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“They Drew What Was in Them: The Past, the Present”¹

Testimonial Drawings as Schoolwork in the Immediate Aftermath of the Holocaust

Abstract

A source group consisting of twenty-six drawings that was created by thirteen- and fourteen-year-old survivors in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust is analysed in this article. The youngsters who drew the testimonial drawings as compulsory school assignments were pupils of the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest. Our aim is to demonstrate that these drawings are crucial historical sources that document both the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath. Until recently, these kinds of documents have been routinely viewed as merely marginal sources of historical information, mainly because they are visual in nature and were created by young teenagers. Certain factors, such as the school environment, age, gender, and the shared historical experiences of the children turn the drawings into a source group from which additional information can be gleaned by analysing the individual pieces in one another's contexts. The analyses of the drawings show that the girls consciously took the role of the witness upon themselves. We also examine how the fact that these drawings were created by females influences the source group.

The aim of this article is to focus scholarly attention on a source group consisting of twenty-six drawings that were created by thirteen- and fourteen-year-old pupils of the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest in the late spring and early summer of 1945. The girls' drawing teacher, Mrs. Tibor Klein (later, Kertai), born Klára Friedrich (1913–1999),² kept the drawings. Her son, Iván Kertai, donated the drawings to the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest in 2023.³

A number of the drawings had been made available to the public before: twelve of them had been exhibited in Budapest in 1991. For this occasion, Klára Kertai published a short account concerning the creation of the drawings, from which we chose the quote for the title of our paper.⁴ Many of the drawings were published in 1994 and in 2021, as illustrations for commemorative journal articles about the Holo-

1 Hungarian original: “Rajzolták, ami bennük volt. A múltat, a jelent.” Klára Kertai, “Add vissza a gyerekkoromat ...” [Give my Childhood Back ...], *Szombat* no. 9 (1991): 38.

2 From the school year of 1945/46 onwards, she was called Mrs. Tibor Kertai, born Klára Friedrich, as her husband changed his surname.

3 Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest, Acquisition no. 3534.

4 The twelve drawings were exhibited between 17 November and 13 December 1991, by the Chagall Art Gallery (48 Garay Street, Budapest). See the account: Kertai, “Add vissza”, 38. Six drawings from among the exhibited ones were published in the same issue of *Szombat*.

caust.⁵ However, up until now, no one has researched and analysed the drawings. Through analysing this previously unexplored source group, we change the drawings' status from being mere picturesque illustrations to serious sources of research – viz. the centre of attention⁶ – and reveal the complex inter-relation of trauma and testimony among Jewish children in Pest during the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.

Even though there exist several sources featuring drawings that were created by adolescents in the immediate aftermath of the liberation,⁷ the source group analysed here is extraordinary in Hungary. The fact that they were created as fulfilments of formal class requirements within an educational context of a school allows us to analyse the twenty-six drawings together as a group.⁸ Not only do the youngsters constitute a homogeneous group in terms of gender, age, and religion but, according to the school register, they all lived in Budapest before 1944.⁹ Therefore, the events which they had experienced during the period of the persecutions also had similarities.

Through several examples, we will demonstrate that both their gender and age played a decisive role in the ways the youngsters had experienced the events of the Holocaust and recalled them in their drawings. Additionally, the fact that the drawings were created as compulsory school assignments by following clearly identifiable instructions by the teacher, provides a set of points of view for comparing the drawings and identifying certain mechanisms for as well as consequences of remembering traumatic events, such as “avoidance”, “entrapment”, and “re-traumatisation” in the drawings.¹⁰

5 *Múlt és Jövő* no. 2 (1994): 32–49–11 drawings; *Új Élet*, 1 April 1994, 5–1 drawing; *Ezredvég* 31, no. 2: 144–147–12 drawings.

6 Joanna Michlic has also called attention to the importance of children's testimonial drawings in her recent lecture “Postwar Reconstructions of Family through the Eyes of Polish Jewish Child Survivors”, lecture presented at the *What's New, What's Next?* conference, “Focusing on Families” section, Polin Museum, Warsaw, 5 October 2021.

7 For example, Gergely Kunt has published drawings that were included in diaries, such as a drawing of an air-raid siren from the diary of Margit Molnar, without a date (418), or, also from her diary, a depiction of queuing, dated August 1945 (388). See Gergely Kunt, *Kamasztükrök. A hosszú negyvenes évek társadalmi képzetei fiatalok naplóiban* [Multi-Faceted Reflections – The Diaries of Jewish and Non-Jewish Adolescents in Wartime Hungary] (Budapest: Korall, 2017).

8 Another series of children's drawings created as school assignments is known to us from archival and press sources. However, these drawings are still missing. The drawings were created by pupils of the High School for Boys of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest (PIH) and those of the primary school of PIH at Szt. Domonkos Street. They were exhibited in March 1947 in the Bibliotheca Officina in Budapest. From the sources available to us, only the interpretations of the adults are known, not the drawings themselves. See Viktória Bányai, “Gyermekrajzok a Vészorszakról”, *Ezredvég* 31, no. 2 (2021): 139–147.

9 See the school register of the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest for the school year 1944/45, which is contained in the archives of Scheiber Sándor High School and Elementary School, the legal successor of the former school.

10 We are drawing upon trauma theory as psychologists and literary scholars, such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Henry Greenspan, Geoffrey H. Hartman, Lawrence L. Langer, Dori Laub, and Júlia Vajda, have developed it in connection to trauma narratives, mainly Holocaust testimonies. Psychology employs numerous definitions of trauma and it acknowledges the existence of an intensive individual traumatic event, a series of events, or long-term situations, each one of which completely overwhelms a person and remains unassimilated, with continuing negative effects. To be interpreted, trauma narratives need special hermeneutic devices. For developing a set of tools in order to be able to draw upon traumatic memories as reliable historical sources, see Rita Horváth, “Memory Imprints: Testimonies as Historical Sources”, in *Jewish Families in Europe, 1939–Present: History, Representation and Memory*, ed. Joanna Beata Michlic (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2017), 173–195.

The School Setting and the Voices of Child Survivors

Questions that are much-discussed in the scholarly literature on the early post-war era include how much and how intensely the members of the surviving communities talked or wrote about their experiences, recorded them, listened to one another's accounts, and in what ways they accomplished all of this.¹¹ Moreover, in what ways and to which degree were the child survivors involved in these activities, and what are the dynamics of the creation of children's testimonies versus adults' testimonies?

In Hungary, we can see that wherever and whenever the primary aim of rendering testimonies was to document the Holocaust in its immediate aftermath, such as in the earliest large-scale testimony-collecting project, the National Relief Committee for Deportees in Hungary (*Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság*, henceforth referred to as DEGOB), the voices of the child survivors were not prominent in any way.¹² However, in another crucial arena of the culture of *She'erit Hapletah* (the Surviving Remnant) in the DP camps, this was not the case. For example, the Central Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich, which was established by survivors in order to document the Holocaust, specifically sought the testimonies of children within its large-scale testimony collection project.¹³

For Yisrael Kaplan (1902–2003), a teacher from the Kovno ghetto, who was one of the leading figures of the Central Historical Commission, collecting the testimonies of child survivors was especially important. So much so that Kaplan, who was also the editor of the journal of the Central Historical Commission, *Fun letzten Hurbn* (From the Last Extermination: Journal for the History of the Jewish People during the Nazi Regime), published a child-survivor testimony in each issue of the journal.

In contrast to the large-scale documentation project of the DEGOB, Jewish schools in Hungary seemed to provide a more accommodating environment for producing child survivor testimonies through various media such as writings, drawings and other – mainly artistic – activities. In a school setting, then, the adult caretakers' primary aim for producing testimonies was not documentation, but to help children to cope with their traumatic losses. Klára Kertai's interest in psychology and art therapy, for example, is well demonstrated by her earlier works involving the

11 See, for example, the touchstone books on the subject by David Cesarani (2012), Laura Jockusch (2012), and Zeev W. Mankowitz (2002).

12 See Rita Horváth, "Gyerekek túlélési stratégiái a náci koncentrációs táborokban tanúvallomásaik tükrében" [Survival Strategies of Children in Nazi Concentration Camps as Reflected in Their Testimonies], in *A nagy-politikától a hétköznapokig. A magyar holokauszt 70 év távlatából. Tanulmányok*, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2017), 305–312. Together with Kinga Frojimovics, we (RH) are working on a project concerning the children's testimonies given to the DEGOB.

In an earlier study, the similarities between the DEGOB and the Central Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich had been emphasised, as both were "Jewish historical commission[s]", to draw upon Philip Friedman's notion. See Boaz Cohen and Rita Horváth, "Young Witnesses in the DP Camps: Children's Holocaust Testimony in Context", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 11, no. 1 (2012): 103–125. In the present article, we stress the differences between these two large-scale testimony-collecting projects regarding the collection of child testimonies to document the Holocaust.

It is also important to mention that, whereas many children later remembered that their voices were not heard, some adolescents remembered that differently. Imre Kertész, for example, constructed the entire last section of his memoir-novel, *Fatelessness* – which relates the story of the Protagonist's return from the concentration camp universe to Budapest – as a series of conversations requesting the immediate rendering of his testimony. The DEGOB and the journalist asked for his testimony for public purposes.

13 See Boaz Cohen, "The Children's Voice: Post-War Collection of Testimonies from Children Survivors of the Holocaust", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 74–95. Henceforth, we will refer to the Central Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich as "the Central Historical Commission".

research and development of pedagogical as well as therapeutic concepts for teaching drawing.¹⁴ She wrote about the developmental effects of drawings as well as about the potential of art therapy.

However, dealing with traumas, especially long-term social-historical traumas, typically involves the recalling of traumatic events and experiences as well as their aftermath, together with the development of one's identity as a witness. The issue of documentation thus came up automatically. From the wording of how Kertai remembered the commencement of the school year after liberation, we can understand that one of her goals in asking the children to create testimonial drawings was to counteract some of the most debilitating effects of the traumatising forces of the persecutions:

All of us were injured, with unhealed, incurable wounds: teachers [and] children. Maybe, we began too early to somehow start getting these wounded souls accustomed to life: ourselves and the others too. Jewish high school, 1945.

The history that tore them out of school, tore their childhood out of them, cannot be erased from the children's eyes either. Their memories are terrifying. Their school of life taught them to lie, to lie about their name, their religion, to disavow their own selves.¹⁵

Klára Kertai emphasised that one of the major elements of the children's Holocaust survivor trauma was that they were coerced to lie about everything important: their name, age, religion, and identity. And this predicament can be best counteracted by the construction of the identity of the witness, whose value lies solely in the truthful recording/documenting/witnessing of certain events.

The fact that Kertai kept the drawings for decades regardless of the lack of their artistic value, and created occasions for them to be seen, suggests that, in addition to being psychological devices, she deemed the drawings of her survivor students as important documents of the Holocaust and its aftermath.¹⁶ Moreover, the commemorative activities organised by Mrs Kertai for the fortieth anniversary of the Holocaust at the Jewish high school of Budapest called "Anna Frank", demonstrate that she also regarded these documents as being especially accessible to youngsters.¹⁷

The primacy of psychological help as the main motif behind asking children to testify as schoolwork did not characterise all post-war school settings. The representatives of the Central Historical Commission, for example, saw the DP camp schools

14 Already as a high school student, she won a place of distinction with her essay entitled "Mi a mai magyar ifjúság legnagyobb lelki problémája" [What is the Largest Psychological Problem of Today's Hungarian Youth] in the youth literary competition of the newspaper *Budapesti Hírlap* in the academic year 1929/30. Wirth Kálmán, ed., *A Pesti Izraelita Hitközség Leánygimnáziumának Értesítője az 1929/30. iskolaévről* [The Bulletin of the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest concerning the 1929/1930 school year] (Budapest, 1930), 24. Her 1937 article in *Budapesti Hírlap* entitled "A rajzitanítás védelmében" [In Defence of Teaching Drawing], which she published right after graduating from university, shows that she researched, developed, and employed pedagogical and therapeutic concepts for teaching drawing. *Budapesti Hírlap*, 11 September 1937, 4.

15 Kertai, "Add vissza", 38. Hungarian original: "Mindannyian sérültek, begyógyulatlan, kiheverhetetlen sebekkel: tanárok, gyerekek. Talán túlságosan is korán fogtunk hozzá, hogy valahogy elkezdjük az életre szoktatni ezeket a felsebzett lelkeket: magunkat és a többieket is. *Zsidó gimnázium 1945*. A gyerekek szeméből is kitorolhatatlan a történelem, mely kitépte őket az iskolából, kitépte belőlük gyermekkorukat. Emlékeik félelmetesek. Az ő élet-iskolájuk megtanította őket hazudni, hazudni nevet, vallást, megtagadni önmagukat."

16 "These drawings that I saved and brought here, are not masterpieces. There are hardly any among them that could win a prize at some drawing exhibition. Yet they are heart wrenching." [Hungarian original: „Ezek a rajzok, amiket megőriztem és elhoztam, nem remekművek. Alig akad közöttük olyan, amelyik valamilyen rajzkiállításon díjat nyerhetne. Mégis szívbemarkolóak.”] Klára Kertai, "Levél egy volt tanítványomhoz" [A Letter To A Former Student of Mine], *Új Élet*, 1 January 1982, 4.

17 Anna Sándor, "Fiatalok emlékeznek" [Youngsters Remember], *Új Élet*, 1 September 1984, 2.

merely as convenient places where they could reach the children to take down their testimonies. They collected many testimonial compositions from DP camp schools.¹⁸ However, the workers of the Central Historical Commission, especially the pedagogues, were keenly aware of the deep interrelatedness existing between aiming at documentation and implementing pedagogical/psychological help through eliciting testimonies from child survivors. Kaplan, for example – when the necessity of collecting children’s testimonies had been attacked from the historiographic point of view – emphasised the importance of children’s testimonies for the children themselves, as they allowed the children to form a novel connection to their traumas.¹⁹

The differences concerning the concept of children’s testimonies created in schools can be attributed mainly to the fact that the school system in the countries where survivors had returned (even if only temporarily) aimed at being a stabilising force. By contrast, the Central Historical Commission collected testimonies mainly from survivors living in DP camps waiting to move on with their lives somewhere else. Therefore, the schools in the DP camps were constituted as consciously ephemeral phenomena.²⁰

The Creation of the Drawings as School Assignments

Based on the 1944/45 yearbook of the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest, we can see that, in the framework of numerous subjects and in other ways, too, the school aimed at providing the students with many opportunities to write, draw, and speak about their traumas. For example, Judit Jordán’s writing entitled “Emlék a munkatáborból” [Memory from the Labour Camp] and Éva Munkácsi’s work entitled “Menekülés” [Escape] won the high school’s literary competition. This was also a nationwide educational policy,²¹ as those students who took the matriculation examination in German had to write a composition entitled “Das Leben ist schwerer geworden” [Life Has Become More Difficult].²² The twenty-six drawings which we have were part of the effort described above.

18 See the in-depth analysis of testimonial compositions collected from survivor children and teenagers in the DP children’s camp of Aschau, located in southern Bavaria in the American zone of occupied Germany: Boaz Cohen and Rita Horváth, “Young Witnesses”, and Rita Horváth and Katalin Zana, “Trauma és szelf-narratíva: Gyerek holokauszt-túlélők tanúvallomásainak interdiszciplináris elemzése” [Trauma and Self-Narrative: An Interdisciplinary Study of Child-Survivors’ Holocaust Testimonies], *Lélekelemzés* no. 2 (2013): 230–256.

19 Yisrael Kaplan, “Day to Day Work in the Historical Commission”, main lecture given at the meeting of the Historical Commissions, Munich, 12 May 1947. This lecture was published in Yiddish, as a separate booklet, by the Central Historical Commission of Liberated Jews in the American zone.

20 Yisrael Kaplan emphasized the ephemeral nature of the DP camps and their institutions as early as 9 November 1945, in his programme-giving article “Zamlen un fartsayhenen” [Collect and Record], *Undzer Veg* no. 5: 3. Kaplan viewed the DP camps as providers of a unique opportunity for collecting testimonies since, during the period of their mandatory suspension, before starting their lives anew elsewhere, the survivors concentrated there had time to record their memories. In his touchstone book, Zeev W. Mankowitz quoted this article when analysing Kaplan’s ideas: Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 215–216. See also Ada Schein’s article “‘Everyone Can Hold a Pen’ – The Documentation Enterprise in the DP Camps in Germany”, in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, eds. David Bankier and Dan Michman (Jerusalem and New York: Yad Vashem and ergham Books, 2008), 103–134.

21 Concerning this wider context, and including international parallels, see Tuomas Laine-Frigrén, “Traumatized Children in Hungary After World War II”, in *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe after World War II*, eds. V. Kivimäki and P. Leese (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 149–176. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84663-3_6.

22 Jenő Zsoldos, ed., *A Pesti Izraelita Hitközség Leánygimnáziumának és Ipari Leányközépiskolájának Évkönyve az 1944/45. iskolai évről* [The Yearbook of the High School and the Industrial High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest concerning the 1944/1945 School Year] (Budapest, 1945), 43, 63.

The High School for Girls could start the 1944/45 school year only in March 1945. In the autumn, only enrolments and supplementary enrolments took place. These involved an especially large number of students, as the Jewish girls, or girls deemed Jewish by the Hungarian legal system, had been banned from the high schools of the state and the city. There still remained vestiges of normal life in the capital in the autumn. Between 15 May and 9 July 1944, the Jews from the Hungarian provinces were deported. By contrast, the majority of the Jews of Budapest, who were the last to be deported, remained in the capital because Governor Miklós Horthy suspended the deportations on 6 July 1944. The Lakatos government, established on 29 August 1944, even allowed the holding of synagogue services during the autumn High Holidays.²³

The school had not been able to use its modern building on Abonyi Street for years, as it was requisitioned for military purposes during the war and, after the liberation, a Russian military hospital operated in it. On 13 March 1945, when teaching commenced, only two rooms of the ORT²⁴ office (at 32 Elizabeth Boulevard) were available, but later, still in March, the High School for Girls was moved to the building of the Rabbinical Seminary, where the classes of the High School for Girls and those of the High School for Boys were taught according to a system of alternating morning-afternoon shifts.

The school year was very short, as it ended already on 6 July 1945. The yearbook formulated it as follows: “[During that not quite four months,] we had only processed the material that were important and relevant for moving forward.”²⁵ In addition to that, many students joined later, recovering from illnesses or staying in the countryside as part of relief efforts. Those who went to school for less than three months or did not attend school at all could take grade-assigning exams in mid-July in order to avoid losing a school year.

From 1940, Klára Kertai taught drawing and needlework at the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest where she herself had graduated in 1931. During the short school year of 1944/45 she taught the III/a, b, and the IV/a classes, as well as the fourth-graders in the Személynök Street section.²⁶ The twenty-six drawings were created in these four classes as compulsory school assignments, since grades had to be obtained in the short school year too.²⁷ According to today’s terminology, the creators were seventh- and eighth-grader girls, most of whom had been born in 1932, meaning that they were about thirteen years old in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.

The number of girls who earned year-concluding grades indicates that more than a hundred girls studied in the four classes taught by Klára Kertai. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that she chose the drawings for keeping. Unfortunately, we do not know her criteria for the selection, as we do not know the drawings which were not chosen. Still, we can rule out one fact as a criterium: the drawing talent of the students. In that

23 László Karsai, *Holokauszt* (Budapest: Pannonica Kiadó, 2001), 249.

24 ORT was an organisation promoting handicraft and agricultural work among Jews, which was established in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century. Between the two world wars, it was active in other states of Central and Eastern Europe as well.

25 “We taught only the parts of the curriculum that was crucial from the point of view of further progress.” [Hungarian original: „Csak a továbbhaladás szempontjából fontos és lényeges anyagrészeket dolgoztuk fel.”] Zsoldos, *Évkönyv*, 32.

26 *Ibid.*, 39.

27 Seven drawings are by pupils from the No. III/a class, fourteen drawings are by pupils from the No. III/b class, three drawings are by pupils from the No. IV/a class, and one drawing is from the No. IV class in Személynök Street.

school year, one could only receive three types of grades: 1, 2 and 3, with 1 being the best. About half of the children whose drawings the teacher kept received a 1 for drawing at the end of the year, but many received a 2, and some of them even a 3.

The girls themselves wrote the date on twelve drawings, indicating that they created them at the end of May (31 May) and the beginning of June (1 and 5 June). The pupils drew the majority of the drawings on the same day in each class, most probably according to their timetables. In addition to the dated drawings, there are two undated ones depicting the 1st of May parade, so these could not have been drawn earlier. On the drawings which the students themselves dated, in the upper right-hand corner, the girls wrote down the number of their class and also wrote: "Page 1". These formal elements suggest that the drawings could have been a part of the portfolio put together for receiving their end-of-the-year grade.

The drawings feature memories of war and persecution, as well as experiences of the present focussed on a life returning to an increasing degree of normalcy. The majority of the drawings have titles, which the children themselves gave to their works. Titles about the past are "The Siege of Budapest" [Budapest ostroma], "Arrow-Cross Thugs are Taking Us" [Visznek a nyilasok], "The Guarding of a Jewish House" [Egy zsidó ház őrzése], "The Reign of the Arrow-Cross [Party]" [A nyilas uralom], "Night Robbery!" [Éjjeli rablás!], "Air Raid!" [Légi riadó!], "October 16" [Október 16], "The Memory of Times Past" [Elmúlt idők emléke], "Bombing" [Bombázás], "During the Siege of Budapest." [Budapest ostroma alatt.], "Russians on the Streets of Pest" [Oroszok Pest utcáin], and "Deportation" [Deportálás]. Titles about the present are "After Liberation" [Felszabadulás után], "The Electric Lights Are on Again!" [Újra ég a villany!], "The Tram Is Running!" [Jár a villamos!], "May 1st" [Május 1], "May 1st in the Zoo" [Május 1 az Állatkertben], "Team of Children at the May 1st Parade" [Gyerekcsoport a május 1-i felvonuláson], "Girls in front of the Wall Newsletter" [Lányok a falújság előtt], "A Chaluca (Zionist Woman) Who is Guarding a Sleeping Colony [of Chalucim]" [Egy alvó kolónia felett őrködő chaluca], and "Girls Dancing the Hóra" [Chórázó lányok].²⁸ The drawing featuring the writing on the blackboard, "Death to the Reac.", also depicts the time of the aftermath.

In total, twelve drawings depict the past, ten depict the present (to which, of course, the past assigns part of its meaning), and four works show the past and the present as structurally juxtaposed. The juxtaposition is emphasised either by the title, such as "The Past and the Present" [A múlt és a jelen.], or by comments such as "It was like this ... It is like this ..." added to a drawing entitled "Arrow Cross Men" [Nyilasok]. Indeed, the juxtaposition itself interprets these works so strongly that, in all four drawings, words are added to underline the parallel structures of the visual depiction. The parallel structure by itself creates a mini narrative that could be understood as hope. By contrast, some of the drawings depicting the present, such as "The Electric Lights Are On Again!" and "The Tram Is Running!", include elements from the past implying that the bright future – even if it appears peaceful and optimistic, as evidenced and symbolized by lights and moving trams – is problematic and poisoned by traumatic memories as well as the consequences of the past. Ágnes G, who drew "The Electric Lights Are on Again!" implies this traumatic notion through a joke: under the title,

28 Sándor Gervai, in his long article in the *Új Élet*, wrote about the 1947 exhibition of the boys' drawings (3 April 1947, 19). Gervai's report lists the titles of the drawings: "Út a Duna felé" (Towards the Danube), "A csendőrbántalmazásai" (The Abuse of the Gendarme), "Az óvóhely szorongásai" (Anxieties of the Shelter), "Deportálótáborok emlékei ..." (Memories of Deportation Camps ...), and "Élményeim a nyilasok alatt" (My Experiences under the Arrow Cross Men). These titles can be fruitfully compared to those given by the girls to their testimonial drawings.

she writes in parentheses “But where is the gas?”. Anna B emphasises that the tram symbolising the bright future features the number “44”, as in 1944.

Based mainly on the drawings themselves, we can guess how the teacher’s instructions influenced the choices concerning the subject matter as well as the design of the drawings. It is most probable that the teacher suggested the format of either drawing a scene from the past or depicting the present, or drawing two scenes side by side, one describing a scene from the past and the other one from the present. The formal attributes (date, title, name, uniform indication of class, and the layout of the drawings) constantly remind us of the fact that the drawings were created in school, during a lesson. Some of the drawings emphatically employ elements of technical drawings and there are powerful perspective representations of buildings as well as certain objects. These are also skills, those learnt, practiced, and expected in drawing classes. The staircase in Éva H.’s drawing entitled “Air Raid!” is a fascinating example of this. Moreover, this drawing utilises a very sophisticated technique of representation that, in cinematography, is called the “Dutch angle” (or canted camera), which provokes discomfort and disorientation in the viewer in order to convey the utter terror of air raids. Éva H. depicted the long staircase leading down to the air raid shelter and the shelter’s benches in a tilted fashion; the horizon line is not parallel with the bottom of the drawing.

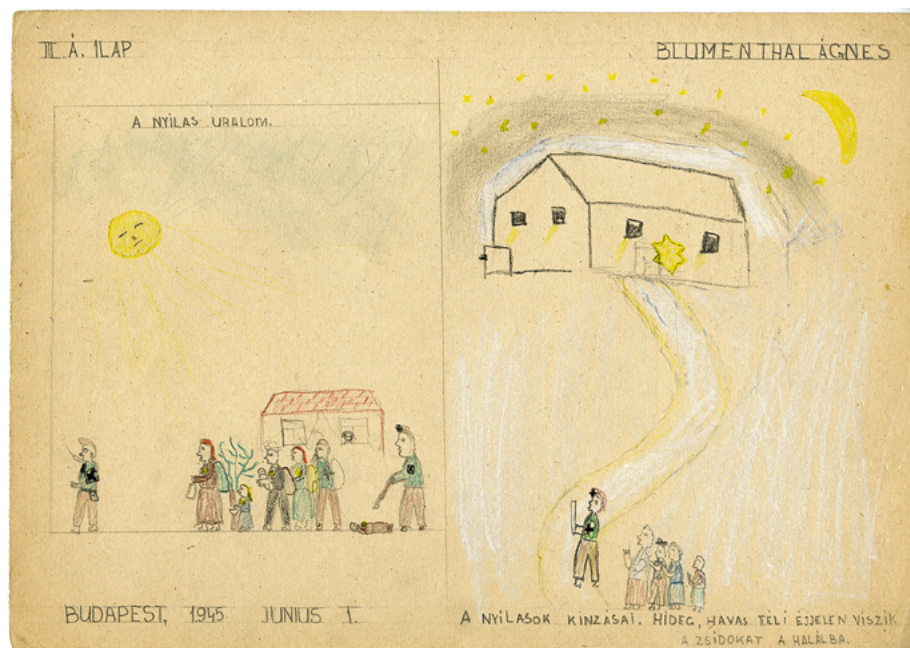
As in the case of school assignments under usual circumstances, we even encounter copying. Seeing Borbála G.’s and Marianne F.’s drawings together, it is clear that one of the children copied from her classmate’s drawing, producing a less complex version of her work.

In the special case of assignments concerning the children’s at once collective and personal traumas, we have reasons to believe that the copying happened not because there were children who escaped the recent historical catastrophe unscathed. It happened because some survivors could not deal with their agonising and retraumatising memories then and there. Pupils therefore might have copied in order to complete the assignment, as is necessary in school, but not to let the past resurface. We have encountered a similar case of copying in class in the school of the Aschau DP camp in 1946. There, fifteen- and sixteen-year-old boys were asked in class to write down their testimonies as compositions. In analysing side by side the two testimonial compositions in which the copying occurred, it became clear that copying was a defence mechanism on the part of the copying youngster. The analysis revealed that the moment he was forced to give that defensive measure up, his traumatic memories flooded him, causing his text to become chaotic, fragmented, and short.²⁹

We can see also in the case of the girls’ drawings what happens when the trauma resurfaces. Ágnes B. twice drew the same extremely traumatic scene from the past: how Arrow Cross men herded a group of Jews to massacre them. The creator of the drawing became trapped in the traumatic repetition in a very literal sense.³⁰ She divided the page into two the same way as the drawings depicting the past and the present in a parallel manner. She also placed the title “The Reign of the Arrow Cross [Party]” on the left side of the drawing, again similarly to the drawings depicting the past and the present as juxtaposed. However, she could not switch over to the present. Instead, she repeated the same topic: Arrow Cross thugs herd Jews to murder them. In fact, in the first drawing, a Jew had already been shot by one of the Arrow

29 Cohen and Horváth, “Young Witnesses”, 112–113, and Horváth and Zana, “Trauma és szelf-narratíva”, 236–249.

30 Repetition has a crucial role in the history of psychoanalysis: the intrusion of traumas in the form of repetition, viz. the phenomenon of “repetition compulsion”, forced open Freud’s early hermeneutics and compelled the writing of his rather uncontrolled *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the starting point of trauma theory.



Ágnes B, *The Reign of the Arrow Cross [Party]*. Klára Kertai's Collection, Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

Cross thugs. In addition, the second drawing depicts the extreme cold together with the world's utter indifference to the fate of the Jews. The two sides end up depicting day and night with the same horrors.

When the trauma resurfaces so clearly, no binary opposition like past and present can create an encoded positive mini narrative: only the cruelty of the Arrow Cross men and the suffering of the victims exist in a continued and timeless present that is the past. It is especially painful to see that both groups of victims (the second group is additionally tortured by the bitter cold) include little girls, like the author of the drawing herself.

Experiencing the Persecutions as a Teenage Girl

It is especially informative to consider issues of gender in the case of these drawings created by girls in an emphatically female setting. In the fall and winter of 1944, the fathers of the Jewish girls in Budapest, if the fathers were still alive at all, were taken away as forced labourers, and even some of the working-age women, that is, the mothers, were taken away. Thus, mainly children, women, and the elderly became the victims of the persecutions in Budapest. It is therefore understandable that the majority of the drawings feature children as well as women. However, it is important to note that the creators of the drawings noticed women and children not only among the victims, but also among the perpetrators and bystanders. They depicted them sensitively. This special perspective of the girls led to the documenting of details about which we do not have any other visual sources, and which had thus also been invisible to historical memory for a long time.³¹

31 For the lack of visual sources concerning women perpetrators, see Andrea Pető, "Forgotten Perpetrators: Photographs of Female Perpetrators after WWII", in *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence*, eds. Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Pető (Routledge, 2016), 203–219.



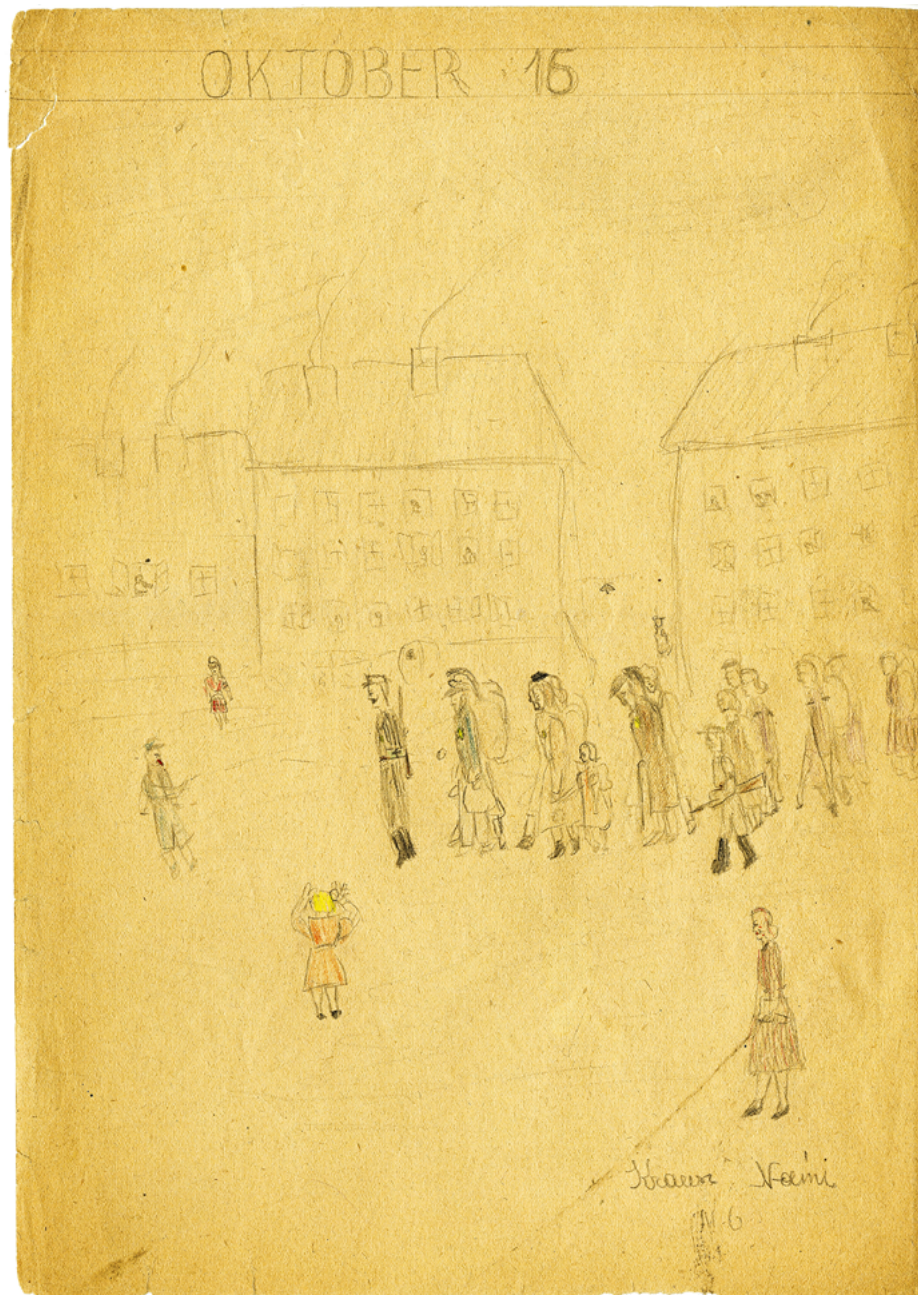
Zsuzsanna S, *Arrow Cross Thugs Are Taking Us*. Klára Kertai's Collection, Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

Gender receives an unusual stress in Zsuzsanna S.'s drawing entitled *Arrow Cross Thugs Are Taking Us*. The distinguishing marks are emphasised on the clothing of the six marching figures. The three Jewish women carrying their luggage – one of them, who is in the centre of the drawing, is a teenage girl – have a yellow star on their clothes, while two women are identified by their armbands: one of them by her Arrow Cross armband, the other by her Skull Legion [*Halálfejes Légión*] armband. The only male in the picture, who herds the marching women from behind, carries a gun and can also be clearly identified as an Arrow Cross man by his carefully depicted armband. He is at the top of the power hierarchy. Thus, the unequal power relationship between the Arrow Cross women and the man has also found its way into Zsuzsanna S.'s picture, even though the drawing clearly focusses on the utter powerlessness of the three Jewish women. According to Andrea Pető, who has researched the topic of Arrow Cross women in depth, improving their “relative power” position is one of the possible explanations for the participation of women in the Arrow Cross movement.³²

Noémi K.'s drawing entitled *October 16* also depicts a procession of Jews herded by armed Arrow Cross men. The group of Jews, clearly marked by their yellow stars, consists of women, children, and old as well as disabled people. One of them is clearly depicted as needing a crutch to walk. A little Jewish girl marching in the group is at the centre of the drawing.

Noémi K. did something rare: in addition to showing the perpetrators and their victims, she broadened the perspective of the picture, including also bystanders and a rescuer. We see people on the street and others are watching from the open windows of the houses. From among the numerous people surrounding the victims and the perpetrators, four figures are elaborated on and highlighted with colours. A woman walks alongside the marching Jews without even looking at the procession.

³² Andrea Pető, *Láthatatlan elkövetők – Nők a magyarországi nyilas mozgalomban* [Invisible Perpetrators - Women in the Hungarian Arrow Cross Movement] (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2019), 202.



Noémi K, *October 16*. Klára Kertai's Collection,
Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

Two children, one boy and one girl, actively, with well-recognisable childish gestures, mock and taunt the Jews. The fourth figure is a woman approaching the procession purposefully from the background. She hurries towards the march and she is on a collision course with it. Her position in the picture and her uniform with an armband and a headdress suggest that she is, or claims to be, a Red Cross nurse, who rushes to rescue the Jews.³³ We can identify the red colour on her armband. This visual representation of a probably, and at least partly, successful rescue attempt makes this testimonial drawing unique.

³³ On rescue attempts by real and pseudo Red Cross employees see, for example, "DEGOB protocol no. 3622," DEGOB, accessed 10 January 2023, <http://www.degob.hu/index.php?showjk=3622>.

The majority of the drawings, when they depict war scenes, saturation bombings, the siege of Budapest, weapons and killings, do so in a characteristic but schematic and simplistic way. This is especially true for the representation of people and their clothing. Schematism and clarity go together in the way the weapons, uniforms, and distinguishing marks are drawn: the distinguishing marks of the Arrow Cross men and, uncommonly, also women, are always unequivocally identifiable.³⁴

By contrast, the drawings depicting scenes after liberation are strikingly different from this point of view: the portrayed women and girls are wearing emphatically fashionable clothes and have beautiful, elegant hair. The clothes and hair are shown in detail in the style of fashion magazines and drawings. It radiates from the pictures that both wearing and drawing fashionable clothes and hair are sources of a pleasure that belongs to free and optimistic times. At the same time, the depiction of the clothes this way also represented the curriculum of the high school for girls. In drawing classes, the girls also learnt material pattern design, and in needlework classes, which was also taught by Klára Kertai, the girls learnt pattern making and the basic steps of sewing and tailoring.³⁵

Marianna F., whose drawing features a beautiful light blue dress drawn with care, associated the memory of dress-up cardboard paper dolls to the carefully crafted display of women's clothes on the pictures. She remembered how much they had played paper-doll dress up, for which they designed, drew, and cut out clothes from paper.³⁶

There is only one drawing – that of Éva G., a talented artist – in which fashion rendered in detail is from the time before the liberation. Éva G. portrays female victims, who are just about to be sent on a death march from Budapest, with fashionable clothes and hair. In the drawing entitled *Night Robbery!*, the terror is emphatically gendered: young male Arrow Cross thugs terrorise young, elegantly dressed women and a little girl.

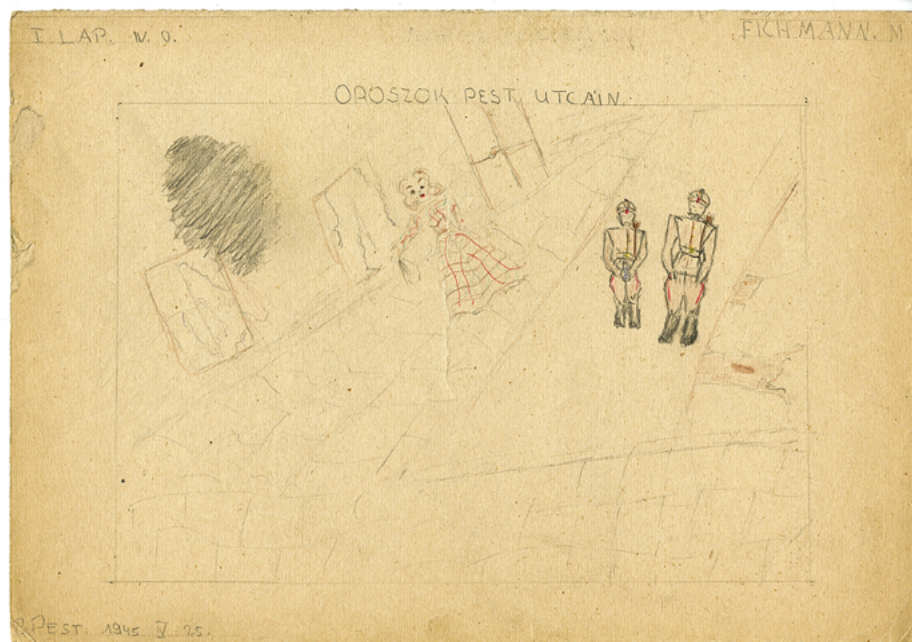
Mária F. is the only one who might have depicted violence against women occurring *after* the liberation. The fourteen-year-old girl entitled her drawing *Russians on the Streets of Pest*. The title is descriptive and seemingly objective. Strangely, it does not convey any emotion, positive or negative. This feature becomes more pronounced if we compare Mária F.'s drawing with that of Vera H. entitled *After Liberation*, in which a little girl happily gives a bouquet of flowers to a liberating Russian soldier. As opposed to the clear grateful joy of Vera H.'s drawing, Mária F.'s drawing seems to be deliberately ambiguous.

The ambiguity of the drawing is encoded into the sharp contrast between the rendering of the two Russian soldiers and the woman on the other side of the picture. As a result, the drawing becomes disturbingly unbalanced. The details concerning the soldiers are sharply depicted, involving strong colours and contours, while the woman and the street are rendered in a surreal way. The uniforms of the two Soviet soldiers are drawn with distinct lines and they are rich in detail, from the red star on their caps down to the red side stripes of the pants tucked into their boots. Both of the soldiers have their guns on their shoulders. However, the street, the broken windows, the winter light, and the female figure with her legs spread are drawn from a strange perspective, as pale, somehow floating, and less contoured.

34 Pető emphasizes the importance of the Arrow Cross armband as a tool of identification and also as a symbol of power in connection to the protocols of the People's Courts. Pető, *Láthatatlan elkövetők*, 63–65.

35 See the minutes of the meetings [*Értekezleti Jegyzőkönyvek*] of the High School for Girls of the Neolog Jewish Community of Pest from the school years of 1944/45, 1945/46, and 1946/47, in the archives of Scheiber Sándor High School and Elementary School.

36 Mariann F., oral communication, August 2020.



Mária F, *Russians on the Streets of Pest*. Klára Kertai's Collection, Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

The drawing's ambiguity seems to convey the shocking double role that the Red Army soldiers played in the lives of Jewish women. They were liberators, they saved the life of each and every Jew in Budapest, but they also raped and even killed many women, including Jews. Moreover, this drawing seems to thematise the very undepictability of a scene featuring liberators as perpetrators. Therefore, the drawing can be understood in two ways. It is either the depiction of a happy scene in which a woman greets the liberators by waving her handkerchief, or it is a picture showing a raped woman who still clutches the handkerchief which she had used to show her gratitude to the liberators. Klára Kertai herself sees only the first possibility and lists the drawing among the happy pictures.³⁷

Recent literature dealing with the history of sexual violence in Hungary during and after the Second World War makes it clear that, due to the mass nature of the phenomenon, the topic was present in contemporary communication. The social importance and clear recognition of the magnitude of the phenomenon is demonstrated by the fact that the ban on abortion was suspended in Budapest (on 14 February 1945) and also in other cities of the country.³⁸ This wide awareness, however, did not mean that this experience could have been discussed openly either in the family or at school. Mária F's drawing, though, seems to convey an additional taboo concerning this subject in a Jewish environment.

37 Klára Kertai, "Levél egy volt tanítványomhoz", *Új Élet*, 1 January 1982, 4.

38 Andrea Pető, *Elmondani az elmondhatatlant. A nemi erőszak Magyarországon a II. világháború alatt* [To Speak the Unspeakable: Rape and Sexual Abuse in Hungary During World War II.] (Budapest, Jaffa Kiadó, 2018), 106.

Unequivocally Ending the Past

In order to be able to start a new life, survivors needed to close the past completely and with assurances that it could not re-emerge. The majority of the drawings featuring the post-liberation era contain one of the following three possibilities to end the past in a way that would make the future viable. One such possibility was the fundamental restoration of justice through the punishment of the perpetrators, while the other two possibilities were ideological in their nature: Zionism and Communism.³⁹

Punishing the guilty was an important part of post-liberation reality. The first official executions of war criminals following a People's Court verdict, was carried out on Oktogon Square in Pest on 4 February 1945. Staff sergeant Péter Rotyis and platoon leader Sándor Szívós, who had been responsible for the murder of 124 members of the 401st Special Penal Labour Squadron were executed. The war criminals hanging high from the lampposts (both in reality and in photographs) were part of a new life.

Then five-year-old Ferenc Kőszeg recalled this event later as follows:

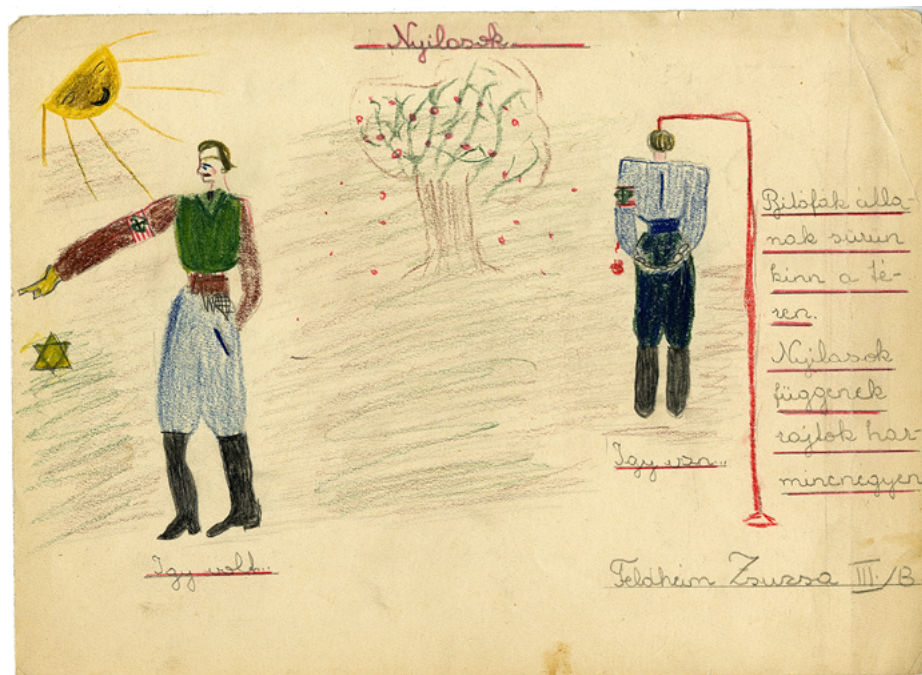
One sunny morning, my mother and I set out from Margit Schlachta's convent, where we lived together with many other hiding Jews during the weeks of the siege. On Stefánia Avenue (or Thököly Avenue) a group passed us: four or six Russian soldiers with fixed bayonets surrounding two prisoners. Although I was not yet six years old, the sight of the soldiers with bayonets was so unusual that the image remained vividly in my mind. A few hours later, we were making our way back to the convent through the Oktogon. A large crowd gathered in the square, [and] two people were hanging very high on two lampposts. They were certainly those who had been guarded by the Russian soldiers. Later, I saw the images of the execution again in István Kossa's book, entitled *A Dunától a Donig*.⁴⁰

Two drawings report the hanging of war criminals. Both images emphasise that the tables had been turned and now the former merciless murderers are the ones who are completely vulnerable, receiving the ultimate punishment. Even though the situation is reversed, which introduces some kind of a balance into the drawings, the fact that the murderers were guilty and their victims were innocent keeps the pictures ultimately unbalanced.

Zsuzsa F. from class III. B. drew her picture according to the assigned task. The past is on one side of the drawing: an Arrow Cross thug shoots a Jew. The murdered Jew is represented symbolically by the yellow star. This way, of course, the victim is not (only) a specific individual, but the representative of all the Jews as well. It also allows the creator to take some distance from the traumatic subject matter of the

³⁹ These ideological alternatives are quite well researched as far as adults are concerned. See, for example, Viktor Karády, *Túlélők és Újrakezdek. Fejezetek a magyar zsidóság szociológiájából 1945 után* [Survivors and Those Who Start Again. Chapters of the Sociology of Jews in Hungary After 1945] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002), and András Kovács, "Jews and Jewishness in Post-war Hungary", *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* no. 1 (April 2010). <https://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/jews-and-jewishness-in-post-war-hungary/>.

⁴⁰ Ferenc Kőszeg, *Múltunk vége* [The End of Our Past] (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2011), 178. Hungarian original: "egy napsütéses délelőtt elindultunk valahová anyámmal Schlachta Margit zárdájából, ahol sok más bujkáló zsidóval együtt az ostrom heteiben laktunk. A Stefánia úton (vagy a Thököly úton) egy csoport haladt el mellettünk: négy vagy hat orosz katona feltűzött szuronnal, közöttük két fogoly. Bár még nem voltam hatéves, a szuronyos katonák látványa annyira szokatlan volt, hogy a kép élesen megmaradt bennem. Néhány órával később az Oktogonon át igyekeztünk vissza a zárdába. A téren nagy tömeg verődött össze, két lámpaoszlopon, igen magasan két ember lógott, minden bizonnyal azok, akiket az orosz katonák kísértek. Később a kivégzés képeit Kossa István *A Dunától a Donig* című könyvében láttam újból".



Zsuzsa F, Arrow Cross Men. *That is how it was ... – That is how it is ...* Klára Kertai's Collection, Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

drawing. Moreover, this way the drawing could focus on the Arrow Cross thug. The present is characterised by the hanging Arrow Cross man, advertising the crucial notion that all the murderers would be punished. This message is emphasised by a short mocking poem, written next to the hanging perpetrator: “Gallows are standing densely outside in the square. / Thirty-four Arrow-Cross men are hanging on them” [Bitófák állanak sűrűn kinn a téren. / Nyilasok függenek rajtuk harmincnégyen]. The writings on the two halves of the drawing, “That is how it was ...” and “That is how it is ...”, aim to show a now established balance, emphasising punishment and a complete reversal of the situation. However, the three dots indicate incompleteness: the silence of the picture, viz. the silence of the trauma, witnessing, and survival, belongs to both of the eras, that of the persecution and of its aftermath. This unbalanced balance between past and present is also encoded into the fact that, on the side representing the past, everything weighs down, including the position of “That is how it was ...”. By contrast, the writing “That is how it is ...” is at a more elevated place on the page, and on the side representing the present, everything is directed upwards. At the same time, the Arrow Cross man is larger on the side of the past, dominating it, while on the other side the hanging figure is significantly smaller. These symbolic details of the drawing, however, are balanced by the realistic rendering, down to the fact that the base of the gallows is on the level of the shoes of the Arrow Cross thug shooting the symbolised Jew/Jews.

By contrast, Vera H.'s drawing entitled *After Liberation* does not depict the past. The upper half of the picture is filled with images of the liberation of the large ghetto of Pest. Even the board fence of the ghetto is visible. The liberated Jews emerge from the crowded air raid shelters, and a girl in the middle of the picture greets the liberators with joy. A dead Arrow Cross man lies in the left part of the lower half of the picture, while in the right part three Arrow Cross thugs are hanging on gallows just as the fourth is being taken to be hanged. The joy of liberation, together with the palpable need for the punishment of the guilty, radiate from the drawing.



Vera H, *After Liberation*. Klára Kertai's Collection,
Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

The drawing youngsters trusted the two uncompromising ideologies, either Zionism or Communism, to make the past impossible to repeat. Zionism is the main future-oriented ideological message in the following drawings: *A Chaluca Who is Guarding a Sleeping Colony [of Chalucim]* and *Girls Dancing the Hóra*. The Communist ideology rendering the promise of no return, viz. the promise of a new beginning, informs many drawings. Vera R.'s drawing features the red star replacing the finch-yellow star.⁴¹ Erika T.'s drawing also emphasises the irreversible change of ideology: she depicted twice the same building sporting a different flag. Like many of the other youngsters, she did not trust the visual cues alone and therefore wrote above the two buildings: "In 1944, it [a building] is the Headquarters of the Arrow Cross [Party]" and "In 1945, Hungarian Communist Party". The numerous drawings depicting the first free May Day parade, or Vera R.'s *Girls in front of the Wall Newsletter*, also place their trust in Communist ideology. Marianna F.'s drawing, in which a girl who is standing in front of a blackboard writes on it a crucial Communist catchphrase: "Death to the Reaction!", can also be counted among the drawings radiating trust in that ideology. However, she cannot do it properly, because the girl in the picture only manages to write "Death to the Reac". Not only is the writing unfinished and the message is incomplete, but the proportions of the writing are wrong: there is not enough space to write the entire phrase. This could be a sign of a threatening imbalance that is still creeping upon the present of the survivors.⁴²

41 This highly abstract drawing seems to be a joyous answer to the well-known Arrow Cross placard on which the hammer and sickle is drawn as equalling the yellow star.

42 There are first-hand accounts of how the initial hopefulness turned into disappointment, and by children of the same age as the ones who created the above analysed drawings. Andrew Handler and Susan Meschel, *Red Star, Blue Star: The Lives and Times of Jewish Students in Communist Hungary, 1948–1956* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

Exact Details and Symbol Creation as Part of the Processes of Remembering, Interpreting, as Well as Meaning Making

Even though the primary pedagogical aim of asking the students to create these drawings was not to document the Holocaust, but to help the youngsters to deal with traumatic losses, we can observe that the depicted facts and details, whenever we can check them, are surprisingly accurate and informative. Éva G. depicted the Tattersall, one of the central places of the history of the Holocaust in Budapest, Erzsébet A. found it important to record the exact place and title of the first theatre production in Budapest after the liberation, and Zsuzsanna S. drew exactly not only the Arrow Cross armband but also that of the Skull Legion. From the inclusion of numerous exact details in the drawings, we can infer that the children took testifying very seriously. Therefore, the children themselves turned their works into reliable sources for historical research.

The drawings not only record exact details: they also incorporate layers of interpretation, mainly through the inclusion and creation of symbols. Understanding at some levels the facts that one wants to report is necessary in order to be able to report them but, at the same time, recounting the facts is a prerequisite for understanding them. Therefore, as a consequence of this paradox, a multi-layered complex process takes place that includes the recording of both remembered facts and processes of assigning meaning to them. The complex dynamics between the exact details and the interpretations featured in the pictures materialise in the use and/or creation of symbols.

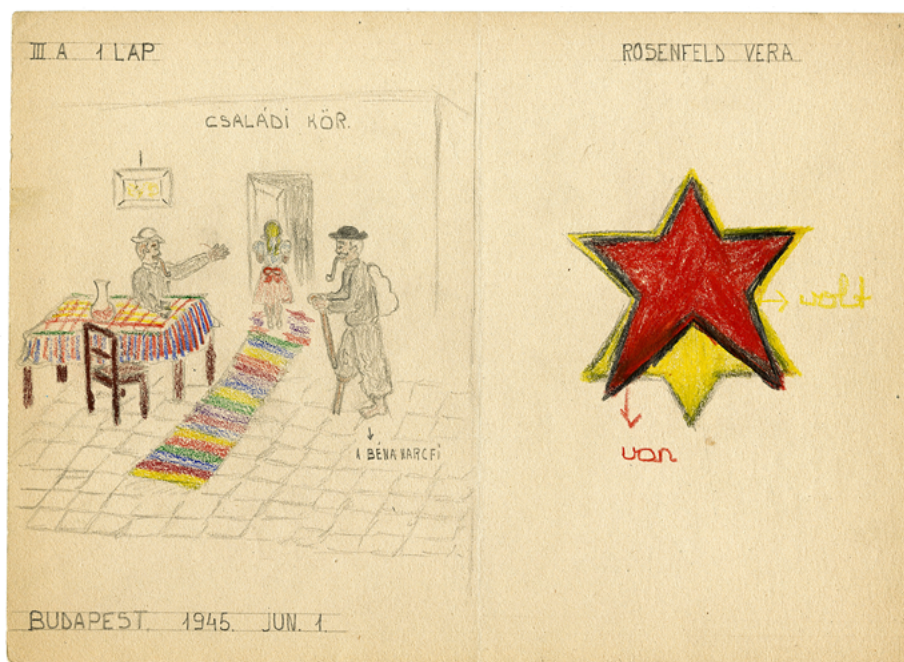
The girls used colouring to achieve a double aim: sometimes colour added real details, such as the green shirts of the Arrow Cross thugs and the colours of the armbands, or they used colours to lead towards some kind of interpretation, such as the strong yellows contrasting the at once bright and dull whiteness of the snow in Ágnes B.'s drawing. In Vera R.'s conceptual drawing, the strong colours of the yellow star of David and the red star of Communism are not only realistic, but also emphasise the abstract nature of the drawing. In this context, it is important to note that there are four black and white drawings. Two of them, *Air Raid!* and *The Tram is Running!*, are black and white, as the pictures demonstrate the girls' affinity for technical drawing. The artistic qualities of *Night Robbery!* explain its black-and-white technique. By contrast, the black-and-white *Bombing* is the simpler version of the colourful *The Siege of Budapest*.

Both drawings on the two halves of Vera R.'s work are highly abstract and symbolic. The one on the left-hand side depicts an emblematic poem of Hungarian literature. Vera R. drew the scene from János Arany's "Családi kör" [Family Circle], in which the head of the family talks with the "lame war veteran".⁴³ In this case, the drawing child is being both receptive and creative. At the same time, she analyses/interprets a work of art and creates a new one, a process during which she interprets her own environment and tries to interpret and visualise her own trauma within the framework of analysing a pre-existing work of art.

Zoltán Rákosi, a literature teacher who taught at the school of the Pax Children's Home led by Gábor Sztéhlo,⁴⁴ called attention to the special meaning of this very

⁴³ The original context of János Arany's poem is the aftermath of the defeat of the 1848/49 war of independence in Hungary.

⁴⁴ On Gábor Sztéhlo (1909–1974) and his children's home, see Charles Fenyvesi, *When Angels Fooled the World: Rescuers of Jews in Wartime Hungary* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), chapter 5.



Vera R, *Family Circle*. Klára Kertai's Collection, Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

poem for survivor children.⁴⁵ In 1947, in the journal *Válasz*, Rákosi wrote in a diary-like manner about his attempts to help fifth-grader survivors to process their losses through (rhythm) exercises, poem writing exercises, and analyses of literary works. Rákosi wrote about the “Family Circle”:

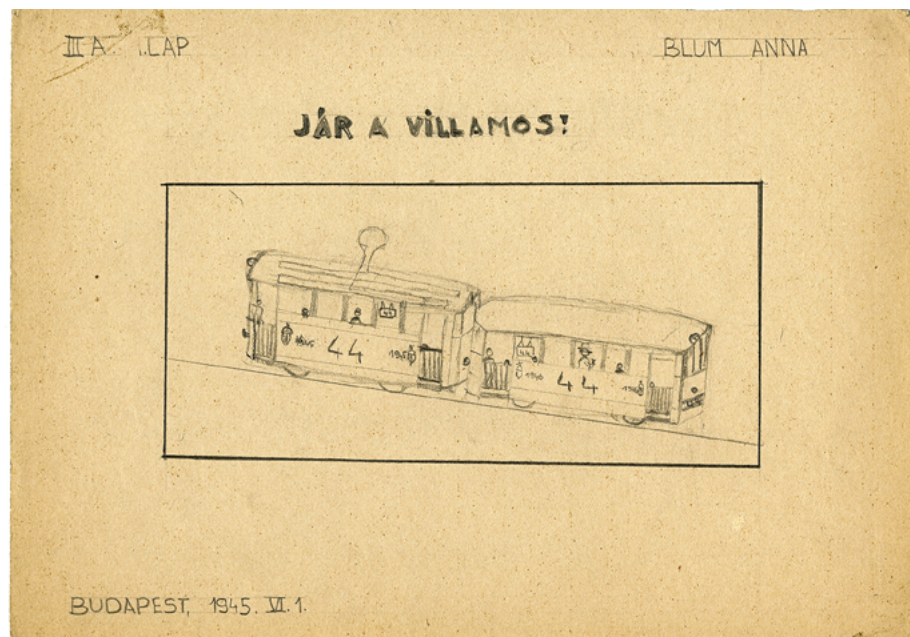
As the local conditions are (the overwhelming majority of the students are orphans and half-orphans), in addition to the usual analysis, they were concerned with the following problems in connection to the poem: Can someone who has no parents have a home? What is home? Can a poor child, who is abandoned without help, still become someone, like the boy would from “Family Circle”?; How can reading expand the boundaries of our lives?⁴⁶

One of the main figures in Vera R.’s drawing is the almost grown-up girl, who has a crucial role in the poem as well. The rest of the extended family from the poem is not in the picture, painfully emphasising that only a few members of the family can be present. The mother and the younger children, who are important in the poem, are painfully missing. There is no circle, only a triangle: father – girl – wanderer. Since the drawing focusses on the role of the girl, the survivor guest appears mainly as someone who might be able to bring news about the still missing family members. In the summer of 1945, many families did not know anything about relatives who had been deported or sent to labour service or forced labour.

Ágnes B.’s *The Tram Is Running!* demonstrates clearly one of the central features of testimonial works, that is, symbol creation. The drawing is an exact rendering of

45 On Rákosi, see Gergely Kunt, *The Children’s Republic of Gaudiopolis: The History and Memory of a Budapest Children’s Home for Holocaust and War Orphans* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2022), 110–111.

46 Zoltán Rákosi, “Gyermekköltészet vagy a „közönség” útja a művészethez” [Children’s Poetry or the Audience’s Road to Art], *Válasz* 7, no. 2 (1947): 419. Hungarian original: “A helyi adottságoknak megfelelően (a tanulók java része árva, félárva), a sablonos feldolgozáson kívül ilyen problémák foglalkoztatták őket a verssel összefüggésben: lehet-e otthona annak, akinek nincsenek szülei? mi az otthon? lehet-e segítség nélkül elhagyott szegény gyerekből is valaki, mint a «Családi kör» olvasó fiújából; hogyan lehet olvasással életünk határait kitágítani?”



Anna B, *The Tram Is Running!* Klára Kertai's Collection,
Holocaust Memorial Centre, Budapest.

the number 44 tram, exuding the precision of an engineer. We know that the girl who created the drawing grew up to be an engineer and, at the time of the drawing's creation, she lived near Thököly Avenue, where the number 44 tram ran.⁴⁷ Therefore, the number of the tram is a fact. However, Ágnes B. renders it not merely as a fact, but also as a symbol of the traumas experienced in 1944. We know that she employed the number as a symbol, because she wrote the numbers 1945 and 1946 on the side of the cars in a way that surrounds the central number of 44. The number of the tram is not written on the side of the cars and, even though four-digit numbers are written there as the number of the cars, it is highly unlikely that the numbers of 1945 and 1946 are accurate in this case. These numbers are there to show that the author of the drawing is acutely aware of the fact, and makes the audience aware of it, that the number 44 is simultaneously an accurate fact and a symbol. The fictional numbers of 1945 and 1946 are there to interpret the number 44, to provide a historical context for it.

The traumatised vision of the creator of the drawing is encoded in the central position of the number 44. In post-war Hungarian culture, the yellow tramcars were widely seen as prominent symbols of the revival of the capital of Hungary. Anna B. not only draws upon this widely known symbol but also asserts that revival is problematic: the traumas of the year 1944 are and remain central, and revival is problematic and has its limits.

The creator of this testimonial drawing therefore recorded facts and also interpreted them by viewing some of them as symbols. Moreover, she managed to record the additional process central to the vision of traumatised people: viz. the nightmarish process during which a piece of reality turns in a moment into a meaningful/threatening symbol, a sign of a hideous danger for a psyche that experienced massive long-term social historical traumatising. Trauma manifests itself regularly by the

⁴⁷ Anna B. (1932–1998) became a chemical engineer and worked as a hydrologist. Their family house at 1 Gizella Avenue was built by her father. Thököly Avenue was the most convenient route to go to school.

sudden experiencing of the fact of one's surrounding having a special meaning, of being a symbol, and transporting the traumatised consciousness back into the time of the trauma.

Conclusion

One of the most important characteristics of this special source group is that the twenty-six testimonial drawings were created as compulsory school exercises. It follows from this circumstance that youngsters who otherwise would not have testified about the Holocaust, or not at that time, or not through the required medium, did testify in the immediate aftermath of the liberation. The visual nature of the testimonies is responsible for the conveyance of numerous unexpected and exact pieces of information.

The drawings are crucial sources not only about the Holocaust but also its immediate aftermath. The two time horizons interact in the drawings in a complex manner, sometimes taking symbolic, and oftentimes exact, renderings of minute details. In addition to that, the drawings also recorded fundamental psychological as well as hermeneutic processes that had been necessary for rendering witness accounts concerning such traumatic historical events.

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