trauma, community, life story

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT COULD IT MEAN TO BE A MEMBER OF A *KEHILLAH* AFTER THE *SHOAH* IN BUDAPEST?

The basic premise of ethnographic-cultural/anthropological research, enabling the researcher to understand the functioning of a community in the present, is to consider, above all, how the reality that (s)he experiences in the "now moment" is embedded in historicity.

The locality-related operation of a synagogue community in Budapest can reach back centuries. Along with several of its "companions," the Páva Street Synagogue in the 9th district of Budapest, Ferencváros,[1] also belongs to this group. While we cannot assume that different events of the past can affect the present of a community with equal intensity, we can be sure that the direct or indirect effects of certain past events will have an impact on the present.

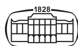
In my study, I would like to draw attention to a field of research that we know little about so far: the historical study of everyday life in the synagogues of Budapest. Through my work, I would like to sow the seeds of the idea that "bottom-up" examination and the proper contextualization of intertwined historical planes can also lead to a better understanding of current processes in the micro-world of the synagogue.

Trauma — which is also present in synagogue communities — is a psychological phenomenon that is of interest to the social sciences and humanities, so its meaning and definition cannot be determined in general.[2] In the present study, I interpret and examine the short and long-term detectable consequences of the Holocaust as a traumatic event in a synagogue community, appearing on an individual, social and cultural level.

The concept of cultural trauma can be linked to Jeffrey C. Alexander, who emphasizes the following in the introduction to his book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*: "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (ALEXANDER 2004:1). As a member of a synagogue community, the traumas of individual destinies and family histories "intersect" and become a common set of traumatic experiences. As Ferenc Erős points out, "Trauma (…) is never suffered only by the isolated individual. There are many actors and many factors in its formation, course, impact, and aftermath. (…) The group, which is more than the number of the participating individuals, transforms the shocks, traumatic experiences suffered individually or simultaneously, into a *collective experience*. The content, tension and dynamics of this experience are present even if they are not put into words or formulated in coherent stories if, in the words of Ferenc Mérei, it remains on the 'edge of consciousness,' on the periphery of memory. The reference that connects past, present and future conveys and keeps this experience alert (…)" (ERŐS 2007:16). András Keszei highlights the same encounter when he says that the

[1]The Páva Street Synagogue was built by the Pest Neolog community, the Pest Israelite Congregation. The building, which can accommodate 1,200 people, was inaugurated in 1924 and has served an important religious and social function for the past century. Prior to the Second World War, the synagogue served as a base for thousands of people. Today, however, it comprises a small community (about 40–50 people on major holidays and 10–12 people on Shabbats).

[2]Cf. DANIELI 1998; HÜBL 2020; KIRMAYER et al. 2007; LA CAPRA 1999.



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"development" which takes place with the appearance of symptomatic trauma always emerges as an interaction between the individual soul and the socio-cultural environment (Keszei 2012:14).

In addition to the fact that the consequences of the Holocaust have a collective effect on the community, their temporal appearance is shifted from the traumatic event, appearing in different generations and in different forms. Wulf Kansteiner's insight that "the majority of experts in the field who have treated the children of survivors in the last two decades are convinced that the suffering of the parental generation still leaves its marks on the children and even the grandchildren of survivors" (Kansteiner 2004:105). Even so, it is not only family stories that can capture the patterns of passing the trauma of the Holocaust from generation to generation. Transgenerational traumas also cause symptoms in the life of the synagogue collective, for which I use the term "prolonged social traumas," coined by Teréz Virág, one of the first Hungarian therapists and researchers to work with Holocaust survivors (Virág 1990). This definition sensitively expresses how I interpret the consequences of the Holocaust below as an impact on the life of a micro-society — my starting point is the community, not the individual. This is my aspiration, even when I present various interview-details in order to illustrate the "collective experience."

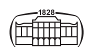
Briefly reviewing the effects of 1944 on the community, and then looking at the experiences of the period between 1945 and 1989, I attempt to present and interpret contexts and life story details that, being closely related to the locality of the Páva Street Synagogue, make it possible to understand how the traumas of the 20th century could become a "collective experience" at given moments within a synagogue community, a *kehillah*.[3] In light of the above, I would like to argue that in addition to individual psychotherapy, the ethnographic-anthropological study of the functioning of the community — which can be reconstructed from the past and can be experienced in the present — can play an important role in understanding the phenomenon of trauma in human and social sciences.

The questions and partial answers formulated in the study fit within a larger research framework, in which I examined the past of the Páva Street Synagogue (1945–1989/90), focusing on how the dynamics of the micro-level synagogue milieu and the behavioural patterns and motivations of synagogue visitors were influenced by various events and social processes in the 20th century.

In this research, I work with a complex methodology. In addition to analysing press and archival resources — to supplement these — I recorded *oral history* and *life story* interviews and selected recollections from existing databases in which the narrators touched on the locality I examined. In my use of resources, denominational press publications (*Egyenlőség, A Magyar Zsidók Lapja, Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja, Új Élet*)[4] appear as a guideline, considering that this group of sources provides information about the life of the *kehillah* on a continuous basis, albeit through a specific filter. Archival sources help to nuance the reality behind the processes that can

[3]'Kehillah' means Jewish community or congregation; in this study, the term always refers to the community of the Páva Street Synagogue.

[4]The names of these four journals reflect the past of Hungarian Jewry: between 1882 and 1938, *Egyenlőség* [Equality] operated in the name of social equality, and then, depicting the deprivation measures during the era of anti-Jewish laws, in 1938, the newspaper became *Magyar Zsidók Lapja* [The Journal of Hungarian Jews]. In 1944, it became the *Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja* [The Journal of Jews in Hungary]. Following the Holocaust, after 1945, the social newspaper of Neolog Jewry, which still operates today, was published as *Új Élet* [New Life].



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be gathered from press sources. The main consideration in selecting who was to be interviewed using the *oral history* method was that at some point in life the individual should be connected to the religious and social life of the Páva Street Synagogue. Materials recorded in this way, connected to a given era, present individual life events arranged around the synagogue, simultaneously describing the moods and moments that characterize the intimate inner world of the synagogue community.

The study is divided into three content units. First, I briefly review the impact of the cataclysm of the *Shoah*[5] on the synagogue and its *kehillah*, after which I examine what forms of trauma processing may have taken shape in its social and religious life between 1945 and 1956. Then, including the autumn of 1956 as a turning point, I examine how the manifestation of "prolonged social traumas" in the locality can be interpreted in the changed community dynamics due to the lack of generations. Finally, two life-story segments are presented.

ANTECEDENTS: THE EFFECTS OF THE *SHOAH* ON THE PÁVA STREET SYNAGOGUE AND ITS *KEHILLAH*

Following the introduction of labour-service at the synagogue in Páva Street, the charitable work of the Women's Association[6] gradually unfolded, helping not only labourers in the synagogue district, but also family members who remained at home.

At first, the German occupation had little effect on the religious life and functioning of the Páva Street Synagogue community.[7] Our data show that on April 19, Dezső Kun, the secular leader,[8] had to hand over the community hall of the synagogue to be used as a storage room for physics and chemistry equipment, along with other furniture from the St. Dominic Street high school.[9] At the same time, the denominational press published the order of worship from week to week, and the synagogues listed systematically included Páva Street until June 22, 1944 — from which we can conclude that religious life was continuous until the beginning of summer, although this assumption is not supported by recollection or ego-document at this time. However, after June 30, 1944, the *Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja* [The Journal of Jews in Hungary] no longer reported the order of worship. Instead of the large regional synagogues,

[5]Several names are used to designate the genocide committed against Jews during the Second World War: the Greek word *Holocaust* means "burnt sacrifice," the German word *Judenmord* means "murder of Jew," the Hebrew word *Shoah* means "destruction," "catastrophe; " in Hungary, the term "age of peril" (*Vészkorszak*) has become used within the Jewish community. For the concept behind the names, see Komoróczy 2000:10–11.

[6]A group of prominent women in the synagogue, whose aim is to engage in charitable activities, organize community events and celebrations, and to strengthen the connection between different synagogues.

[7]Following the German invasion of Hungary on March 19, 1944, and after the Jewish Council of Budapest was formed on March 21 — "the leaders of the Pest Israelite Congregation were asked to reassure the masses and avoid panic" (Braham 1988:341). The Germans wanted "Jews to continue their denominational, cultural, and religious life as they had done so far" (Lévai 1946:89).

[8]In addition to a religious authority (rabbi), synagogue communities also have a secular leader (*rashekol*) who coordinates the operation of the community.

[9]Hungaricana Database, Jewish Collections, Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, documents of the Jewish Community of Pest from the period of the Jewish Council.

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the list included the addresses of temporarily designated places of worship: in the 9th district, religious life continued at 23 Liliom Street[10] instead of 39 Páva Street.

Archival sources and DEGOB-protocols[11] confirm that the Páva Street Synagogue was set up as an internment camp[12] from the middle of Prime Minister Sztójay's term,[13] but this function did not last long. By August 1944, rural Jewry had already been deported, but sources show that a more consolidated situation existed in the life of Budapest Jewry for a short time before the autumn holidays[14] of 1944: the Páva Street Synagogue also regained its function.[15] One of the last available sources associated with the Páva Street Synagogue, from the period of the Holocaust, is dated September 28, the day after *Yom Kippur*.[16] In fact, the note does not mention 39 Páva Street as a synagogue, but as a "former internment camp," one of the starting points for "emigrating Jews" into labour service (Karsai 2017:301). Jenő Lévai writes about the events of the days following the Arrow Cross takeover:[17] "the unfortunate people to be gathered up are not allowed to be driven into open spaces (…). In the absence of other premises, the synagogues of Dohány, Rumbach Sebestyén and Páva Streets were used for this purpose" (Lévai 1946:30). From all this, we can conclude that the synagogue was "re-established" as an internment camp after October 15th.

It is difficult to quantify the loss related to the Holocaust in the community of the Páva Street Synagogue. The *List of Victims of the Holocaust in Hungary* identifies 475 of the victims from Ferencváros (Szita 2015:204–213), but the number is probably much higher in reality. On the other hand, since there were several houses of worship in Ferencváros, it is almost certain that not all believers attended the synagogue in Páva Street. Moreover, several people came to this community from other districts, and these individuals are not counted by the data repository as being from Ferencváros, although their names can be read on the synagogue's monument (which lists at least 243 names).

[10]*Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja* [Journal of the Jews of Hungary], July 27, 1944, 2.

[11]National Committee for Attending Deportees: An organization founded in March 1945 to register returnees from deportations, organize assistance and documentation. See in detail: The History of DEGOB, http://www.degob.hu/index.php?showarticle=2 (accessed January 20, 2022), or: Horváth 1997.

[12]Testimony of F. O. in the DEGOB Protocol (source: http://www.degob.hu/index.php?showjk=719 accessed January 20, 2022).

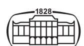
[13]Döme Sztójay (1883–1946) Prime Minister of Hungary after the German invasion, between March 22 and August 29, 1944.

[14]During September–October, the Jewish New Year begins with a festive period of about a month.

[15]In connection with the main ceremonial preparations of the Pest Israelite Congregation, the *Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja* [The Journal of Jews of in Hungary] reports that "in addition to the services held in the main synagogues of Dohány Street and Rumbach Sebestyén Street, they will also try to reclaim the district temples. The Páva Street Synagogue has already been reclaimed." (*Magyarországi Zsidók Lapja*, August 24, 1944, 1)

[16]The Shabbat of the Shabbats is the Day of Atonement, a strict fast of lasting twenty-five hours.

[17]The armed, extremely nationalistic and anti-Semitic paramilitary group called the Arrow Cross took power on October 15, 1944, after which the Jews of Budapest were ghettoized, and thousands were sent to the borders in death-marches or killed during raids.



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Possible platforms for trauma processing in the context of social and religious life

In her studies,[18] Teréz Virág discusses the experiences of her psychotherapy treatments with patients, seeking an answer to the question of "how children receive unprocessed parental trauma" (VIRÁG 1994:170). Virág first presented the results of her therapies with the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors in 1982. When mapping the mental problems of her patients — and analysing their family background — she came to the conclusion that "in all cases, forced repression of their Jewish past" was typical among Hungarian survivors (VIRÁG 1990:149).

Research based on psychotherapy in a domestic and international context has shown that suffering experienced during the *Shoah* and various subsequent coercive behaviour strategies (for example, anxiety related to the suppression of one's own Jewish identity) led to pathological distortions of self-image and identity in many subjects. In connection with the work of Teréz Virág, Ferenc Erős also poses the following question: "But what happened to the survivors who never turned to a mental health professional, those who can therefore be regarded as being more or less 'healthy' (…)? What happened to the anonymous mass of survivors who (…) started living and working again after the war, those who — at least on the surface — were relatively successful in adapting to post-Holocaust culture and 'normalized' discourse, while their children learned to 'adapt' and 'function' even more" (ERŐS 2001:132)?

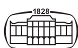
With regards to the appearance of the *Shoah* trauma and trauma treatment, I examine a context and two segments of life-history in which the "Jewish past" is not being "stifled," or at least not in the sense evidenced by lessons learned through therapeutic examinations. In my writing, I seek to analyse how it can be grasped in the history of a synagogue community that "the Holocaust trauma was a series of 'prolonged,' 'long-lasting' psycho-traumas" (VIRÁG 1990:147).

The examination of religious life in a post-Holocaust synagogue community provides an easily graspable answer to András Keszei's question regarding the ways in which a traumatic experience can become communal (KESZEI 2012:20). Investigating the consequences of the Holocaust in a synagogue community also outlines the contours of a cultural trauma, which refers to "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (EYERMAN 2003:2).

After the genocide, communities faced the absence of members lost in persecution and had to process the trauma in some way, further culminating in stories of suffering recounted by surviving members. Facing loss and trauma processing are both long-term processes which, in a synagogue community, with the exception of an initial short period, may have begun, if at all, within the framework of a single-party state dictatorship.[19] Indeed, for much of the second half of the 20th century, the Holocaust was treated as a taboo historical event in Hungary, which

[18]The nature and phenomenon of transgenerational trauma is a key topic in various psychological research and practices, see e.g. BALOGH – BÁRDOS et al. 2021; LEMAN 2009; ORVOS-TÓTH 2018; SCHÜTZENBERGER 1998; TÓTH 2017.

[19]After the communist takeover in 1948, a single-party state system was established in Hungary, characterized by the liquidation of political opponents, the purging of "reactionary elements" from public administration, the persecution of those involved in the old system and the establishment of violent organizations. Between 1949 and 1989/1990, the Holocaust remembrance constructed within the Páva Street Synagogue moved along a trajectory determined by expectations and changes in national politics.



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greatly hindered the process of facing the trauma: "The grief of families who have suffered historical trauma, reconciliation, the restoration of confidence in life and the world and the restructuring of the family are hampered by attitudes towards the wider systems surrounding the family, social counterfeiting, fogging and denial, often political manipulative tendencies. Because of this, sufferers are very often unable to overcome the painful, paralyzing and toxic effects of the past" (Koltai 2021:26).

Patterned after the American psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, Ferenc Erős describes the psychological characteristics of survivors, including "the barely dissolvable guilt with which they, as survivors, hold themselves responsible for the death of their peers and relatives" (Erős 2001:122). Presumably, this guilt was a dominant feeling in many who returned to the synagogue, especially when they had to realize that the place next to or in front of them — where their family members, friends, and acquaintances used to sit — was empty. This absence reminded survivors of the collective loss and, in the words of Géza Komoróczy, "the grief became that of the whole community" (Komoróczy 2000:73). As Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker highlight: "Injury and death (…) can therefore become instrumental to the constitution of community and the sense of collective identity that emerges in the wake of trauma" (Hutchison – Bleiker 2008:390). However, the resumption of synagogue life helped the much-suffered survivors to find their place in the everyday world.

Eyerman emphasizes that "there may be several or many possible responses or paths to resolving cultural trauma that emerge in a specific historical context, but all of them in some way or another involve identity and memory" (Eyerman 2003:4). Between 1945 and 1956, these responses and paths meant a series of steps in the synagogue of Páva Street. This meant the physical renovation of the synagogue environment and the organization of everyday routines — for example, launching the school and the *Talmud-Torah*[20], filling Jewish identity with new and *positive content* through various lectures and programs, and holding religious holidays in the community.

After the war, many synagogue communities were left without a religious leader or rabbi. However, the Bulletin of the National Rabbinical Association shows that it was not only the lack of rabbis that challenged religious Jewry, but also the uncertain preparedness of surviving and functioning rabbis. After all, post-war rabbis had to cope with a completely new life situation, and in addition to providing remedies for suffering caused by individual losses, they also had the task of replenishing Jewish identity with old-new content. The rabbis who took on this function had to try to bring people back to the synagogue, creating worship services and drafting speeches and lectures that were able to adapt to new spiritual needs (Benoschofsky 1946:8–10).

Although the rabbi of the Páva Street Synagogue, József Farkas,[21] was killed by the Arrow Cross, the synagogue was not left without a rabbi since Rabbi Manó Rosenblum[22] (Fig. 1), who served as an assistant rabbi before the war, stepped up to be the head of the religious life of the community. However, in addition to the organization of religious life, it was also necessary to make the infrastructure of the building complex suitable for community life. Since its

[20]Religious education sessions for children in synagogues.

[21]József Farkas (1866–1945) was the rabbi of the Páva Street Synagogue between 1910 (still in the temporary synagogue) and 1944.

[22]Manó Rosenblum (1903–1981) was the rabbi of the Páva Street Synagogue between 1945 and 1957.

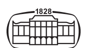

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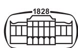
Fig. 1. Rabbi Manó Rosenblum in 1950 (from the collection of András Arató)

construction, the Páva Street Synagogue had been a central religious and cultural complex for the Jewry of Ferencváros; it was not only the synagogue itself, but also cultural and educational life that had to be restarted by bringing together the surviving members of the community. Ilona Riemer — whose grandparents had significantly supported the construction of the Páva Street Synagogue — the wife of Géza Seifert,[23] who later became leader of the Budapest Israelite Congregation, spearheaded the reorganization of the community. Her commitment is shown by the fact that even as a young girl at the time, she felt the most urgent task was to take care of children so their parents could focus on reintegrating into society and earning a living.

Immediately after the war, even with the help of the congregation, survivors could not provide an amount of funding that would have restored the Páva Street building complex, so Ilona turned to the Hungarian chapter of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint).[24] In 1945, merely a few months after constant persecution, the "celebration" of the re-established community institutions through the efforts of surviving but mutilated communities

[23]Géza Seifert (1906–1976) was the leader of the Budapest Israelite Congregation — an umbrella organization uniting the synagogue communities in Budapest — between 1966 and 1976.

[24]Following the *Shoah*, the joint committee operated in Hungary between March 1945 and early 1953, with the primary goal of facilitating and accelerating the reintegration of Jews into economic and social structures. Its successful program was able to keep many Jewish people in the country. See Frojimovics 2004.



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and families meant (new) life itself, both on an individual and community level, as the recollection of Ilona Riemer shows as well. “Most of the leadership of the congregation in Budapest already came to the opening, from everywhere abroad, even from Switzerland, and as long as I live, I won’t forget that day, especially what it meant to me. Because at the end of the inauguration, the ceremonial principal of the district was asked to thank Miss Ili Riemer for her great work. (…) And the point is that after the door of the kindergarten was opened, the room was full of toys. The kids rushed in, then chewing gum for the first time in their lives because they got that, and lots of chocolate — which they ate right away. And the kids told me how good it was not to be silent; ‘we can shout’. At times of bombing and during blackouts, talking loudly was life-threatening, especially for a Jewish child who wasn’t in the ghetto,[25] so there had always been a warning to be quiet, because they could be heard, and so on. That happiness, their joy, cannot be imagined. So, all this was excellent, and the day care was also excellent.”[26]

Interviews recorded during my research indicate that the kindergarten and school in Páva Street meant safety for both children and parents, on the one hand, but also a medium in which the goal was to create a *positive Jewish identity* for children, despite the shocks experienced. This meant, among other things, playing together, learning, participating in fun, festive role-playing games and in the choir, rewarding and creating the “feeling of home” within the walls of the synagogue (Fig. 2). Szidónia Orlik (1938–) was a child at the time of the *Shoah* and one of those who spent her weekday afternoons in the Páva Street. “After the war, I spent my hours after school in the courtyard of the Páva Street Synagogue. There was afternoon supervision, we could

Fig. 2. Children’s home/kindergarten at the synagogue building complex in Páva Street (from the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives online gallery, IV/21.8.3. MILEV, accessed July 22, 2022, http://collections.milev.hu/items/show/33103)

[25]The Pest Grand Ghetto was built in the 7th district; it was blocked on December 10, 1944, and liberated on January 18, 1945.

[26]Ilona Riemer, Mrs. Géza Seifert (b. 1921). Source: Centropa Foundation, https://www.centropa.org/sites/default/files/person/interview/huseifert%20int.doc (accessed January 20, 2022)

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go there after school, we had lunch, we could do our homework, we could study whatever we wanted to. A worn photo preserves the memory of the home. And for me, the one who lost a parent, it was my home away from home. Aunt Kati was the music teacher, from whom we learned many beautiful songs, especially in Hebrew."[27]

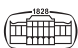
As it is evident from András Arató's recollection, to him and, broadly speaking, to members of his generation, the walls of Páva Street marked the beginning of the history of their lives and the first steps in their attachment to Judaism (Fig. 3). "My brother and I went to kindergarten because our parents worked. In the summer, we were taken from the kindergarten to the Buda hills for an outing. The kindergarten teacher was called Aunt Alíz, and we adored her. So, I got to attend the Jewish kindergarten next to the synagogue; that's where the story began, and then I stayed there later. I actually had my childhood there. I was a pre-schooler there, I went to the *Talmud-Torah*, my friends were there, and my mother insisted that we go there." (András Arató /1944–/; February 26, 2019)

As mentioned above, the resumption of life on the part of communities, but especially among rabbis, primarily meant that they had to meet the challenges posed by the new circumstances. Their goal, therefore, was the opportunity to create and transfer a new identity and, immediately after the war, many expected the synagogue to help with this difficult task. The synagogue, on the other hand, no longer offered the possibility of identity assimilated to Hungarian society, focusing on religious conservatism as before the war, but a possible self-determination for the individual, the most important elements of which were Jewish culture and *Eretz Yisrael* ('Land of Israel'). As "assimilation was legally and, as such, brutally halted, the right to Zionist dissimilation has been somewhat consolidated in Hungary as well" (Karády 1984:93).

In the Páva Street Synagogue, the cornerstone of the new community life was "following the positive Jewish idea," creating unity for the Jewry, emphasizing the spiritual liberation of

Fig. 3. Children in the kindergarten during the 1950s (from the collection of András Arató)

[27] Dombi 2019:3.



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Judaism with the abolition of physical captivity. In addition, the synagogue district played a major role in charitable activities.[28] The new situation also posed a challenge for the prefecture to make worship attractive again for fellow members. "The prefecture (…) takes special care to increase attendance at worship services and to develop a sense of community in the district. This is also the purpose of the *Shaleshudes*[29] arrangements on Shabbat afternoon, in which district rabbi Manó Rosenblum gives an explanation of the written weekly Torah portion.[30] This religious institution is also of a high standard and has a tasteful appearance, and it praises the sacrifices made by members of the Women's Association, who, in addition to their great charitable work, are constantly involved in the religious activities as well."[31]

The report shows that in the second half of the 1940s, it was not prayer or the ritual that sustained the community. On the contrary: if the synagogue was able to provide some community-sustaining impulse to the people, it could also expect them to attend religious services. An increase in the number of participants attending services could be facilitated by ensuring that the individual felt good in the company and community of the synagogue, and thus longed to return there. This tendency is supported by the relevant literature, according to which "an integral part of the synagogue ceremonies are the gatherings of friends that take place afterward: these *Kiddushes*[32] also have an effect on their community-forming power. Religious cultural events also serve this purpose" (Tamási 1990:206). In this case, one of the community-retaining factors seemed to be the rabbi's educational speeches, which presumably conveyed some kind of message or guidance, but the main impulse was the *Shaleshudes,* i.e. the farewell feasts of the Shabbat, which were made possible by the social activities of the Women's Association.

After the genocide, "many families with missing members were unable to create the conditions for family celebrations. Events previously held exclusively at home, such as the *Seder nights*,[33] (…) were transformed into rituals organized within the framework of religious communities" (Tamási 1990:206). Along with this phenomenon, the issues of *Új Élet* [New Life] report on the organizing work of the active Women's Association in Páva Street, which made it possible to have *Purim*[34] celebrations or *Seder nights* in the "ornate culture hall."

These reports reveal that the religious content of the synagogue holidays was provided by the rabbi's speech and the cantor performance, but the festivities were always supplemented with some cultural (community building and community retention) content, as András Arató also

[28]*Új Élet* [New Life], February 20, 1947.

[29]Shabbat farewell feast.

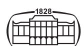
[30]The structure of the five books of Moses is given by weekly portions, one of which is read from the Torah in the synagogues every Shabbat of the year.

[31]*Új Élet* [New Life], January 9, 1947.

[32]It is a blessing said over wine on holidays and Shabbats, typically followed by a communal meal.

[33]The first two evenings of Pesach, the Feast of the Egyptian Exodus, in which the Egyptian withdrawal is recounted and relived in a certain order.

[34]To commemorate the salvation of the Jew, according to the story, Esther, the Jewish girl, was made queen by the Persian king Ahasuerus, who later saved the Jewish people from one of the king's governors, the evil Haman.



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highlighted in his recollection. "There were great celebrations at every holiday, *Sukkot*,[35] *Seder*, *Hanukkah*.[36] There were a lot of kids. We performed plays from the time of Esther, and so on and so forth. Many well-known people came, such as Péter Kelen,[37] who later became an opera singer; he was only a tiny little kid at the time and sang there on stage during the holidays. László Kabos[38] also went there. He was a very friendly person, and the children loved him very much. Several famous actors also came during the holidays. It was a very active, exuberant life there." (András Arató /1944–/; February 26, 2019)

In addition to worship services framed by artistic performance, the "social dinners" held in the culture hall, "Hanukkah festivals," "snacks and tea parties," "Shabbat evening coffee gatherings," poetry and music evenings, concerts with famous celebrities in artistic life (frequent guests were outstanding performers of the Opera House) and well-known musicians were also an integral part of the community life of the Páva Street Synagogue in the late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s. "The artists' experiential performances were greeted with enthusiastic applause by the audience, which filled the room to capacity."[39] These occasions and performances were also usually organized by the Women's Association, so they were not integral part of the religious life, which also meant that they were not necessarily attended only by active participants of public synagogue prayers.

In her weekly lectures, Mrs. Manó Rosenblum, co-chair of the Women's Section[40] and the highly educated *rebbetzin*[41] of the synagogue, highlighted the role and responsibility of women in the community. Mrs. Rosenblum was a charismatic driving force in the community and its cultural life since in addition to her role in the women's group, she also played the role of religion instructor. She led the *Talmud-Torah* in Páva Street and, along with her husband, was actively involved in preparing children for their *bar mitzvah*.[42] Her *Talmud-Torah* students — whom she regularly gave presents to — entertained the audience on various holidays.[43] The active presence of young people also reinforced the positive connection to the community among generations of grandparents and parents surviving the *Shoah*.

[35]Sukkot, when it is customary to eat for seven days in a tent (*sukkah*) built according to ritual rules.

[36]A memorial service for the recapture of the Sanctuary by the Maccabees, an eight-day celebration of the proclamation of the miracle, when a candle is lit in the *Hanukkah* candlestick, the *hanukiah,* every night.

[37]Péter Kelen (1950–) is a Hungarian opera singer, a merited and honoured artist.

[38]László Kabos (1923–2004) is a Hungarian, Jászai Mari Prize-winning actor, comedian and honoured artist.

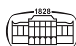
[39]*Új Élet* [New Life], March 23, 1950.

[40]Following the dissolution of the associations, after May 1950, the "Women's Association" was called "Women's Section" or "Women's Group."

[41]Wife of the rabbi.

[42]'Son of the commandment' is the rite commemorating the religious adulthood of a boy on his 13th birthday, when Jewish boys first join the Torah and then become full members of the community.

[43]For example: "On December 25, students of the *Talmud-Torah* in Páva Street held their ceremony in the culture hall, where beautiful poetry recitals and chants delighted the sizable audience. The performance by the little ones was particularly well received. (…) The children were prepared by Mrs. Manó Rosenblum." (*Új Élet* [New Life], January 3, 1952)



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CAESURA OF 1956: TO START OVER AFTER THE RESTART

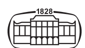
The social discontent fuelled by the repression of the communist dictatorship manifested itself in the form of demonstrations in October 1956. The conflict, which deepened into armed struggle — later declared to be a "counter-revolution" — was defeated and followed by a dictatorial regime that lasted until 1989–90.

1956 and its aftermath severely affected not only Hungarian Jewry, but also the Páva Street Synagogue. A new kind of resumption had to be considered again, although "in the decades after 1956, much like in the 1950s, the majority of the Jews used tactics of silence in order to get rid of the burden that the existence of the Jewish Question posed to them" (Kovács 1984:18).

1956 and its consequences also caused a crucial break in the life of the Páva Street Synagogue, mainly because the synagogue, which had been restored after the devastation of Second World War, once again lay in ruins (Fig. 4). "During the street fighting in Pest, the synagogue in Páva Street was severely damaged (nearby was Tűzoltó Street, one of the focal points of the armed resistance) (…)" (Komoróczy 2012:1037). Experience of the interviews I conducted also shows that after October 1956 the majority of those who still attended the synagogue regularly in the first half of the 1950s broke away from it for various reasons.

Many who also experienced the events of 1956 after the persecutions of 1944/45 once again anticipated a period full of anxiety and dread, and so they decided to emigrate instead. The wave of emigration in 1956/57 brought great losses to the local Jewish community and the entire country in both a religious and cultural sense. "The gravity of the situation was aggravated by the fact that most of these emigrants belonged to denominational bodies (rabbis, shochets, cantors, etc.), who felt threatened in their Jewish existence during the autumn of 1956. Their departure thus ensured that the continuity of everyday Jewish life was placed in an 'almost

Fig. 4. The courtyard of the Páva Street Synagogue during late autumn 1956 (from Fortepan, img. n. 40143; donator: Gyula Nagy)



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hopeless' situation, practically in a state of disintegration" (Csorba 1990:39–140). Rabbi Manó Rosenblum and his family also *aliyhaed*[44] from the synagogue in Páva Street.

Manifestations and symptoms of "prolonged social trauma": the missing generations of the *kehillah*

Recollections by my interviewees as well as reports in *Új Élet* [New Life] in the context of the Páva Street Synagogue show that religious activities began to decline in the second half of the socialist era, especially during the last decade. The consequence of the *Shoah* cataclysm and the events of 1956 became visible: entire generations were missing from the world of the synagogue. Survivors who turned away from their Jewishness — including religion — also disappeared, and so did their children and grandchildren, socialized in a family milieu where not discussing the roots of their ancestors was a defining attitude. Below, we review some examples of how missing generations changed the dynamics of how the community functioned.

Silence regarding family ties to Judaism and ignorance of the details of family history are among possible reasons why at the turn of the 1970s and '80s it was "almost only old people who attended synagogues while the younger Jewish generations stayed out of the Jewish religious community, and so the renewal had almost completely disappeared" (Győri Szabó 2009:342).

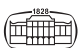
The leading figures of the Páva Street Synagogue during this era were Holocaust survivors, and they made it their primary goal to embrace the elderly, who were lonely but longing for a traditional community life. During the 1950s, the concept of educating young people and the role of the *Talmud-Torah* were paramount in the programs of Rabbi Manó Rosenblum and his wife. Looking back on their experiences of the era, my interviewees report that the *Talmud-Torah* was still in operation during the 1960s, whereas by the second half of the era — the 1970s and '80s — the previously typical focus on youth and attempts to fill their Jewishness with content had been relegated to the background, replaced by concern for the older generation, which can also be traced to the fact that the number of children reaching the "*Talmud-Torah* age" was decreasing.

Examining the identity of the second generation after the Holocaust, Ferenc Erős, András Kovács and Katalin Lévai pointed out that the socialization of the children of Holocaust survivors in Hungary was characterized by a tendency among young people to discover their roots "when they were about half-grown" as opposed to learning about their Jewishness "on the basis of natural transmission" (Erős et al. 1985:130). I found a reference to this "young generation" in a single *Seder night* account in the context of life at the Páva Street Synagogue, which reveals that on the *Pesach*[45] of 1982, members of the "new generation" who, as children of Holocaust survivors, did not have a home experience of Judaism, were invited into the community as a group. The purpose of the *Seder night* was to function as a meeting point between the two generations, those who experienced Jewish tradition through natural socialization and those "who, for the most part, were attending a *Seder* evening for the first time."[46] Aging, declining

[44]The word has two meanings: 1) emigrating to Israel; 2) advancing to the Torah Scroll (*Sefer Torah*) in the community.

[45]The first two evenings of the seven-day celebration of the withdrawal from Egypt in Israel and the eight days in the diaspora are called *Seder*, during which the story of the Egyptian withdrawal is narrated and relived.

[46]*Új Élet* [New Life], April 15, 1982.



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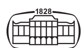
community membership and the problem of "missing generations" did not only affect the Páva Street Synagogue, and therefore "community activity was increasingly organized around solving the social problems of aging religious community members, providing assistance and caring for the elderly" (KOVÁCS 2003:21). The transformation of community dynamics is also nuanced by the fact that most of the reports are about golden wedding anniversaries instead of young couples' weddings, meaning celebrations of 70th and 80th birthdays, and sometimes of deaths, instead of *bar mitzvah* initiations.

Although the number of reports appearing in *Új Élet* [New Life] declined only slightly during this period, they now focused on the events of the culture hall operating in the synagogue. Accounts of the holidays reflect an emotional nostalgia saturated with longing for past experiences and memories. Synagogue holidays seem to have acquired a new function: to create "the atmosphere of the great family *Seders*," to recall "old Jewish family homes," to attain an atmosphere in which "guests sitting with sparkling eyes around the table in memory of the beautiful old family *Seder nights*" should remember to rejoice in the coexistence framed by Jewish traditions. It can be seen that turning to the past, feeding on nostalgia, was an attitude and a social need characteristic of the aging community, who did not wish to fill the holidays — and identity — with new elements.

Among members of the new generation, their relationship to Judaism was ambivalent because while many did not socialize within the framework of the tradition, they later sought their identity by turning to religion. An interviewed rabbi from Budapest was already eighteen years old when he first attended a *Yom Kippur* ceremony in the countryside since Judaism was considered a taboo subject in his family. He then enrolled at the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest, where he completed his studies in the 1980s, after which he was often sent to the Páva Street Synagogue to give a speech (*droshe*) or hold a *Seder night*. This rabbi recalled the community at the time as being "poor and disorganized," one of the main reasons for which he deemed the absence of a rabbi, the precentor function held by "an elderly man from Transcarpathia." Although he would have had ambition, as a young rabbinical candidate he was not authorized in any way to reorganize the life of the community by involving young people. Moreover, the young rabbi even found himself in a conflict with the secular leader (*rasekhol*), Károly Haas, because he did not want to hold the *Seder* in accordance with the requirements of Haas and the community. "Károly Haas was the *rasekhol*, with whom I had a lot of problems at the time, because I was still young and silly then, and I still wanted to be very religious. I just didn't realize that one can't be religious over his head. Once they sent me to Páva for their *Seder night*, and they wanted to do it at six o'clock, but I told them it couldn't be done, and then it became a huge issue — although Chief Rabbi Salgó[47] theoretically agreed with me, but Haas was also right, and then we somehow found an intermediate solution, but it was a problem that I was too religious there and then." (L. N. /1954–/; November 6, 2019)

It seems the community declining, not only in terms of average age, but also in terms of how Judaism was practiced in the synagogue, as if the rigid atmosphere and stiffened customs had become the only accepted way to practice religion — hence we see in the rabbi's narrative a clash between ingrained (comfort) habits and the enthusiasm of a young candidate.

[47]László Salgó (1910–1985) was chief rabbi of the Budapest Israelite Congregation and rabbi of the Dohány Street Synagogue, the largest synagogue of Budapest and Hungary.



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AS A CHILD IN THE SYNAGOGUE DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY: DETAILS FROM TWO RECOLLECTIONS

In their uniqueness, details from the two life stories presented below synthesize the events and contexts experienced by other community members.

Born in 1941, János Flamm survived the *Shoah* as a child. After his uncle lost his own child, he saw in János the only possibility of continuing Jewish existence within the family. This is how János Flamm came to the Páva Street Synagogue, where he took an active part in worship until October 1956, after which his relationship with Judaism was severed for many decades.

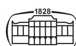
Jenő Lévai's *Black Book of the Suffering of Hungarian Jewry* details the deeds of the Arrow Cross. He mentions that "the mass murders committed by the terrorists of the party headquarters at 12-14 Városház Street will remain memorable for a long time. In particular, the torture and murder of defenders at the Swedish house[48] at 1 Jókai Street is linked to this place" (Lévai 1946:306). The "torture" — driving people into the winter night in January 1945 — exposed János Flamm and his family to severe suffering. János Flamm — who was transferred with his family to 1 Jókai Street — lived through the events at the age of three.

According to Teréz Virág, in the psychotherapeutic treatment of Holocaust survivors "we find well-traceable individual differences in the severity of trauma, which result from the life path and special circumstances of the individual: their age, the nature of their mother-child relationship, how long the social discrimination lasted and whether the individual had to live alone or with the parents" (Virág 2016:276). In the case of my interviewee, we see that he experienced persecution as a child,[49] at a particularly sensitive stage in terms of personality development, and it also follows that he himself does not remember anything; the events were reconstructed for him by his parents, his uncle, and the eyewitnesses visited. "The first three years of a child's life are crucial. And my first 4–5 years were spent in fear, even if I didn't know. War was war, of its kind; down in the basement, then up, from one house to another, my father in labour-service. So, the fear was in it. We were in the ghetto, but sometime in the 1944/45 round we were transferred to the protected house on 1 Jókai Street. So, we can say that we all were free and lived, because by then people had been taken from several parts of Budapest, and Wallenberg[50] was working as he could. It could have been arranged by Aladár, my uncle, who was an acquaintance of Wallenberg. About 200–250 people were crowded into that house, usually 10–15 in one apartment. When the tragedies happened that night, Aladár was not home. At home was Aunt Eta, a pulmonary patient, the wife of Aladár, along with their eighteen-year-old teenage daughter, Zsuzsika, and my father, mother, my grandparents, brother and I were all there. That night (January 7 to 8, 1945) it was at least as cold as it is now. We were down in the basement. And then the Arrow Cross broke into the house at dawn. They gave us three min to get dressed and line up outside on the street. And so it happened. My mom didn't have time to put shoes on us. It was the seventh of January, a particularly cold, starry night. They drove us

[48]During the Holocaust, several different organizations and diplomatic forces carried out rescue operations in Budapest. Neutral states, such as Switzerland and Sweden, provided protection in Budapest buildings designated for the persecuted, and they established the 13th district of the international ghetto.

[49]For more information on the trauma of persecuted children, see Erős 2001:123–124.

[50]Wallenberg was a Swedish diplomat who carried out life rescuing activities in Budapest in 1944/45.



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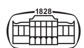
onto the street. The two children, my brother and I, were in the arms of our parents, but the two elderly women could not get out of bed, and they stayed there. Zsuzsika was taken separately…, she was too pretty… And they started this procession, with this two-hundred some people. Meanwhile, whoever could hide did so, even though we were told that whoever they found would be shot dead. There was someone who was shot dead. And then we were driven onto Andrássy Road, and the final destination was the Arrow Cross House at 14 Városház Street. My maternal grandmother was already past two strokes, and then came her third stroke and she collapsed onto the street. My diabetic grandfather sank down next to her to help. My mother handed over the two children, me and my brother, to my father and wanted to step out of line to her parents. An Arrow Cross member grabbed a gun and told her that if she stepped out, he would shoot her. And my mother didn't step out of line. And so, we got to the Arrow House. My grandparents stayed there, and we don't know anything about them. Zsuzsika was taken and raped by the Arrow Cross. (…) That's how my uncle Aladár lost his wife, who died there in the basement, his parents on the street, and his daughter. That's how he was left alone." (János Flamm /1941/; January 22, 2019)

János Flamm and his family survived the Arrow House, which, according to the narrator, is largely due to the fact that his mother protected her children and her husband "like a lion," so the child's confidence in his mother was not shaken.[51] What happened afterwards, however, was that his mother bore the consequences for the rest of her life: after their liberation, she completely severed her ties from religion. "After what happened, Aladár vowed to keep the religion, unlike my mother, and many other Jews, who said that if this could happen, there is no God. My mother testified to this, but Aladár insisted that her sister's children, being the only carriers of the religion, attend synagogue. First, my older brother joined, and then my younger brother, and so we went to the Páva Street Synagogue. And I was later protected within the walls of the synagogue because the elderly people there loved me. My mother didn't go. She couldn't go. Never. What happened greatly affected her, and she carried it all through her life." (János Flamm /1941/; January 22, 2019)

The narrator's mother, like many other survivors, felt that what happened could not have taken place if God existed.[52] The narrator's uncle, Aladár, lost his parents, wife, and child, but

[51]For the relationship of *Shoah* and ancestral trust — of which the mother is the main custodian in the first stage of a child's life — see Virág 1999:281–284.

[52]Both in individual narratives and in philosophical, literary, artistic works, the paradox of divine (presence) existence and the horror of Auschwitz becomes a defining motif of Holocaust interpretations. The philosopher Hans Jonas asks the question, "what kind of God" could have allowed Auschwitz to happen if the Jews saw "the place of divine creation, justice, and redemption" not in the transcendent but in the earthly world? In his view, in the light of this question, "even in the eyes of believers, the traditional concept of God is questioned" (Jonas 2016:75). According to Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust has had a great impact on the dialogue between the individual and God, even if the individual preserves an impersonal image of God based on intellect, but also when (s)he is related to a personal God. In both cases, the question is: where was this God during the *Shoah?* (Abrahamson 1985:235). Many of those who survived the horrors of the Holocaust have "chosen" the world of atheism to continue the life in which their children were raised. In a volume that organizes the life stories of children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors according to various themes, under the chapter "God and Faith" we find several examples of this socialization: "the Holocaust has given us enough reason to lose the possibility of God's existence; " "Not believing in God was like a family mantra" (Rosensaft 2015:36–63).



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vowed to keep the religion. Aladár intended his nephews to have a "memorial-candle"[53] role: and insisted that his sister's children, as the only followers, carry on the religion by attending the synagogue. His uncle died a few years later, but János Flamm's mother complied with Aladár's request and sent her sons to the Páva Street Synagogue for years. In our conversation, János recalled the years he spent there with particular tenderness. "I have memories of Páva Street, those most beautiful five years there. The psychological reason for this is that there were many elderly people and only a few young ones. In Judaism, the child is the most important thing, and very few children went to the synagogue. I remember three, a little girl named Gyöngy, Sanyi Steiner and Alíz Székely. They were very happy to have children in Páva Street. There were only elderly people there, and it was only there that I felt safe, in that familial warmth. I kept this — and I still have goosebumps — so when I went to the small prayer hall at the Hegedűs Gyula Street Synagogue as an adult, and later to the Heroes' Memorial Temple behind the Dohány Street Synagogue, I felt like I was in Páva Street — the murmur, the chit-chat, the conversation." (János Flamm /1941/; January 22, 2019)

János Flamm paints a very personal, intimate picture of the synagogue world. He felt safe in a "familial warmth" as a child between the walls that had seen so much, and among the survivors of the genocide, who he perceived to be elderly. Although my interviewee cannot recall what happened, he nevertheless survived the persecution. It is conceivable that being in the community and experiencing the characteristics of the synagogue atmosphere have served to heal subconscious traumas.

Prior to his *bar mitzvah*, Rabbi Manó Rosenblum and his wife had worked together with my conversation partner. Initiation into adulthood means the growth of the Jewish community, the (prayer) community of the synagogue, the *minyan*,[54] and so in a depressed atmosphere like the reality of the 1950s it was of paramount importance to the *kehillah*. János Flamm's father became poverty-stricken as a result of the genocide and subsequent socializations. Fleeing the shame, he did not take part in the initiation of his son into adulthood, and yet János sees his own *bar mitzvah* as a defining, positive event. "Manó Rosenblum personally prepared me. The rabbi's wife held the *Talmud-Torah*. At that time, we were very poor because my father slowly had to give up his business as self-employment ceased to exist. My father was not even there at the *bar mitzvah* because, among Jews, who was what was also important. My father didn't come to the *bar mitzvah* because he was ashamed to be poor. A boy becomes an adult with a *bar mitzvah*, and from there on he counts in the *minyan*, the tenth, after which the rules are binding. It's a serious ceremony, and one has to perform in front of the whole synagogue. At the Páva Street Synagogue, there were generally at least fifty or sixty people, and even more at the *bar mitzvah*. Sure, my heart was beating, my voice was right, because I had to learn to intonate a section of the Torah. I had to stand where the rabbi used to stand and read and intonate a good twenty-minute Hebrew text. It was a big deal for me as I did not really know how to read and intonate a text. I knew Hebrew songs, but how to read a sentence with a melody (*nigun*) so that I know where

[53]According to Dina Wardi's concept, after the *Shoah*, the children in the given family had a key role to play in maintaining continuity and connection with the past. When surviving parents see a "memorial-candle" in their child, "they were not perceived as separate individuals but as symbols of everything the parents had lost in the course of their lives" (Wardi 1992:37). Although Wardi's concept refers to the children of Holocaust survivors, in the above case, we see that after Aladár's own child was murdered, he intended this "task" for her brother's children.

[54]The synagogue community is a "prayer community" of ten adults, of ten, more than 13-year-old Jewish men.

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the emphasis is and what melody belongs to it, well, I had to learn that. It happened, and there was a big ovation. Then came the gift giving. I was given a compass set by the religious community, and it was interesting at the time. From an aunt who had lost her husband, I got her husband's used pyjamas clean, along with his used kippah and his used *tefillin*.[55] I still have those. After the *bar mitzvah*, this aunt invited me to her house. I don't remember anything about home, but I'm glad that there was one." (János Flamm /1941/; January 22, 2019)

In connection with 1956, János Flamm recalled the apocalyptic atmosphere, the disintegration of common order and the end of his years at the synagogue in Páva Street. His narrative reveals that October 23 suddenly "exploded" into his everyday teenage life, which made him annoyed at the time because he was unable to take part in a wrestling workout. It was only later when he realized that 1956 had become a watershed in his life as well. After these events, his connection with Páva Street and the world of synagogues was lost for decades: "Soroksári Road, Boráros Square, suburban railway /HÉV/, Csepel. Monday, Wednesday, Friday practice. October 23, 1956, a quarter past four in the afternoon — I have to take off for the training, which starts at five o'clock. I am fifteen years old. Crowd. József Boulevard, corner of Üllői Road. Ferenc Boulevard, Kilián barracks. What's happening? Bullshit. The tram isn't running. There is a revolution! What? There is a demonstration! The tram stops. I can't get there for training now. I'm going home. The next day there is a curfew… After '56, Páva Street and Judaism ceased to exist for me too… And then I became an adult. My friends, sports and girls became more important. I only started going to the synagogue again later, but I had to relearn everything…" (János Flamm /1941/; January 22, 2019)

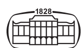
The family of L. L. T. (female) belongs to the "anonymous crowd" whose members returned to the synagogue after the *Shoah*. Her parents married in 1942 in one of the smaller houses of worship in the 9th district, after which her father was forced into labour and her mother was taken to the Dachau concentration camp. When the couple reunited in 1947, they decided to have children. L. L. T. was born in 1949 as the second child of the family (the first-born had died as a baby due to poor health), and in 1954 the couple had twins. L. L. T.'s defining childhood experiences are related to the Páva Street Synagogue, from which she eventually broke away as well as from the practice of religion.

My interviewee recalls that her parents did not talk about their suffering,[56] but they took her and her younger siblings to the synagogue. The related surviving grandparents and parents, and the unrelated survivors, the children, lived together in their apartment near the Páva Street Synagogue; experiencing the life of Jewry, including visits to the synagogue, was therefore a natural part of her childhood.[57] "My parents' devotion was not broken by the Holocaust. My dad came back in '47, and my mom was living there with my grandparents, waiting for him to

[55]A prayer strap, to be worn on the arms and head every day during morning prayer, except Shabbat and holidays.

[56]Along with the thoughts of Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-On, Ferenc Erős says "for Holocaust survivors (…) the primary pain is indescribable, cannot be put into words, even if the person is fully aware of everything that has happened to him and his relatives" (Erős 2001:116).

[57]In connection with the study of the demographic effects of the *Shoah*, Viktor Karády explains that in families in which "parents and grandparents, i.e., guardians of the values of group identity, have disappeared" while the "propensity for assimilation" has increased (Karády 1984:68). The case of L. L. T. illuminates this statement from the opposite aspect. In her family, the "guardians of the values of group identity" survived, and so they, the children, became socialized by learning these values.



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return. Mom had been in Dachau. She waited for dad for five years. They didn't really tell stories — they said we wouldn't want to know the horrors. They buried it and didn't really want to deal with it. So, we knew very little about it, but their health was impaired. And then we lived in that district on József Boulevard, not far from Páva Street, so we belonged there locally. We lived with my grandparents for as long as we could. The synagogue was full on major holidays. Ladies mostly sat upstairs, in two or three rows. Of course, we girls were also upstairs, and the boys' section downstairs was full too because after the *bar mitzvah* the boys were already there.[58] During the '60s, the synagogue was *always* full. Especially for our parents, it meant a very good community life. We were there, and we talked. That was another generation, wasn't it? No one in that neighbourhood was rich, but everyone was properly dressed when they went to the synagogue.[59] We loved to go there, we didn't have to be forced. It was natural for me when they said we're going and we're praying there. It is such that we're born into it, like we learn how to eat with a knife and fork. The synagogue was so much a part of our life. It was good, and it was absolutely beautiful — I loved the ritual stuff. When they brought out the Torah, the men kissed the outer cover as it was passed among them. I liked that, and the sight of it has remained in my memory.[60] What I still remember is that during times of fasting, the ladies sat up there and smelled apples with cloves poked into them so they wouldn't be hungry.[61] I fasted too, until I was in high school. I kept this up for quite some time. Then life thickened and it wasn't really possible anymore, or we got lost — I don't know." (L. L. T. /1949–/; April 8, 2019)

L. L. T.'s recollection differentiates participants in synagogue life, separating the generation of parents who survived the Holocaust and their children. According to her narrative, for those among the latter — including herself — visiting the synagogue was not a coercion but a natural experience of life. The synagogue was a meeting point for members of different generations, with the mixture of space and time there appearing as a symbol of "common life." The components of this common life are as much about the men praying "below" and kissing the outer cover of the Torah as the ladies discoursing "above" — or lively children running between the two "worlds." L. L. T.'s recollection nuances the social determinants of the Páva Street Synagogue area. The Ferencváros milieu did not concentrate on the affluent strata, but each tried to separate the synagogue's presence from everyday reality in terms of clothing as well. L. L. T. recounts the ritual moments that grabbed and captured her attention as a child, but she also recalls the details of closeness in the synagogue.

L. L. T.'s grandfather was a community leader who initially served as a *shamash*[62] and then as a secular leader (*rashekol*), and for a long time he served as the main coordinator of *Seder nights* and community events for the continuity of cultural and religious life. In L. L. T.'s recollection of her grandfather, we find a phenomenon illustrating the folklore of Pest Jewry:

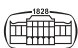
[58]In traditional synagogues, women and men attend prayers separately. If there is a gallery in the synagogue, women sit there.

[59]The 9th district of Budapest, Ferencváros, was typically the home of craftsmen, lower middle-class and middle-class folks.

[60]When taken out of the Torah ark, it is customary to walk around the synagogue with the Torah Scroll (*Sefer Torah*) to be kissed by members of the community, who also touched it with their prayer shawls and their prayer books.

[61]On the Day of Atonement, at *Yom Kippur*, there is a twenty-five-hour fast, during which an apple poked with cloves — citrus fruits are also used nowadays — is smelled to quench hunger during the almost all-day synagogue prayer.

[62]'Temple servant' who is responsible for preparing the synagogue before prayer times.



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her grandfather was one of those who in the 1950s and '60s had performed the *kapparot*[63] folk ceremony before the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*. L. L. T. recalls the circumstances of the death of her grandfather in the Páva Street Synagogue, and she also provides an example of the fact that the loss of an elderly family member can mean a distancing from the synagogue for younger generations, as happened in her case. For my interviewee, this distancing is still very tense and painful, even now in the present moment, although it took place decades ago. While she acknowledges that she no longer has any religious or cultural attachment to Judaism, she still considers herself a Jew on an emotional level through family memories and bonds. "One thing I remember is a holiday I don't know the name of, when we were praying at home and my grandfather waved a live hen over my head. The chicken was kept at home by my grandfather so that he could swing it over our heads, and we were a little scared of it as kids, but we loved him very much. And then the years went by. My grandfather used to be a regular leader in the synagogue — with women sitting upstairs in the gallery and boys sitting downstairs. Grandpa sat in the semicircle next to the Torah among the prelates. He may have been around 83 in '66, when at *Pesach* he was handing out care packages and fell from the podium in the synagogue and hit his head. He was in a coma for a few months, his heart still going, and then he died. I must have been around 16, and I really loved him because we lived together. My parents did not even let me visit him in the hospital, though I say he was there for several months. He always said, 'I'll even dance at your wedding' — and well, that didn't happen. After his death, my relationship with Páva Street and Judaism gradually came to an end. Some customs were passed onto my children. We don't sew on Friday nights, and we don't cut nails,[64] but, unfortunately, I haven't really had a religious attachment since then. For us, it's still about keeping the feeling inside because the truth is, even though one does not practice religion, in the depths of one's heart one is still… a Jew. /weeping/" (L. L. T. /1949–/; April 8, 2019)

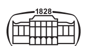
CONCLUSION

For Jews who survived the Holocaust, the first few years after the war meant the hope of a liberated resumption of life and a liveable future, while at the same time it also meant facing the losses that arose from physical and mental suffering. In the Budapest Israelite Congregation, the difficulties of starting over and the search for opportunities to integrate into the new system were the priority tasks.

As we have seen in recollections, the Páva Street Synagogue during this period emerged as a place for the return to everyday life, and as a centre for Jewry in Ferencváros it also played a role in finding members of broken families. The kindergarten and day care centre not only helped to educate the children but also indirectly helped the parents to reintegrate into society. In addition to religious functions, the synagogue milieu provided assistance to survivors in many areas of life during this period.

[63]It is a custom to spin a hen/rooster over one's head before *Yom Kippur*, whereby the sins of the individual are passed on to the animal.

[64]According to religious regulations, there are 39 activities, including animal slaughter, which are not allowed on Shabbat.



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The second half of the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s were marked by cultural and religious activities: holding of the synagogue holidays in the broadest sense, various cultural performances, the *Talmud-Torah* education of young people — all were emphasized during the hard dictatorship of the single-party state. Sources and recollections thus showed that in the first half of the 1950s, despite the repression, religious activities were alive in the Páva Street Synagogue, after which they were then interrupted by the events of 1956.

After October 1956, although daily life resumed, during 1970s and 1980s, symptoms of trauma manifested as the size of the community declined and its members grew older: generations were missing from the synagogue.

Both the sources and the personal recollections illustrate how the community has aged and what mental differences have emerged since the entry of the "new generation." As the district gradually settled to serve the needs of an aging community, there was a lack of a common language in which common goals could be set by a rabbinical candidate or young people participating in *Seder* for the first time, who also posed a certain "risk" to older people in terms of the order that had developed over the years.

The pre-war community of thousands at the Páva Street Synagogue had shrunk to a mere handful of people by the end of the decades of socialism. Traces of all these problems — which go beyond Páva Street — are still being borne by the community today, and whether they will ever be resolvable perhaps still remains a question.

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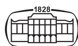

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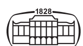

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