

***Memories in Stone: The Politics of Holocaust Remembrance in
Hungary, 1945-1989***

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to reevaluate Holocaust remembrance in Hungary spanning from the immediate postwar period until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Contrary to the prevailing scholarly narrative, which asserts an absence of commemoration for Jewish martyrs during this period, and attributes a taboo to discussing Jewish experiences of deportations, forced labor camps, and concentration camps, this research challenges the notion of a silenced Holocaust memory culture. It seeks to dismantle the prevailing top-down paradigm in Holocaust memorialization, which predominantly examines commemorative activities from a state-centric perspective. Instead, the dissertation endeavors to present a more comprehensive outlook that integrates grassroots participation from local Jewish communities, survivors, and regional officials. The central argument posits that the extent of Holocaust remembrance activities during the discussed period surpasses current awareness. Additionally, the study endeavors to shift the focal point from Holocaust remembrance in Budapest to other cities in Hungary, particularly those that experienced significant losses in Jewish communities due to deportations. Departing from conventional reliance on state archives, this research heavily draws on newspapers, periodicals published between 1945-1989, interviews with Jewish community leaders, and archival investigations of local Jewish communities. By doing so, it aspires to provide a more expansive array of voices and discourses on Holocaust remembrance, enriching our understanding of this complex historical phenomenon.

The findings not only contest the perceived silence surrounding Holocaust memory but also unveil a diverse landscape of memorialization activities. The research explores

various forms of memorialization, examining their evolution in terms of symbolism, artistic representation, location, and actors' involvement. This comprehensive approach sheds light on the non-homogeneous nature of remembrance culture during this period. Given the global significance of Holocaust memorialization, which has become a universal duty for all nations, this dissertation highlights its role as a poignant reminder of the gravest atrocities committed against humanity in the 20th century. The attention given to Holocaust remembrance in shaping each nation's historical narrative and World War II role, coupled with its utilization as a political tool, underscores the continued relevance of this topic in contemporary discourse. The misinterpretation of collective memory surrounding the Holocaust carries significant dangers, extending beyond historical inaccuracies to impact contemporary perspectives and societal narratives. A prevalent and misleading misconception asserts that the state, during the period between 1945-1989, did not allow the remembrance of Jewish victims and exclusively permitted the memorialization of Soviet liberators. This oversimplification not only distorts the complex historical reality but also perpetuates a narrative that diminishes the multifaceted activities and engagements related to Holocaust remembrance during this timeframe. By scrutinizing the nuances of this period, the thesis uncovers a more intricate tapestry of memorialization efforts involving various actors, including local Jewish communities, survivors, and local officials. Failing to recognize this complexity not only perpetuates a distorted historical narrative but also inhibits a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between politics, memory, and societal perspectives, ultimately hindering our ability to comprehend and learn from this pivotal period in history.

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Introduction

In 1993, the Jewish cemetery at Balassagyarmat received the distinction of being nationally recognized as a monument under the decree of the Minister of Culture, Ferenc Mádl, and the Minister of Environmental Protection, János Gyurkó, signifying its status as the first Jewish cemetery in the country to be accorded such recognition.¹ A year later in June 1994, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Holocaust a significant Holocaust Memorial Day event was orchestrated in the city with a pivotal moment of the installation of a commemorative plaque on the street-facing facade of the mortuary building at the entrance of the cemetery. The formal ceremony was attended by numerous descendants and representatives of the city, with Mayor György Németh at the forefront. Among the notable attendees were Colonel János Réti, the presidential chief aide representing President Árpád Göncz, Iván Beer, serving as the President of the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Committee, and Lajos Bakos, Vice President of the Eastern European Office of the World Jewish Congress. In his address at the plaque unveiling, Mayor György Németh extended apologies on behalf of the city's populace to the erstwhile deported Jewish martyrs of Balassagyarmat. Upon the conclusion of his address, Dr. György Németh, acting on behalf of the Balassagyarmat City Council, made a commitment to provide ongoing support for the preservation of the Balassagyarmat Jewish legacy.²

¹ Majdán, Béla. *Műemlék Zsidó Temető*. Kertész István Foundation. Balassagyarmat. 2018. p. 62.

² Majdán, Béla. "Report on the mitzvae of Balassagyarmat and the historic Jewish cemetery..." in *A balassagyarmati zsidó közösség emlékezete*. Balassagyarmat: Kertész István Alapítvány-Balassagyarmati Zsidó Hitközség. 2014. pp.88-91

The former prayer room at 24 Hunyadi Street in the center of Balassagyarmat also underwent renovation in June 2000, and from July 1, 2000, began operating under the name "Ipoly-menti Jewish Collection and Exhibition Space." This initiative further reinforced the preservation of the Jewish heritage in Balassagyarmat, with a particular emphasis on broadening the historical understanding of the Holocaust tragedy. In one of the exhibition rooms, a memorial wall featuring 1100 names was established in 2000 as an extension of the names already inscribed on the Holocaust memorial at the Jewish cemetery, which was erected in 1974 to commemorate those deported and tragically murdered during that period.³

Drawing from the intricate collaboration between state authorities, local governing bodies, and the Jewish community in the commemoration of Jewish martyrs within the region, a concerted effort was made to preserve their history and impart knowledge regarding local historical events, particularly focusing on the ramifications of antisemitism and World War II during the 1990s and 2000s. The genesis of these initiatives can be traced back to the establishment of a memorial in 1974 within the Jewish cemeteries, which served as a catalyst for subsequent endeavors.

Motivated by the strong historical interconnection between state and grassroots actors, I posited that a visit to the town archives of Balassagyarmat would yield substantial materials elucidating the involvement of various entities in memorializing Jewish Holocaust victims from Balassagyarmat and its surrounding region. My confidence in this assumption was further bolstered by the contextual understanding that the 1974 memorial

³ Majdán, Béla. "Report on the mitzvae of Balassagyarmat and the historic Jewish cemetery..." in A balassagyarmati zsidó közösség emlékezete. Balassagyarmat: Kertész István Alapítvány-Balassagyarmati Zsidó Hitközség. 2014. pp.87-91.

was erected in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of Hungary's liberation, a significant milestone often marked by elaborate commemorative events, extensive participation, and delivered speeches.⁴ Consequently, I anticipated departing from the archives with a wealth of compelling and significant materials that would contribute substantially to my research endeavor.

Upon finalizing the arrangements for my archival visit, a comprehensive collection of materials awaited my perusal. As expected, the focus of my examination was on an extensive array of documents pertaining to the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of liberation in Balassagyarmat and the meticulous organizational efforts invested in the event. To my surprise, the meticulously described activities outlined in the documents predominantly revolved around competitions, contests, exhibitions, and ceremonies, primarily spotlighting the significant sacrifices attributed to the Soviet people and the Red Army for the liberation of nations.⁵ Strikingly absent, however, were any references to Jewish victims, deportations, the Jewish community, aspirations to erect a monument, or the inclusion of the unveiling of the monument at the Jewish cemeteries in the orchestrated commemorative events.

A prior examination of contemporary newspapers had provided me with insights into the Holocaust monument constructed in the Jewish cemeteries, with references not solely confined to Jewish publications but extending to regional newspapers. This prior

⁴ Such assumption was supported by elaborate reports from 1974 on the Balassagyarmat memorial unveiling in Új Élet as well as in Nógrád Megyei Hírlap Nógrád

⁵ Archive materials from Nógrád megyei Tanácsa VB. Szervezési- és Jogi Osztálya, 1974. Nógrád megyei Tanács V. B. Művelődésügyi Osztálya: Intézkedési terv Felszabadulásunk 30. Évfordulójának megünneplésére, 1974. Nógrád megyei Tanács V. B. Művelődésügyi Osztálya: Iskolai megemlékezések a szocialista országok felszabadulásának évfordulójáról, 1974.

knowledge indicated that the unveiling of the Holocaust memorial was not an isolated event exclusively catering to the remaining members of the Jewish community.

While my archival findings proved inconclusive, a fortuitous meeting later in the day with Rabbi József Bauer, the head of the Jewish community, offered valuable insights. He graciously opened the cemetery, providing an opportunity to visit the memorial. During our interview, Rabbi Bauer illuminated the enduring Jewish history of the town, detailing notable figures such as Rabbi Deutsch and World War I heroes buried in the cemetery. Our discussion delved into the memorial itself, a topic I will elaborate on in the final chapter of the dissertation. Rabbi Bauer also guided me to the synagogue, where an exhibition and an extended memorial wall for Holocaust victims were housed.⁶ Additionally, I established contact with Béla Majdán, a local historian who further enriched my research with valuable materials.⁷

This narrative encapsulates a recurrent theme in my research experiences across various town and city archives. It underscores the realization that adopting a top-down approach is inherently impractical. Despite evidence from periodicals suggesting a vibrant remembrance culture in Hungary evolving through different political eras, a shift in perspective was necessary. To assemble the puzzle pieces, I engaged with Jewish community leaders, members, local historians, and archivists from Jewish archives to glean detailed information on specific memorials and discourses surrounding the remembrance of Jewish martyrs.

⁶ Interview with Bauer, József (Head of the Jewish Community in Balassagyarmat) by Agnes Kende October 20, 2023.

⁷ Majdán, Béla. Email message to the author, local historian, July 27.2023.

This process was not without challenges, as archival materials on monuments and memorials erected between 1945 and 1989, while available, lacked thematic contextualization. This uniqueness in the research challenges the prevailing notion that Holocaust remembrance in Hungary was negligible before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The dissertation asserts that a distorted version of Hungary's remembrance culture has been perpetuated, challenging the consensus that Jewish subjects were not discussed prominently, and memorialization predominantly focused on Soviet liberators. In contrast, grassroots activism unveils an untold story, portraying concerted efforts to commemorate Holocaust victims by diverse actors, both at the grassroots and state levels.

Main arguments of the dissertation

The principal argument posited in this thesis seeks to counter the prevalent narrative that contends that Holocaust memorialization from 1945 to regime change in 1989/1990 was virtually nonexistent. The extensive body of literature on Holocaust memory, Holocaust memorials, and Holocaust memory politics in Central and Eastern Europe from the post-Communist era to the present is vast. However, when examining Holocaust memorialization and remembrance during the postwar and Communist periods within the Eastern Bloc, the historiography on the topic becomes more limited. Nonetheless, notable publications have addressed Holocaust memorials and remembrance during the Communist period. Scholars in this field generally agree that the memory of World War II was often obscured by collective amnesia during this time, as highlighted by Tony Judt.⁸ In the works

⁸ Judt, Tony. 2005. *Postwar : A History of Europe Since 1945*. New York: Penguin Press.

of Jean-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic's "Bringing the Dark Past to Light," the emphasis is primarily on post-Communist commemoration, as they argue that during the Communist era, there was little space for public mourning and empathy for the victims of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe.⁹

Other scholars, such as Milton Sybil, and Ira Nowinski, and Tim Cole, who have examined memorials erected between 1945 and 1989 in Eastern Europe, argue that these memorials primarily reflect the ideology of the Communist regime, often neglecting the Jewish aspect and instead emphasizing the role of the Soviet liberators.¹⁰ Moreover, much of the research conducted on memorialization during the postwar and Communist periods has focused on capital cities such as Budapest, Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, and former concentration sites like Treblinka and Auschwitz.

The German art historian Jochen Spielmann examines the memorials erected for the victims of National Socialism in East Germany (DDR) from 1945 until the unification of Germany in 1990.¹¹ Although Spielmann's research does not specifically concentrate on memorials for Jewish victims and his work does not provide a thorough exploration of the memorial landscape of East Germany, certain similarities with Hungary can be inferred.

⁹ Himka, Jean-Paul, and Joanna Beata Michlic, eds (2013) *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

¹⁰ Milton, Sybil, and Ira Nowinski (1991) *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. / Tim Cole (2003) *Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory*. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95 / Harold Marcuse (2010) 'Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre' / Marek Kucia (2016) *Holocaust Memorials in Central and Eastern Europe: Communist Legacies, Transnational Influences and National Developments* / Jonathan Huener, (2003) *Auschwitz, Poland, and the politics of commemoration, 1945–1979*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

¹¹ Spielmann, Jochen (1988). „Gedenken und Denkmal.“ In: *Berlinische Galerie; Senatsverwaltung für Bau und Wohnungswesen* (Hgg.). *Gedenken und Denkmal. Entwürfe zur Erinnerung an die Deportation und Vernichtung der jüdischen Bevölkerung Berlins*. Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 7–46. And *Steine des Anstoßes. Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg in Denkmälern 1945 - 1985*. Hamburg: Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte. 1985. pp.5-1-15.

Spielmann categorizes the phases of memorialization in his book based on the political changes in East Germany and traces these shifts in memorialization processes. He observes that in the immediate years following the end of World War II, there were simple monuments in the form of obelisks or memorial plaques, along with commemorative events. However, after the establishment of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949, Soviet ideology became increasingly apparent in the monuments erected in memory of the victims of National Socialism. Spielmann notes a more conscious acknowledgment of the past beginning in the 1960s, reflecting changes in the political climate, and observes that from the 1980s, monuments began to play a larger role in terms of the spectrum of groups they were dedicated to, with an increasing emphasis on educational purposes.¹² Similar phases can also be identified in the case of Hungary. However, this thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive overview of memorials erected in the country and will focus on the roles played by both political and local actors in commemorative practices.

Additionally, an online information portal established in 2011 by the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, as part of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, aims to showcase the diversity of European memorial culture by listing memorials commemorating victims of the Second World War across Europe, including cities beyond capitals of each country.¹³ However, it has to be noted that the portal's coverage is not comprehensive, and the memorials presented on the site are predominantly from the 2000s onwards, contributing to the misconception that there was minimal memorialization in Europe prior to that period.

¹² Spielmann. p.15.

¹³ The Information Portal to European Sites of Remembrance (2011)
<https://www.memorialmuseums.org/pages/home>

Although these findings are pertinent and central to understanding Holocaust memorialization before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, my dissertation argues that they do not fully capture the entirety of Holocaust memorialization history in a single country like Hungary. While the arguments put forth by established academics hold merit, the landscape of Holocaust memory in Hungary cannot be accurately described as entirely homogeneous. I also aim to demonstrate that, despite Budapest being the capital and thus most representative of the political atmosphere during the Communist period that shaped the accepted narrative of Holocaust remembrance, there were numerous local initiatives outside of Budapest that emphasized the importance of commemorating Jewish martyrs through public commemorative events or memorials in distinct ways. These initial memorials evolved during the period between 1945 and 1989 in terms of their forms, locations, symbolic roles, and intended audiences. My research concludes that there was indeed not a period of silence during this time; rather, there were diverse voices and discussions not only about the necessity of remembrance but also about the methods of remembrance, involving not only Jewish communities but other actors as well. While it is true that the state largely avoided directly initiating state memorials for deported and murdered Jews, it would be inaccurate to suggest that existing political involvement and actors did not contribute to the complex landscape of Holocaust memorialization in Hungary, a topic that warrants further exploration from the postwar period to the change of regime.

Similar to the issue of collective amnesia, there is a conventional understanding in academic circles that designates the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union as

the epoch of a "memory boom,"¹⁴ my investigation also challenges this perception. It is acknowledged that, typically, in a more democratic and liberal environment, coupled with the emergence of diverse actors (civic, state, national, international, supranational) in the memory domain, a renewed or intensified wave of Holocaust memorialization is anticipated. The expectation stems from the belief that countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, strive to reconcile with their past to meet the criteria for European Union accession, thereby collectively acknowledging the darkest chapter of the 20th century.

It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of Hungarian scholars to the historiography of Holocaust memorialization, particularly their nuanced analyses of early postwar martyr memorials in Hungary and the symbolism they embody. Kata Bohus, for example, has provided critical insights into martyr commemorations, emphasizing the pivotal role of Yizkor books as portable monuments that encapsulate collective memory, serving as enduring sites of mourning and reflection.¹⁵

¹⁴ Scholars have been deliberating on the idea of a memory boom and an associated memory "industry" since the early 1990s (Jay Winter, Wulf Kansteiner, Kerwin Lee Klein, Jeffrey K. Olick, Omer Bartov). An evident impetus for extensive contemplation on memory arises from the phenomenon of public commemoration, as elucidated by Jay Winter in his essay, "The Generation of Memory." The construction of memorials in prominent urban locations, exemplified by the Holocaust memorial adjacent to Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, has garnered heightened attention and publicity, contributing to a surge in remembrance practices. The dissolution of the Soviet Union further played a pivotal role, allowing Eastern European nations the autonomy to shape their memorialized past, unencumbered by dominant political narratives and silenced voices, thereby contributing significantly to the broader memory boom across Europe. Moreover, Eastern European countries embarked on erecting additional monuments related to Holocaust memory, motivated in part by their aspirations to join the European Union. Membership prerequisites necessitated nations to confront their historical past, a process referred to as "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*" in German. According to Jay Winter, the recognition of trauma, particularly in the form of PTSD-related traumas, gained acceptance in psychiatric discourse from the 1980s, influencing the trajectory of the memory boom. Finally, the cultural phenomenon of the memory boom became intricately linked to the proliferation of museums, television programs, movies, and monuments, particularly from the 1990s onward.

¹⁵ Bohus, Kata. Mártírünnepek a háború után. Published on Szombat.org. 2022.09.16.

Similarly, Kinga Frojimovics, Viktória Bányai, and Szonja Komoróczy have examined the linguistic and symbolic challenges inherent in early postwar Holocaust memorials. Their work delves into the contested use of terms such as "martyrs" and the difficulty of addressing both victims and perpetrators in commemorative narratives.¹⁶ Moreover, they highlight the Jewish community's use of biblical motifs, such as the destruction of the Jewish Temple, to create a powerful link between contemporary suffering and historical memory, thereby enriching the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of these memorials.

Regina Fritz explores the evolving dynamics of Holocaust remembrance, focusing on its marginalization and tabooization during the establishment of Hungary's communist regime. She also examines the increased attention the topic garnered in the final decade of the Kádár era, reflecting a shift in both public and academic engagement with this history.¹⁷ Andrea Pető further broadens the discourse by introducing a gendered perspective to memory studies, illustrating how the politics of Holocaust remembrance intersect with broader societal and cultural transformations.¹⁸ Collectively, these scholars have laid a foundation for understanding how Holocaust remembrance in Hungary was shaped by local, national, and transnational influences. By exploring its local, national, and transnational dimensions, they illuminate the complexities of memorialization practices and the enduring debates over how the Holocaust is remembered and commemorated.

¹⁶ Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel. A vészidőszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949.

¹⁷ Fritz, Regina. (2012). *Nach Krieg und Judenmord. Ungarns Geschichtspolitik seit 1944*. Wallstein, 2012.

¹⁸ Altinay, A., & Pető, A. (Eds.). *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories: Feminist Conversations on War, Genocide and Political Violence* (1st ed.). Routledge. 2016.

Building upon the work of the scholars mentioned above as well as a meticulous examination of sources and commemorative evidence from Hungary's postwar period, this study reveals a nuanced and heterogeneous process of memorialization, contrary to the presumed homogeneity. Aleida Assmann's delineation of the top-down political memory approach: *"The top-down political memory is investigated by political scientists who discuss the role of memory on the level of ideology formation and construction of collective identities that are geared toward political action"*, which emphasizes the role of memory in ideology formation and the construction of collective identities geared toward political action, highlights a distinct perspective.¹⁹ Yet, a comprehensive understanding of the memory landscape, particularly in the context of Holocaust memory, requires a balanced consideration of both top-down and bottom-up approaches to political and social memory. The integration of these approaches is essential for a nuanced analysis that goes beyond political memory alone and encompasses the social dynamics involved in shaping Holocaust memory culture.

Drawing on the "from below" approach, the research conducted by scholar Irina Rebrova in her work *"Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus"* proved to be invaluable.²⁰ Her extensive examination of grassroots initiatives aimed at commemorating Holocaust victims in a specific region of Russia provided reassurance that not only regional contexts, but also bottom-up perspectives could offer a nuanced understanding of Holocaust memory. This is particularly significant given that during the period under scrutiny, official Holocaust remembrance was either

¹⁹ Assmann, Aleida. "Transformations between History and Memory." *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 49–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972052>. p.9.

²⁰ Rebrova, Irina. *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020.

nonexistent or severely marginalized in both cases. Rebrova's work, which broadens the scope beyond memorializing Jewish victims in monuments to encompass personal narratives, school textbooks, and museum exhibitions, serves as a source of inspiration for my future research endeavors.

In pursuit of my research, which seeks to integrate both top-down and bottom-up approaches, it becomes evident that initiatives to grapple with the past and commemorate Holocaust victims were initiated at the local, micro level, reflecting a community's, town's, or village's commitment to confronting its historical legacy. By expanding the examination to a regional level within Hungary, the thesis illustrates that an exclusive reliance on institutionalized top-down memory would not have portrayed the nuanced memory culture revealed through a more grassroots-oriented approach. Moreover, despite the predominant focus on Budapest and the prevailing narrative of the top-down approach to Holocaust commemoration, this thesis elucidates that, in many instances, these endeavors unfolded independently of the capital. It underscores the profound sense of local responsibility within communities to pay homage to those who could never return.

Examining the trajectory of memorialization, one observes a transition from simple plaques to more elaborate sculptures, marking not only an evolution in form but also revealing the dynamics involved in securing funds for the erection of these commemorations. The transformation extends beyond physical representations to encompass alterations in commemorative speeches, the nuanced language employed in addressing victims and perpetrators, and the diverse participants present during unveiling ceremonies from politicians to the representatives of different churches. It becomes

pertinent to investigate local reactions to the commemoration of Jewish victims, discerning whether there are instances of opposition or disagreement within the community.

This investigation holds significance for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the reception and interpretation of commemorative efforts at the local level. It serves as a lens through which insights into the dynamics of collective memory, along with potential challenges or conflicts within the community's perspectives on the commemoration of Jewish victims, can be garnered. Furthermore, it illuminates a distinct portrayal of Hungary's memory landscape, revealing numerous instances of commemoration and diverse discourses on the role of such commemorations. Nonetheless, these findings contribute to the nuanced and contested nature of the politicized Holocaust memory in present-day Hungary.

Contrary to another prevalent misconception that early memorials solely presented victims in a collective light, such as martyrs, and that the practice of individually naming of the victims emerged much later, my research challenges this notion.²¹ Delving into the early years of memorialization, my findings illuminate a substantial effort in local research aimed at collecting names and pertinent information concerning those whom they wished to commemorate, challenging the assumption that such detailed recognition emerged predominantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.²² This underscores a proactive engagement in memorial practices, debunking the notion of a delayed trend in

²¹ Scholars such as Holocaust historian James E. Young have discussed how early memorials tended to emphasize collective suffering rather than individual narratives. Young, in his work "The Texture of Memory," explores how certain memorials, especially those erected shortly after the Holocaust, adopted a symbolic and collective approach to convey the magnitude of the tragedy.

²² Braham, Randolph L., and András Kovács, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*. NED-New edition, 1. Central European University Press, 2016. p.215.

acknowledging individual victims and revealing a longstanding commitment to preserving the memory of those affected by the Holocaust.

The Significance of Remembering

The act of remembering has been an integral part of human existence since ancient times, manifesting in diverse forms across various cultural developments. However, the methods of preserving these memories have undergone diverse transformations, ranging from basic directional markers, like columns, to more intricate depictions, such as naturalistic or abstract sculptures. Remembering is of profound significance as it anchors societies in their history, serving as a compass for the present and a guide for the future. The act of remembrance is not merely a nostalgic reflection on the past; rather, it is an essential aspect of human identity and collective consciousness. Remembering enables individuals and communities to honor the sacrifices, achievements, and lessons of those who came before, fostering a deep connection to one's cultural heritage and roots.²³

²³ Assmann, Aleida. "Transformations between History and Memory." *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008): 49–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972052>. p.62.

Researching remembrance is critical for several reasons. Firstly, it allows scholars to delve into the intricacies of historical events, uncovering nuanced perspectives, and revealing untold stories. This depth of understanding contributes to a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of the past, dispelling misconceptions and promoting historical accuracy. Secondly, research on remembrance sheds light on the impact of collective memory on societies. Exploring how different communities remember and commemorate pivotal moments provides insights into cultural values, identity formation, and the ways in which historical narratives shape present attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, researching remembrance has practical implications for conflict resolution and reconciliation. Understanding how societies remember and memorialize traumatic events can inform efforts to heal historical wounds and bridge divides.²⁴ By examining the mechanisms through which collective memory is constructed, researchers can contribute to the development of strategies that promote understanding, tolerance, and peace-building.

Moreover, the academic exploration of remembrance contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage. Through the documentation of rituals, traditions, and commemorative practices, researchers play a crucial role in safeguarding intangible aspects of a community's identity²⁵. This preservation ensures that future generations have access to the rich tapestry of their cultural history. In essence, researching remembrance goes beyond the

²⁴ Sierp, Aline. Memory Studies – Development, Debates and Directions. In M. Berek, K. Chmelar, O. Dimbath, H. Haag, M. Heinlein, N. Leonhard, V. Rauer, & G. Sebald (Eds.), *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung* Springer. 2021. pp.6-7.

²⁵ Hanebrink, Paul. The Memory of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary. in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, edited by Himka. John-Paul and Michlic. Joanna Beata. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. p.20.

academic realm; it is a pursuit with far-reaching implications for societal cohesion, historical accuracy, and the promotion of understanding among diverse communities. As we navigate the complexities of the present and chart the course for the future, a deep and well-informed understanding of remembrance is indispensable.

Remembrance functions as a crucial link between individual and collective memory, influencing the perception, interpretation, and transmission of historical narratives.²⁶ The argument posited here emphasizes the fundamental importance of custodianship and expression of this collective memory. This conceptual framework asserts that individual recollection is inherently situated within the contextual boundaries of a collective entity, whether it be a familial unit or an institutional group such as a school or workplace. The question then arises as to who holds authority over this collective memory, determining the shaping of community identity and the narration of historical events.²⁷ This is where the concept of political memory becomes pertinent, aligning with Jelena Subotic's explanation that political memory is the guiding force for community orientation and the creation of state identity.²⁸

²⁶ Lebow, Richard Ned, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*. Duke University Press, 2006. P.9.

²⁷ Olick, Jeffrey K., and Joyce Robbins. "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/223476>. pp. 133.

²⁸ Subotic, Jelena. "*Political memory, ontological security, and Holocaust remembrance in post-communist Europe, European Security*" in *Ontological Insecurity in the European Union*. Edited by Edited by Catarina Kinnvall, Ian Manners, Jennifer Mitzen. New York: Routledge. 2020. Pp. 95-96.

Role of Jewish Remembrance in Holocaust Narratives

Jewish history of remembrance includes a period of captivity in Egypt, characterized by a pervasive focus on earthly endeavors as preparations for the afterlife, with societal structures prominently facilitating the veneration of the deceased. Although, the Jewish faith categorically renounced all forms of idolatry and overt expressions of the cult of the dead, it is essential to acknowledge that within the Jewish religious framework, reverence for departed relatives and the preservation of their memory found a significant and meaningful place.²⁹

One of the earliest instances of such commemorative practices is exemplified by the memorial monument, known as a "maceva," which Jacob erected for Rachel along the Beit Lechem Road. According to tradition, this legendary tombstone marks the location where, in a state of bondage, the descendants of this matriarch were led. Over the course of countless millennia, it has endured as a revered pilgrimage destination within Judaism. The original maceva site saw the establishment of a mausoleum during the medieval era, and this enduring vaulted memorial structure remains extant today. Comparable mausoleums from antiquity, such as the Zachariah and the often-designated Absalom tombs located in the eastern vicinity of Jerusalem's Kidron Valley, demonstrate an amalgamation of Egyptian and Greek architectural elements, intricately interwoven with Eastern motifs.³⁰ Over the course of millennia, the history of the Jewish people finds reflection in the architectural characteristics and customary inscriptions of their tombstones.

²⁹ Meyer, Michael A. "Two Persistent Tensions within Wissenschaft Des Judentums." *Modern Judaism* 24, no. 2 (2004): 105–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396522>. pp.109-110.

³⁰ Deutsch, Gábor. "Azok a kövek..." in *Új Élet*. 1996. Október 15. p.3.

Throughout the annals of history, Jewish communities frequently fell victim to exploitation, with their synagogues demolished, and their existence occasionally relegated to oblivion. Instances of burial grounds being subjected to desecration were not infrequent, with tombstones sometimes repurposed by perpetrators, even in the construction of their own residential edifices. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even domiciles are not eternal, and on certain occasions, when they were disassembled, remnants of Jewish historical heritage were brought to light. Originally, these took the form of subterranean burial sites or catacombs; however, commencing from the heart of the Middle Ages, interments transpired above ground.³¹

Distinctive stylistic influences, representative of different epochs, have profoundly influenced the characteristics of tombstones, which, by and large, maintained an austere demeanor to mitigate the risk of attracting unwarranted scrutiny from an antagonistic external milieu. The commemorative significance attributed to Jewish tombstones has seldom borne such poignant relevance as it does in the present era, postdating the cataclysmic event known as the "great catastrophe."³² This pertinence is underscored by the historical backdrop wherein the Jewish people, over the span of millennia, confronted recurrent persecutions. Paradoxically, it is only in recent times, within the compressed framework of a few years, that they endured the grievous loss of over one-third of their population.

Within the human psyche resides an intrinsic yearning to establish memorials in homage to those who willingly sacrificed their lives, those whose corporeal remnants,

³¹ Jacobs, Joachim. *The Heritage of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe*. London: Frances Lincoln. 2008. pp.14-15.

³² Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel. *A vészidő zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949*. pp.2.

according to a mournful paradigm, merged with the cosmos through the somber conduits of crematoria chimneys. The intrinsic nature of human mortality impels the quest for a medium through which communion with our departed loved ones can be sought, and it tends to gravitate toward a locus where their memory can be invoked.³³ It is within these spaces that grieving relatives may tender their devotion and find relief. In ordinary circumstances, this connection materializes at the gravesite of the deceased. However, the conundrum surfaces when confronted with the myriad hundreds of thousands of Jewish martyrs who, uprooted from their native soil, were thrust into the vortex of a merciless deportation during the Holocaust, ultimately devoid of resting places.

The terminology applied to Holocaust monuments in Hungary from 1945 to 1989 is complex and somewhat imprecise. In Hungary, the term “Holocaust” did not become widely used during this period; instead, the phrase “*vészorszak*” (literally, “time of peril” or “tragic years”) was employed to refer to the era of Jewish persecution and tragedy. In Western contexts, the term “Holocaust” gained prominence only in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly after the airing of the 1978 American television miniseries *Holocaust*.³⁴ Despite this, when translating or discussing Hungarian memorials dedicated to Jewish victims from this era in English, “Holocaust memorial” remains the most accessible term, as “*vészorszak*” lacks a widely recognized English equivalent. Another term often used to describe these monuments from this period is “martyr memorials”.

³³ Young, James. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1993. p.3.

³⁴ Perchoc, Philippe and Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass. *The European Union and Holocaust*. European Parliamentary Research Service. January. 2018. p.4.

In Jewish tradition, martyrdom is defined as the conscious choice to face death rather than violate certain commandments. During the persecutions, choosing death over renouncing Jewish identity was thus regarded as an act of martyrdom. Early memorials often inscribed the Hungarian term "martyr" alongside the Hebrew words "kedoshim" or "kiddush ha-Shem" (sanctification of God's name), and contemporary newspapers also described these commemorations and memorial dedications as "martyr monuments."³⁵

The focus on martyrdom in these memorials stems not only from religious interpretation but also reflects a broader shift in commemorative culture following World War II. Traditional heroic monuments were no longer seen as suitable symbols for honoring those who suffered as victims of the Holocaust. Thus, postwar remembrance increasingly adopted a framework of sacrifice, recasting memorials in a narrative that emphasized the dignity and suffering of the victims over heroism.³⁶

For the remnant Hungarian Jewish community, the aftermath of liberation precipitated an immediate and instinctual resolve: the erection of memorials in commemoration of their fallen martyrs. This resolve catalyzed a plethora of architectural designs and contemplative undertakings. Since the culmination of World War II, it has given rise to an array of memorial designs and the painstaking compilation of memorial albums, a trajectory that perseveres into the contemporary milieu.³⁷

³⁵ Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel. A vészidőszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949. pp. 10-11.

³⁶ Gyáni, Gábor: Holocaust Research and Memory Policy in Hungary. In Attila Jakab (ed.): "Más faj, más vallás, más sors." A magyar holokauszt története (Tanulmánykötet). Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékhely Közalapítvány, Budapest. Budapest, 2024. 15-17.

³⁷ Müller, Jan-Werner, ed. *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p.9.

The strategies employed during the wartime annihilation of groups, including those deemed untrustworthy by the authorities, the Jewish community, dissidents, and resistance fighters, through means such as ghettos, forced labor, concentration camps, and gas chambers, defy verbal articulation or traditional artistic renditions. Some sculptures depicting agony or gesturing limbs, along with the elaborate and dramatic forms, have become increasingly remote and unfamiliar. Instead, the focus shifts toward evoking the essence of the era by emphasizing abstract representations over naturalistic depictions.³⁸

Given the structured nature of these memorials, whether through architectural designs or visual arts, the mode of expression remains open to interpretation. The assessment of completed works necessitates a thorough understanding of the historical context. It is crucial to recognize that a memorial designed to honor a small group executed on the site should communicate a distinct message compared to one dedicated to widespread destruction or armed uprisings. Similarly, the commemoration of distant deceased individuals differs significantly from the memorialization of sites representing large-scale devastation.³⁹

Holocaust monuments and memorials stand as enduring witnesses to history, providing physical spaces for remembrance and reflection. These structures, ranging from solemn statues to sprawling museums, are not mere symbols but tangible artifacts that connect the present with the past.⁴⁰ Researching these monuments helps preserve their

³⁸ Milton, Sybil. In *Fitting Memory : The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials*. Detroit, Michigan ; Wayne State University Press, 1991. p.17.

³⁹ Carrier, Peter. Introduction in *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989: The Origins and Political Function of the Vél' d'Hiv' in Paris and the Holocaust Monument in Berlin*. New York: Berghahn Books. 2005.p.1.

⁴⁰ Shanken, Andrew Michael. "Introduction: Memorials No More" in *The Everyday Life of Memorials Zone* Books, 2022. p.33.

historical significance, ensuring that the stories they tell are accurately conveyed to future generations. By understanding the context, design, and symbolism behind these structures, scholars contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the Holocaust and its profound impact on humanity.

The study of Holocaust monuments also unravels the intricate relationship between collective memory and national identity. Monuments often reflect a society's values, aspirations, and acknowledgment of historical responsibility. Analyzing how different nations choose to represent the Holocaust in public spaces provides insights into the complexities of national identity formation.⁴¹ It sheds light on the ways societies grapple with the darker chapters of their past and the role of remembrance in shaping contemporary identities.

Moreover, Holocaust monuments and memorials are powerful educational tools. They offer immersive experiences that transcend the limitations of traditional classroom settings, allowing individuals to engage with history on a visceral level. Researching the effectiveness of these educational tools helps refine their design and impact, contributing to the development of educational programs that foster empathy, critical thinking, and an understanding of the consequences of intolerance.

In a contemporary context, Holocaust monuments are not static structures but living entities that engage with evolving societal attitudes.⁴² Researching these monuments helps

⁴¹ Müller, Jan-Werner, ed. *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p.139.

⁴² Goldman, Natasha. "Introduction" in *Memory Passages : Holocaust Memorials in the United States and Germany*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2020. pp. 174-175. And Shanken, Andrew Michael. "Introduction: Memorials No More" in *The Everyday Life of Memorials Zone Books*, 2022. p.37.

track changes in public perceptions of the Holocaust and its relevance. It explores how these memorials adapt to address new challenges, such as rising antisemitism and contemporary forms of discrimination, ensuring that they remain relevant and effective in fostering awareness and tolerance.

In conclusion, researching Holocaust monuments and memorials is relevant on multiple fronts. It contributes to the preservation of historical memory, enhances educational initiatives, informs ethical considerations in representation, and enriches global conversations about human rights and justice.⁴³ These monuments serve as poignant reminders of the past, urging societies to confront the legacy of the Holocaust and strive toward a more just and compassionate future.

Beyond Budapest: Exploring Regional Dynamics in Holocaust Remembrance Culture

The rural Jewish population was almost entirely deported, with the liberation marking the survival of approximately 10,000 rural labor service workers who managed to avoid deportation. The fate of Budapest's Jewish population was relatively more fortunate. Within the ghetto, 69,000 refugees survived, while Russian troops liberated 25,000 Jews in protected houses, and approximately 25,000 others owed their lives to hiding. According to 1945 calculations, a total of 733,007 Hungarian Jews were deported during the German occupation, comprising 551,817 from rural areas and 181,190 from Budapest. Adding the 63,000 individuals executed before March 19, 1944, brings the total to 796,007, or

⁴³ Young, James. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1993. p.15.

approximately 800,000 individuals of Jewish or Jewish descent whose tragedies must be accounted for in the tally of persecution. Later data suggests that the Holocaust claimed the lives of 550,000 to 600,000 Hungarian Jews. While the exact number of Holocaust victims may never be known, it can be asserted that proportionally, more than two-thirds of the rural Jewish population perished during the tragic period of persecution.⁴⁴

Hungary emerged as a compelling case study for Holocaust memorialization due to the existing extensive research focused on memorials and monuments within the capital, Budapest. The majority of this research has transpired post-1990, coinciding with a revitalized public interest in the Holocaust throughout Europe⁴⁵. However, there remains a notable gap pertaining to the period preceding the 1990s, particularly in the Hungarian countryside—the primary site of deportation for the majority of Hungarian Jews. The investigation will reveal that the substantial losses experienced by specific Jewish communities throughout the country precipitated a surge in remembrance efforts and the initiation of various initiatives to identify suitable modes of commemorating the victims of the tumultuous World War II era. Notably, this commemorative wave transcended the magnitude observed in the capital during the period spanning from 1945 to 1989. This dissertation seeks to address and bridge this lacuna by examining Holocaust memorialization in both temporal and geographical dimensions, offering a comprehensive perspective.

⁴⁴ A vidéki zsidók deportálása. At A Holokauszt Magyarországon.

http://www.holokausztmagyarorszag.hu/index.php?section=1&type=content&chapter=4_2_3

⁴⁵ Scholars like Gábor Gyáni “Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary”, Tim Cole “Turning the Places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory”, Mónika Kovács ““A holokauszt múlt feldolgozása: emlékezés vagy felejtés?”, Ferenc Laczó, Máté Zombory “Between Transnational embeddedness and relative isolation: The moderate rise of memory studies in Hungary.”

While the prevailing narrative on Holocaust memorialization in Hungary often suggests that the Jewish history of the Holocaust was predominantly tabooed during the Communist era, with monuments primarily emphasizing the significant role of the "Soviet liberators,"⁴⁶ this dissertation seeks to present a comprehensive overview of memorials erected from the postwar period to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The research aims to illuminate the evolution of these memorials under varying political circumstances. Examining the chapters reveals a transformation in these memorials and plaques—from initially serving as personal places of remembrance for the surviving Jewish community to assuming a more muted form of recollection during the Rákosi period. Subsequently, they gradually became integral to collective remembrance, undergoing changes in artistic representation and relocation, progressing from the periphery to the center during the Kádár period.

Furthermore, Hungary's nuanced political approach to Holocaust remembrance continues to be a subject of intense debate and complexity.⁴⁷ To gain a deeper insight into the intricate evolution and transformation of Holocaust memorialization, it is imperative to delve into its origins. This entails exploring the early stages of commemorative practices, examining the motives and decisions that shaped memorial initiatives, and scrutinizing the political discourse surrounding Holocaust remembrance in Hungary. By scrutinizing the

⁴⁶ Cole, Tim. "Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95" in Hornstein, Shelley and Jacobowitz, Florence's "Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust". Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. p. 277. And Gábor Gyáni "Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary" in *The Holocaust in Hungary, Seventy years later*. Edited by Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács. Joint publication by Central European University Jewish Studies Program and Central European University Press Budapest–New York. 2016. p.216.

⁴⁷ Bartha Eszter, Slávka Otčenášová. A holokauszt az emlékezet és a politika vonzásában: totalitárius és revizionista irányzatok a magyar és a szlovák holokausztirodalomban. *Eszmélet* 31. évf. 124. sz. (2019. tél). https://epa.oszk.hu/01700/01739/00109/pdf/EPA01739_eszmelet_124_094-117.pdf pp.94-117

foundational phase of memorialization, we can unravel the complexities that have contributed to the ongoing discourse and controversies surrounding Holocaust remembrance in Hungary.

Method

The zeitgeist of the 1960s precipitated the emergence of social history, imbuing the study of the past with a human-centric essence through the incorporation of multidisciplinary perspectives and a heightened receptivity to social sciences. This catalytic influence of the 1960s era engendered a pivotal shift in historiographical focus, transitioning from macro-social paradigms to micro-social perspectives.⁴⁸ This transformative trajectory not only augmented the scale of historical knowledge but also prompted a nuanced conceptualization of historical narratives. As articulated by British historian and sociologist, Keith Hopkins, social history transcends the mere accumulation of factual data; instead, it necessitates the weaving of a compelling narrative, one that demands meticulous construction with a discerning eye for details and a deliberate commitment to viewing historical phenomena from a grassroots perspective – a vantage point commonly referred to as 'history from below.'⁴⁹

In the pursuit of scrutinizing Holocaust memorialization from a grassroots perspective, the intention is to shift the central focus away from a singular dominant narrative, thereby elucidating an alternative dimension within the historical discourse surrounding postwar Hungary's remembrance culture. This methodological approach seeks to transcend the limitations imposed by an exclusive emphasis on overarching narratives, aiming to incorporate diverse perspectives that have hitherto been marginalized or overlooked. The principal objective is to integrate both "from above" and "from below"

⁴⁸ Samuel, R., Breuilly, J., Clark, J.C.D., Hopkins, K., Cannadine, D. (1988). What is Social History ... ?. In: Gardiner, J. (eds) What is History Today ... ?. Palgrave, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-19161-1_5

⁴⁹ Ibid.

methodological frameworks, thereby elucidating the intricate dynamics of Holocaust memorialization in postwar Hungary during the period spanning 1945 to 1989.⁵⁰ This combined approach endeavors to underscore the participation of an array of actors, encompassing both Jewish and non-Jewish entities, who actively engaged in the deliberations and decision-making processes that fundamentally shaped the commemorative practices pertaining to the Jewish martyrs in Hungary. Through this nuanced examination, the intention is to present a comprehensive and inclusive narrative that reflects the multifaceted nature of memorialization endeavors during the specified historical epoch.

In approaching the investigation of the interplay between top-down and bottom-up perspectives on the activity of remembering communities, especially within Jewish and non-Jewish contexts, this study adopts a methodological framework rooted in the field of social history.⁵¹ Social history provides a lens through which we can examine the dynamic relationship between diverse social actors, including both remembering communities and the authorities involved in monument creation.⁵² The focus is on understanding how these

⁵⁰ The critique of traditional Rankean history, which prioritized political figures and state-centered narratives, gained prominence in the 1950s with the emergence of social history, particularly through the Annales School led by Lucien Febvre, Fernand Braudel, and Marc Bloch. (Hobsbawm, Eric J.. "From Social History to the History of Society." *Daedalus* (1971). pp.21-22.) Braudel argued that historians must move beyond focusing solely on short-term political events and instead examine the deeper social structures—economies, institutions, and civilizations—that shape historical outcomes. He stressed that these "social realities" should be analyzed on their own terms, not as mere backdrops for elite actions. (Braudel, Fernand. *On History*. Translated by Sarah Matthews. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1980. pp.9-10.) The merging of "history from above" (focused on elites) with "history from below" (centered on everyday people) enables a fuller understanding of historical phenomena by examining both social forces and political decisions. This combined approach allows historians to better explain long-term societal changes.

⁵¹ Burke, Peter. *History and Social Theory*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 1993. pp. 89 and 163.

⁵² Braudel, Fernand. "On a concept of Social History" in *On History*. Translated by Sarah Matthews. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1980. pp. 128-130.

entities shape and are shaped by the process of commemoration, particularly as manifested in the incorporation of monuments into the social life of towns, cities, or villages during specific historical periods.

Top-Down Perspective:

"History from above" is a methodological approach focusing on the actions and influence of elites—political leaders, institutions, and state actors—on historical events. As British historian, Jeremy Black notes, much of this history, particularly national or political, served polemical and legitimizing purposes, often intended for popular consumption.⁵³ However, since the 1950s, this approach has faced criticism from scholars for its limited scope, as it tends to overlook broader societal forces and the experiences of ordinary people. Despite these critiques, "history from below" is not fully independent; it is shaped by and intertwined with elite/state/institutional-driven narratives, both of which are essential for a comprehensive historical analysis.⁵⁴ The top-down approach in my research involves scrutinizing the roles of authorities—ranging from governmental bodies to community leaders or religious institutions—who played pivotal roles in initiating the creation of monuments. Archival research will be a cornerstone of this perspective, delving into official records, administrative documents, and correspondences to unveil the motivations, decision-making processes, and societal objectives that led to the establishment of commemorative monuments.⁵⁵ Interviews and oral histories with key individuals involved

⁵³ Black, Jeremy ; MacRaild, Donald. *Studying History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. p. 36.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 113.

⁵⁵ Ginzburg, Carlo. 2013. *The Cheese and the Worms*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. p.XV.

in the monument creation process will provide valuable insights into the intentions and challenges faced by the authorities.

Bottom-Up Perspective:

"History from below" is an approach that seeks to understand the experiences and agency of ordinary people, rather than focusing exclusively on elites or major political events. It emphasizes how grassroots actors influenced historical processes and challenges traditional top-down narratives by exploring how large social, economic, and political structures, such as industrialization or modernization, were experienced, negotiated, or resisted by individuals at the local level.⁵⁶ This methodology highlights the complexity of historical developments by centering on those often overlooked in mainstream historical accounts.⁵⁷ The bottom-up approach in my thesis focuses on the grassroots level, exploring how local communities, both Jewish and non-Jewish, actively participate in and shape the process of remembering. This perspective emphasizes the contributions and engagement of ordinary individuals in the construction of collective memory. Ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviews within these communities, will be employed to explore the lived experiences, collective memories, and personal narratives that shape their interactions with monuments.⁵⁸ Through a bottom-up lens, this study seeks to understand how ordinary individuals negotiate and reinterpret official narratives, fostering a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics surrounding memorialization.

⁵⁶ Crew, David F. "Alltagsgeschichte: A New Social History 'From Below'?" *Central European History* 22, no. 3/4 (1989): 394–407. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4546159>. pp.395-397.

⁵⁷ Black, Jeremy ; MacRaild, Donald. *Studying History*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. p. 109-110.

⁵⁸ Samuel, Raphael. *People's History and Socialist Theory*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis. 1981. pp.225-226

Diachronic And Synchronic Comparative Method

In the context of historical methodology, synchronic comparison involves analyzing different societies, events, or phenomena at a single point in time to highlight similarities and differences in their structures or responses to particular challenges. It focuses on cross-sectional analysis at a specific moment, allowing historians to compare parallel developments within a shared temporal framework. On the other hand, diachronic comparison examines changes over time, tracking how individual societies evolve or respond to challenges across different periods. It allows historians to study processes and developments within a temporal framework. This method highlights long-term changes and the temporal variance in societal responses to similar problems. This distinction between synchronic and diachronic methods enables historians to either conduct cross-sectional analyses at a specific point in time or investigate how certain issues evolve over different periods.⁵⁹

The study examines Holocaust memorialization and the discourses and actors involved in memorialization across different political environments. Therefore, a diachronic comparative approach is employed to gain a deeper understanding of the shifting patterns in the remembrance culture of the Holocaust.⁶⁰ Another comparative aspect explored throughout the dissertation is the comparison between Budapest and other parts of the country. In Budapest, a state-centralized narrative on memorialization, characterized

⁵⁹ Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard, and Jürgen Kocka, eds. *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*. NED-New edition, 1. Berghahn Books, 2009. pp.16-17.

⁶⁰ More on synchronic and diachronic comparative method: Haupt, Heinz-Gerhard and Kocka, Jürgen, "Comparative History: Methods, Aims, Problems" in Deborah Cohen, Maura O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History. Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York, 2004). And Marc Bloch. "A Contribution towards a Comparative History of European Societies," in *Land and Work in Medieval Europe*, New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

by its defined, restrictive, and controlled nature, is more evident.⁶¹ This is juxtaposed with other regions where grassroots and local initiatives were more prevalent, and where the state-centralized narrative may not have reached, or not in the same manner or timeframe as observed in the capital. For such a comparative approach that examines parallel developments, similarities, and differences within the same temporal boundaries, a synchronic comparative method could be of great value.⁶²

This methodological approach aims to bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of how commemorative monuments become embedded within communities and the intricate dynamics between various local and state actors involved in the process. Diachronic and synchronic comparison allow for a nuanced analysis of how both official narratives and grassroots initiatives interact and influence each other over time, and also attempts to identify common, shared patterns of Holocaust memorialization within a specific time period but within different spatial boundaries.

⁶¹ Key scholarly works that analyze Holocaust memorials and the dynamics of state-centered narratives of Holocaust remembrance in larger urban contexts include Harold Marcuse's "Holocaust Memorials and Places of Remembrance in Germany" (1999), which focuses on memorialization practices in major German cities. Peter Carrier's "The Holocaust Memorial Berlin and Other Memorials: Forms of Holocaust Remembrance in the United States and Germany" (2005) similarly examines urban memorials, emphasizing Berlin's role as a focal point for national memory. Bill Niven's "Memorialization in Germany since 1945" (2006) highlights the centralized narratives in post-war urban settings, and Tim Cole's "Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto" (2003) explores Holocaust remembrance in Budapest.

⁶² Berger, Stefan, Heiko Feldner, and Kevin Passmore. *Writing History : Theory & Practice*. London: Arnold. 2003. pp. 167-172 and 196.

Sources

This thesis demonstrates that relying solely on traditional archival sources limits the ability to fully grasp the complexities of Holocaust remembrance and its transformation between 1945 and 1989. Following the approach of historian Natalie Zemon Davis, who argues that unconventional sources such as legal records, folklore, and personal testimonies can offer deeper insights into societal values and sentiments often overlooked in official accounts. In *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Davis shows how a single legal case can reveal social dynamics, aspirations, and tensions.⁶³ Similarly, by using newspapers, personal accounts, archival material from local Jewish communities, and memorials as primary sources, this dissertation provides a more nuanced and broader understanding of the way Holocaust remembrance evolved during this period.

The source material available for tracing Holocaust memorialization in Hungary, as previously noted, would have been insufficient if relying solely on state archival sources. Nonetheless, archival sources (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Magyar Zsidó Múzeum és Levéltár) are primarily used to corroborate the state narrative on Holocaust remembrance and to juxtapose it with sources from local Jewish communities. By eschewing reliance solely on traditional authority for source materials, I was able to engage with a new range of documentations that provided a more comprehensive understanding of Holocaust memorialization, one that did not align entirely with the official narrative.

Consequently, this dissertation heavily depends on newspapers published during the period under study, as well as interviews conducted with local historians and

⁶³ Davis, Natalie Zemon, 1928-2023, Martin Guerre and Arnault Du Tilh, *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983. pp.1-5.

members/leaders of local Jewish communities. Newspapers are invaluable primary sources that offer critical insights into the political and social discourses that dominated their time. By documenting events on a daily basis, they provide a contemporaneous record, often capturing decisions and communications that elude official archives. Additionally, newspapers frequently delve into more thorough investigations of significant issues, offering perspectives that surpass routine news reporting. Such in-depth coverage, when combined with their day-to-day content, allows historians to explore not only immediate public reactions but also the broader societal dynamics, making them essential for understanding the mentalities and socio-political contexts of a given period.⁶⁴

When utilizing newspapers as sources for gathering information on discourses surrounding Holocaust remembrance, it was crucial to include a wide range of publications, including non-Jewish newspapers and those affiliated with political parties. The journal "Új Élet," the official publication of the Hungarian Jewish organized community, serves as a valuable primary source for my research. It addresses political shifts and concerns starting from 1945, with a specific focus on the challenges faced in rebuilding Hungarian Jewish communities. Moreover, it provides insights into the discourses occurring within the community and reports on various memorials aimed at preserving the memory of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. County journals (Szabad Vasmegye, Somogy Megyei Hírlap, Nógrád Megyei Hírlap, Pápai Független Kiszgazda, Somogy Megyei Hírlap etc.) play a significant role in my research as they reflect the interests of the non-Jewish community in the respective towns where commemorative events and memorials are being erected. These

⁶⁴ Tosh, John. *The Pursuit of History : Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. 5th ed. New York: Longman/Pearson. 2010. pp.63-64.

journals provide valuable insights into the broader societal context surrounding Holocaust memorialization efforts, offering perspectives beyond those of the Jewish community.

Furthermore, political (Népszava, Világosság, Kossuth Népe, Szabad Szó, Hírlap, Magyar Nemzet etc.) will be utilized as source material, given their primary emphasis on ideological-based information dissemination and socialist propaganda during the socialist regime. Hence, it is intriguing to explore when and under what circumstances these newspapers covered news regarding the unveiling of Jewish martyr memorials, the observance of commemorative events, the participation of political figures, speakers at these events, and if available, the language used in their speeches during these commemorations.

Finally, the thesis considers memorials and monuments as crucial primary source materials. Rather than approaching monuments merely as works of art, the thesis regards them as symbols within the political-historical discourse of society.⁶⁵ Given that monuments serve as interpretations of the past and subsequently function as instruments of political representation, it is imperative to regard them not merely as passive structures, but rather as narrators engaged in a complex dialogue between the past and the present.⁶⁶

The dissertation aims to underscore that archival sources should not be the sole repositories for constructing historical narratives. A comprehensive research endeavor should draw from both traditional and non-traditional materials, particularly given that state

⁶⁵ Spielmann, Jochen. *Steine des Anstoßes. Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg in Denkmälern 1945 - 1985*. Hamburg: Museum für Hamburgische Geschichte. 1985. p.8.

⁶⁶ Carrier, Peter. *Introduction in Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures in France and Germany since 1989: The Origins and Political Function of the Vél' d'Hiv' in Paris and the Holocaust Monument in Berlin*. New York: Berghahn Books. 2005.

archives may present curated volumes of sources. Such an approach, which integrates both traditional and non-traditional sources, holds the potential to yield new insights into historical events, periods, and concepts that have previously been absent or overlooked, akin to the emergence of research categories such as race and gender from the 1960s onwards.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Blouin, X. Francis and William G. Rosenberg. *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 2011. pp. 84-86 and 207-213.

Thesis Outline

Typology Chapter

The typology chapter within the dissertation serves the purpose of systematically categorizing the key elements integral to the study, which encompasses a diverse spectrum of phenomena within the realm of memorialization. This diversity spans from memory studies to memory politics and involves various actors in the memorialization process. The primary objective of this chapter is to offer a precise definition and comprehensive understanding of the fundamental concepts employed in the research. By doing so, it establishes a structured framework for the subsequent analysis, delineating the specific categories that will be explored in-depth throughout the dissertation.

Moreover, the typology chapter plays a crucial role in providing a theoretical foundation for the research. It accomplishes this by drawing upon pertinent literature within the field, thereby situating the study within the broader academic context. This theoretical grounding is essential for justifying the chosen approach and methodology. In essence, the typology chapter functions as a foundational component that facilitates the conceptualization, organization, and analysis of the research project or dissertation. It is instrumental in bringing clarity to the intricate subject matter under investigation and contributes significantly to the overall rigor and coherence of the study.

Chapter I (1945-1946)

During the immediate postwar period the focus was less on aesthetic representation and rather memorial plaques were employed as historical markers to remember the Jewish martyrs. In a 1946 article on the illustration of Jewish martyrdom, journalist Erno Munkacsi bemoans the lack of artistic manifestation concerning the Hungarian victims of fascism. As Munkacsi explains the commemoration of grief and suffering is deeply rooted in artistry, albeit there have been no statues created till the present to remember the faces of unknown deportees or forced labor workers.⁶⁸ Commemorative plaques in this case concentrated on individuals' memory rather than a collective and were installed on buildings associated with the tragic events of the World War II or more frequently placed in cemeteries to offer a resting place for those who perished in the Holocaust. Further, it is also worth the attention that the historical rupture of 1945 categorically transformed the tradition of public monuments.⁶⁹ However, it is important to point out that the beginning of the postwar era was more typically characterized by the plurality of involvement from civic actors, local and governmental initiatives, as opposed to the period marked by the Communist seizure of power in 1949.

This chapter will commence by examining the intricate challenges associated with the participants in commemorative activities, delineating the transformative journey from grassroots initiatives to the gradual integration of political figures. This evolutionary process will be scrutinized in tandem with a noticeable shift in emphasis, transitioning from

⁶⁸ Munkacsi, Erno. 'Zsido Martirum illusztracioi' published in Ujelet. 14. Nov.1946. Budapest.

⁶⁹ Michalski, Sergiusz. Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997. Reaktion Books, 1998. p.154.

an exclusive focus on remembering Jewish martyrs to a more explicit acknowledgment of the role played by Soviet liberators.

A substantial portion of the chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the resurgence of latent antisemitism, evident in pogroms, vandalism, and various forms of violence.⁷⁰ This investigation will thoroughly explore the impact of these unsettling occurrences on the modes of commemoration and the content of speeches delivered during such events. The exploration will illuminate the intricate interplay between historical remembrance, political dynamics, and the persistent presence of antisemitic sentiments in the postwar Hungarian landscape.

Furthermore, the chapter will delve into the origins of commemorative events that emerged as pivotal milestones for annual Holocaust remembrance. These events, serving as poignant moments for reflection, paved the way for the evolution of diverse memorialization methods. The initial emphasis on memorial plaques will be traced, eventually evolving into the creation of more intricate and artistic monuments. This trajectory signifies a nuanced progression in the visual and symbolic representation of Holocaust remembrance, mirroring the evolving socio-political climate and the changing dynamics of collective memory.

⁷⁰ Csősz, László. „Népirtás után: zsidóellenes atrocitások Magyarországon 1945-1948”. Társadalmi Konfliktusok Kutatóközpont. http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148:nepirtas-utan-zsidoeffenes-atrocitasok-magyarorszagon-1945-1948-&catid=15:tanulmanyok and „Antiszemita zavargások, pogromok és vérvádak 1945-1948”. Társadalmi Konfliktusok Kutatóközpont. http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140:antiszemita-zavargasok-pogromok-es-vervadak-1945-1948&catid=16:esetek

Chapter II (1947-1949)

This chapter will argue that, during the period between 1947 and 1949, the modalities of Holocaust memorialization in Hungary were characterized by distinct categories. Firstly, it emphasizes the diverse array of actors involved, challenging the prevailing notion that post-Soviet liberation led to uniform, state-driven memorialization. Instead, local Jewish community leaders, politicians, international participants, and various church representatives played crucial roles in these efforts.

The second key category underscores the significance of individualizing the memory of martyrs. Before the installation of plaques or monuments, extensive research was conducted to identify and commemorate each person forcibly taken and killed in concentration or forced labor camps. This reflects the communities' commitment to providing a personal resting place for every deceased individual, ensuring their memory is not consigned to nameless graves or tombstones.

A third notable aspect focuses on the impact of foreign entities on national Holocaust memorialization. The establishment of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in 1947 had a profound influence on Hungarian Jewish communities, shaping the scale and diverse purposes of Holocaust commemoration.

The fourth category highlights the evolution of rhetoric in commemorative speeches and on monument engravings, serving as a reflection of the contemporary political environment in the country. Lastly, the fifth category addresses vandalism and antisemitism against memorials dedicated to Jewish martyrs, underscoring the government's failure to decisively confront lingering animosity toward returning Jewish survivors and their

demands for reparations. Through the utilization of archival and journal evidence, this chapter will substantiate the claim that these categories were highly representative of Holocaust memorialization methods between 1947 and the consolidation of Communist power in Hungary in 1949.

Chapter III (1950-1956)

The third chapter focuses on a period commonly characterized by the tabooization of Jewish subjects and the conspicuous silence surrounding the Jewish tragedy during the Holocaust.⁷¹ While this characterization holds true to a considerable extent, it is essential to qualify that the period did not witness absolute silence concerning the Jewish memory of World War II. Although state actors were notably disengaged from commemorative events, with the responsibility for remembrance falling primarily on local Jewish communities, there were still commemorative events, and a few memorials were erected during this time.

A crucial aspect explored in this chapter is the influence of foreign entities on the process of memorialization. It may seem surprising that, within a politically charged period marked by the 1956 Revolution, foreign commemorative cases could impact the Hungarian Jewish community. However, both the grandiose monument for the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris and the exhibition and memorial at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem played pivotal roles in laying the groundwork for a more elaborate memorialization of Hungarian Jewish

⁷¹ Gábor Gyáni “Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary” in *The Holocaust in Hungary, Seventy years later*. Edited by Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács. Joint publication by Central European University Jewish Studies Program and Central European University Press Budapest–New York. 2016. p.216.

martyrs. While the fruition of these seeds becomes more apparent in subsequent years, as discussed in the following chapter, it is paramount to acknowledge and credit their origins during this earlier period.

Chapter IV (1956-1989)

The concluding chapter not only spans the most extended timeframe, encompassing the years from 1956 to 1989, but also encapsulates the most discernible shifts in Holocaust memorialization. A primary catalyst for these transformations is the attenuation of dictatorial leadership during the Kádár era. The prevailing winds of change that swept through Europe permeated the confines of the Iron Curtain. Although Hungarian politics remained under Soviet control, the 1960s witnessed a degree of liberalization orchestrated by Kádár, fostering increased societal freedom.⁷² Evidence of the success and scope of Kádár's liberalization program is evident in the improved relations with religious entities, such as the Jewish and Roman Catholic communities, as well as diplomatic outreach to Yugoslavia and other nations.⁷³

In an era marked by heightened political, economic, and social liberties, Holocaust memorializations underwent substantial evolution, especially when contrasted with preceding historical periods. The first subcategory elucidates that the representation of actors, both at the state and civic levels, increased compared to the Rákosi period. Despite the state's heightened commitment to fulfilling Soviet requirements in commemoration,

⁷² Romsics, Ignác. Chapter VII, Kádár Korszak. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999. 1

⁷³ Rajki Zoltán: Az állam és az egyház kapcsolatának jellemző vonásai a Kádár-korszakban. Egyháztörténeti Szemle, 2002. 2. sz. 74-86.

political leaders and Party members actively participated in events dedicated to Jewish martyrs, indicating a closer collaboration between the state and the Jewish community of Budapest. Notably, during significant anniversaries, such as the 25th and 30th liberation anniversaries of Hungary, various actors exhibited intricate involvement in shaping what, how, and where the commemorative events took place.

The second subchapter introduces a new problematic trend initiated by the government, aiming to shift focus away from the explicit remembrance of Jewish Holocaust victims toward a broader commemoration of World War II victims. This shift elicited discontent within the Jewish community, a discontent that will be further explored and is consequential to contemporary challenges in Holocaust memorialization—manifested in the reluctance to name victims and perpetrators explicitly.

The final chapters also unveil long-term evolutions in memorialization, with two main changes in memorials and monuments dedicated to Jewish martyrs. Firstly, there was a shift in location, with memorials moving from the periphery of Jewish cemeteries to more central and historically significant locations. Secondly, there was a change in the artistic representation of monuments, revealing the discourse around the multifaceted role of a monument beyond its symbolic function as a tombstone for survivors. This includes considerations of the messages a monument conveys and the lessons it imparts to future generations who did not experience the tragic years of World War II.

Importantly, these aforementioned changes became more pronounced after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as Hungary transitioned into a newly democratic state. In this post-Soviet era, an array of actors became involved in memorialization, fostering extensive discussions on the subject. However, it is crucial to underscore that the examples

and cases from the 1990s and 2000s had their roots laid in the transformative period spanning from the 1960s to the late 1980s.

Conclusion

This dissertation holds significance in addressing the gap in Holocaust memorialization research that has been both overlooked and oversimplified by scholars. The Holocaust memory landscape in Eastern Europe, spanning from the postwar period until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has often been portrayed as homogeneous, with scholarly focus primarily centered on memory politics activities in the capitals, which predominantly reflected state positions on Holocaust remembrance. This narrative tended to marginalize or even taboo discussions surrounding the Jewish victim aspect of World War II while emphasizing the role of Soviet liberators.

By extending the scope of my research beyond Budapest, I uncovered the involvement of local actors and the collaborative efforts of local Jewish communities. This finding reinforces the argument that agencies are involved in commemoration even in the absence of state interest. While the state's stance on Holocaust remembrance undoubtedly influenced commemorative practices beyond Budapest, it is crucial to recognize that the state is not the sole relevant actor in discussions of nationwide Holocaust remembrance. As emphasized by Jay Winter, placing monuments within the national capital, both geographically and metaphorically, may divert attention from the myriad original and nuanced commemorative forms present in the capital and across the country.⁷⁴ Despite considerable scholarly attention to Holocaust remembrance in Budapest prior to the 1990s, the research demonstrates that drawing conclusions solely from memorials in the capital

⁷⁴ Winter, Jay. "The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the 'Memory Boom' in Contemporary Historical Studies." *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 27 (Fall): 69-92. 2000. p.367.

depicts a distorted portrayal of memorialization in Hungary during postwar and Communist period and potentially across Eastern Europe as well.

Additionally, broadening the range of source materials from state archives to include documents from these local Jewish communities, as well as newspaper articles covering discourses and events related to the remembrance of Hungarian Jewish martyrs, revealed that postwar memorialization and commemorative practices during the Communist period exhibited a much greater diversity. Furthermore, some of these memorialization practices demonstrated continuity even after the change of regime in 1989. These practices included individualizing the victims on memorials, relocating memorials from the periphery to the center of towns, and transitioning from simple plaques to more symbolic artwork. This continuity suggests that these practices were not isolated occurrences but rather reflective of broader societal contexts.

A case in point is that certainly Holocaust memory culture was burgeoning from the 1980s and 1990s across Europe, it cannot be determined that prior to those dates a ‘collective amnesia’ was casting a dark shadow over Hungary. First memorial plaques, then later public monuments became appropriated to serve anti-fascist sentiments and overall came to be a tool for political communication. The increasing focus to observe monuments and memorials not only as a work of art but as subjects of political battles of today as well as in the past is a relatively recent scholarly approach. Consequently, the doctoral thesis pivots on the ways global collective memory of the postwar era continuously reshaped and transformed the concept of Holocaust memory within some of the Hungarian cities where most atrocities were committed. This research focuses on the disagreements that emerge between the actors engaged in Hungary’s memory politics. Such disagreements seem to

have had turned the Holocaust memorialization process into a battlefield upon which the Holocaust memory still remains one of the most valuable and competitive assets of political importance. In this study, emphasis shall be placed on these multifaceted factors and actors of Holocaust memorialization in academic debates, public culture, foreign policy making, and in state and civic initiations.

Typology

I.I Memorials and monuments

This dissertation focuses on various Holocaust memorials and monuments erected in Hungarian national contexts and memory landscapes in the postwar era up until today. Before going into the depth of the subject and jumping into the analysis of certain case studies of Holocaust memorialization in Hungary, a systematic classification of the Holocaust memorials is essential. This typology chapter aims to categorize and organize Holocaust memorials and monuments into distinct group in order to gain a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of this type of remembrance. In broad terms, memorials and monuments play a key role in commemorating historical events, individuals, and communities. They are the physical manifestation of remembrance with the purpose to stimulate emotions or discussions, to evoke reflection from the viewers, to convey messages both to the current and the future generations and contribute to the construction of collective memory.⁷⁵ There is a plethora of possibilities to analytically approach these monuments and memorials that could range from architecture, art, symbolism, educational perspective or to reflect on the specific historical context and the purpose of the commemoration.⁷⁶ Thus, the wealth of material on various facets of memorialization demonstrates that the concept is cross-disciplinary, allowing academics from diverse scholarly backgrounds to approach the topic in a multitude of ways.

⁷⁵ Shanken, Andrew Michael. "Introduction: Memorials No More" in *The Everyday Life of Memorials* Zone Books, 2022. pp. 17-22.

⁷⁶ Goldman, Natasha. "Introduction" in *Memory Passages : Holocaust Memorials in the United States and Germany*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2020. pp. 1-3.

As the French architectural and urban historian and theorist, Françoise Choay explains in her book, *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, the original meaning of the word is the Latin *monumentum*, derives from *monere* – to warn, to recall, the monument is a defense against the traumas of existence, its essence lies in its relationship to lived time and to memory. With the beginning of the 17th century monument would denote power, greatness, beauty, it was charged with grand public schemes. Today the meaning has changed further. The term monumentality relates to the symbolic status and physical presence of a monument. Monuments have been created for thousands of years, and they are often the most durable and famous symbols of ancient civilizations.⁷⁷

Certainly, Choay's work focuses solely on the distinction between monuments and historic monument and discusses their significance in the context of cultural heritage and memory. Even though this dissertation aims for a different focal point, her extensive work makes intriguing claims that could be applicable in connection to my attempt for categorizing monuments as a whole. As she explains monument is a deliberate creation whose purpose is established a priori. While monument's purpose is to bring to life a past engulfed by time they are also exposed to the ravages of time, can be forgotten, secularized they can become deserted or ruined. Historic monument is not initially desired and created as such, constituted a posteriori, in other words any object of the past can be converted into a historic witness without having any memorial purpose. Historic monument's purpose is to become part of the present but without the mediation of memory and history.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Choay, Françoise, and Lauren O'Connell. *The Invention of the Historic Monument*. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2001. pp.6-7.

⁷⁸ Shanken, Andrew Michael. *The Everyday Life of Memorials* Zone Books, 2022. pp. 83 and 98.

Evidently each memorial and monument serve various purposes and can take on different forms depending on the historical events they commemorate and the intentions of their designers.⁷⁹ However, due to the scope of this research the focus in this chapter will be on categorizing the types of memorials dedicated solely to the victims of the Holocaust and will not aim to discuss other categories of remembrance representing different historical or cultural narratives (e.g. War Memorials, Veteran memorials, National monuments, or other Genocide Memorials).

Within the framework of the thesis, it is truly paramount to reflect on the diversity of sites of memory and their significance in transmitting memory of society or certain collectives. When engaging with memory culture it often occurs that the scholarly discourse uses the word memorial and monument interchangeably. As American philosopher, Arthur Danto expresses ‘we erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build memorials so that we shall never forget.’⁸⁰ While nations set up memorials to recall past death and tragic events, and to provide a place for mourn, monument on the other hand are erected as a celebratory remembrance of triumphs or heroic individuality, to specifically memorialize a person or an event. However, monuments in addition to serve as a place of memory they also hold didactic purposes just like a chronicler they embody and narrate history.⁸¹ I argue that in relation to memory politics, that will be discussed in the following sub-chapter, the importance of memory sites is that both memorials and monuments emphasize the conflicting and multi-layered national memories of one country’s dark

⁷⁹ Winter, Jay. *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century*. Yale University Press, 2006. p.135.

⁸⁰ Danto, Arthur C., Gregg Horowitz, and Tom Huhn. *The wake of art: criticism, philosophy, and the ends of taste*. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: G+B Arts International. 1998. p.153.

⁸¹ Forty, Adrian, and Susanne Küchler. *The Art of Forgetting*. Oxford: Berg. 1999. pp. 2-6.

period and also demonstrate their legitimizing capacity as a political symbol. Moreover, monuments and memorials alike bear with commemorative functions that requires a close attention. Owing to the fact, that such representation of remembrance are fundamentally political since its process of establishment involves political institutions, organizations, and the involvement of press. Therefore, the process of commemoration as well as the official measures taken for constructing a memory site will constitute the base for further investigation.

Even by narrowing down the categorization to Holocaust remembrance, there are still various forms of memorialization to discuss, each designed to honor the victims of the Holocaust and to educate the viewers about this tragic event in history.⁸² It important to note here, that the form of Holocaust remembrance has evolved over time reflecting changes in societal, political attitudes, historical perspectives, and artistic approaches. Notably, these changes accelerated as the demands of shaping collective memory became more pressing in Eastern-Central Europe, particularly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and later with the enlargement of the European Union.⁸³ When deconstructing the evolution of memorialization from postwar period, the part below will not aim to highlight the differences between Eastern and Western model of Holocaust remembrance simply outline it broadly.

Immediate postwar memorials (1940s-1950s) are often consisted of simple plaques, stones, or symbolic monuments. These forms of remembrance were often established by

⁸² Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts : Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. 2003. pp. 12-23.

⁸³ Pakier, Małgorzata, and Bo Stråth, eds. *A European Memory: Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. NED-New edition, 1. Berghahn Books, 2010. pp. 1-3.

local communities or survivors to honor their victims and they were often placed in Jewish cemeteries, on the walls of synagogues, on the sites of former concentration camps⁸⁴ and mass graves. Therefore, rarely these memorials have been part of public remembrance, rather represented a more private way of commemorating family members, colleagues, or the fallen members of the local Jewish community. One notable exception is Nathan Rapoport's monument for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that was unveiled on April 19, 1949, with its monumental public representation of the Jewish martyrdom it differs greatly from the more discreet, unadorned aesthetics of that time.⁸⁵ After the 1950s the narrative behind the Holocaust memorials within the Eastern Bloc concentrated more on paying respect to the Soviet liberators and Soviet heroes in general and the number of erected monuments became also less frequent.⁸⁶

During the 1960s with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961-1962 the recognition of the horrors of the Holocaust gained more publicity. These Holocaust memorials represented a new genre of commemoration during which new symbols, new forms, and materials were used to address the tragicness of the event. Many of the mass killing sites as well as concentration camp sites were memorialized in this 1960s period, such as Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Majdanek, and Babi Yar.⁸⁷ The transition of the symbols represented on these memorials were prevalent in this time period. Originally, the used icons aimed to reflect on the concentration camps or deportation by using barb wires or

⁸⁴ Buchenwald in 1945, Belsen in 1946, Flossenbürg in 1946, Dachau in 1949, Bergen-Belsen in 1952, Neuengamme in 1953, Ravensbrück in 1959

⁸⁵ Young, James E. "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument." *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 80–89. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928524>.

⁸⁶ Tim Cole (2003) *Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory*. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95. p.279.

⁸⁷ Marcuse, Harold. "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre." *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): p. 55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23302761>.

railway tracks, train wagons which later broadened up to portray Star of David, or the Soviet symbol of sickle and hammer and the Communist red stars referring to the Soviet liberators.⁸⁸

The 1970s-1980s marked a new urge for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, not only Jewish communities, survivors and their descendants but governments and organizations took effort to commemorate the victims, educate the public and the future generations concerning the atrocities committed during World War II. Particularly in most Eastern European countries the state monopolization lessened over Holocaust commemoration.⁸⁹ Many countries and communities established permanent Holocaust memorials and monuments during this period. These memorials served as physical reminders of the Holocaust's horrors and honored the millions of victims. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., was established in 1979 as a federal institution dedicated to Holocaust remembrance, education, and research.⁹⁰

The period of the 1980s is considered to be a catalyst for women's studies on the subject of the Holocaust.⁹¹ In 1983, academics such as Joan Miriam Ringelheim, Esther Katz, and Sybil Milton assembled in New York in order to address issues concerning the role of women in Nazi occupied Europe. Moreover, the aim of the conference was among others to shift the focus from women survivors to women's struggle to survive during the

⁸⁸ Marcuse, Harold. "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre." *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): p.57.

⁸⁹ Eschebach, Insa. "Soil, Ashes, Commemoration: Processes of Sacralization at the Former Ravensbrück Concentration Camp." *History and Memory* 23, no. 1 (2011): p.132.
<https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.23.1.131>.

⁹⁰ Goldman, Natasha. "Introduction" in *Memory Passages : Holocaust Memorials in the United States and Germany*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2020. p.7.

⁹¹ Jacobs. Janet. *Memorializing the Holocaust, Gender, Genocide and Collective Memory*. London-New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. 2010

troubling time.⁹² Hereafter burgeoning literature and research discussing Jewish women resistance, life in the ghetto from female perspective, women in concentration camps, and sexual violence against Jewish and Roma women and children have become more universal. The broadened academic interest on women's experiences during the Holocaust later also manifested in physical form of memorialization, as in the case of the Memorial to the Victims of Fascism, Berlin, 1985 or the bronze sculpture "Burdened Woman" ("Tragende") situated in the former concentration camp site of Ravensbrück (1994) both designed by Will Lammert.⁹³

While in the 1990s and early 2000s there was a visible shift toward more monumental and abstract architectural designs for Holocaust memorials. These structures aimed to evoke a sense of solemnity and introspection. Architects and artists embraced innovative forms and materials to create emotionally impactful spaces that encouraged contemplation and remembrance. These memorials often moved away from traditional representational elements and focused on symbolic structures, creating powerful and evocative environments for visitors.⁹⁴ Many countries and communities established permanent Holocaust memorials and monuments during this period. Such examples are the weeping willow tree (Memorial of the Hungarian Jewish Martyrs) erected in 1990 at the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, Hungary with some names of the 400,000 Hungarian Jewish victims of the Holocaust inscribed on its leaves or the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (also known as the Holocaust Memorial) in Berlin, Germany

⁹² Katz. Esther and Ringelheim. Joan Miriam. *Women Surviving the Holocaust*. New York: Institute for research in History, 1983.

⁹³ 1959 - 1992 National Memorial on Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück <https://www.ravensbrueck-sbg.de/en/history/1959-1992/> Last access 08.08.2023.

⁹⁴ Pakier, Małgorzata, and Bo Stråth, eds. *A European Memory: Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. NED-New edition, 1. Berghahn Books, 2010. p.7.

inaugurated in 2005, designed by architect Peter Eisenman. This memorial features a field of 2,711 concrete slabs of varying heights, creating a disorienting and somber atmosphere.⁹⁵ The trend toward monumental and abstract designs represented a collective effort to confront the past, educate future generations, and ensure the memory of the Holocaust remains poignant and relevant for years to come. As the survivors aged, there was a growing sense of urgency to document their first-hand accounts, leading to initiatives like the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation started in 1994. On November 1, 2005, International Holocaust Remembrance Day was adopted by the UN General Assembly.⁹⁶ Following 2005 various countries also established official Holocaust remembrance days to honor the victims and keep the memory alive.⁹⁷

It can be concluded that after 1990s the task of national remembrance grew into a rather European memory that led to a more transnational way to acknowledge past crimes and take accountability across the continent.⁹⁸ One of the most recent approaches to commemorating the victims of the Third Reich is the Stolpersteine Projekt or in English, the Stumbling Blocks project created by German artist, Gunter Demnig. The Stumbling Blocks seek to remember every victim regardless of their age, gender, or their religion, murdered under National Socialism during the years of 1933-1945.⁹⁹ By 2018 more than

⁹⁵ Carrier, Peter. *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany since 1989*. 1st ed. Berghahn Books, 2005. p.145.

⁹⁶ United Nations. General Assembly. A/RES/60/7. Sixtieth session Agenda item 72. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 1 November 2005 [without reference to a Main Committee (A/60/L.12 and Add.1)] 60/7. Holocaust remembrance. 21 November 2005.

⁹⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. *Holocaust Memorial Days An overview of remembrance and education in the OSCE region*. 27 January 2015. p.9. <https://www.osce.org/holocaustmemorialdays>

⁹⁸ Kansteiner, Wulf. "Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies." In *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, edited by Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, 307–318. Brill, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h377.18>.

⁹⁹ Cook. Matthew and van Riemsdijk. "Agents of memorialization: Gunter Demnig's Stolpersteine and the

45.000 blocks have been scattered through Europe in places like including Austria, the Czech Republic, Holland, Belgium, Slovenia, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Italy, Luxemburg, Croatia, France, Norway, Russia, and Switzerland.¹⁰⁰ All contributing to the collective desire to come to terms with the past. Evidently such self-reflexiveness within European countries was not a homogenous memorialization process and it was largely triggered by political motifs from the Eastern countries like joining the European Union.

Modern Holocaust memorials often prioritize education and interactive elements to engage visitors, especially younger generations. They employ multimedia installations, audiovisual displays, and online resources to provide deeper insights into the Holocaust's historical context and impact. As time passed, Holocaust memorials have expanded their scope to acknowledge other groups affected by the Nazi regime, including Romani people, disabled individuals, LGBTQ+ communities, and others persecuted during the Holocaust.¹⁰¹

The dissertation identifies and categorizes the following common typologies of Holocaust memorials:

Abstract Sculptures and Art Installations: Many memorials feature abstract sculptures and art installations that convey the emotional impact of the Holocaust. These pieces often use symbolic elements and powerful imagery to evoke feelings of loss, suffering, and

individual (re-)creation of a Holocaust landscape in Berlin". Journal of Historical Geography 43 (2014) p.

¹⁰⁰ Glass, Nicole. Editor of The Week in Germany. Stolpersteine: Stumbling Into History. On German Missions in the United States. 17.01.2018. [https://www.germany.info/us-en/welcome/03-Jewish-Life-Germany//1308424#:~:text=the%2020th%20century,.Called%20the%20Stolpersteine%20\(in%20English%3A%20%E2%80%9Cstumbling%20stones%E2%80%9D\),.locations%20in%2017%20European%20countries](https://www.germany.info/us-en/welcome/03-Jewish-Life-Germany//1308424#:~:text=the%2020th%20century,.Called%20the%20Stolpersteine%20(in%20English%3A%20%E2%80%9Cstumbling%20stones%E2%80%9D),.locations%20in%2017%20European%20countries)

¹⁰¹ Carrier, Peter. Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany since 1989. 1st ed. Berghahn Books, 2005. pp.106 and 111.

resilience. (Examples: The Holocaust Memorial at California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, US designed by George Segal in 1984 or The Holocaust Memorial of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation in Miami, US inaugurated in 1985).

Memorial plaques: Memorial plaques typically in the postwar period were designed on buildings, structures or placed in cemeteries to offer a commemorative space or resting place for those who perished in the Holocaust. Commemorative plaques in this case concentrated on individuals' memory rather than a collective and were installed on buildings associated with the tragic events of the World War II. These memorials also often incorporate symbolic elements and features like inscriptions, eternal flames, and walls with names of victims.

Counter memorials and monuments: There was an evident shift in the 1960s memorialization processes in Europe from heroic memorialization to memorials and monuments that are not static or last long but diminishing with time. Instead of traditional memorials that deliver distinct messages, these counter memorials offer an alternative way of remembering by inviting the viewers to discuss and question the narrative behind the installation.¹⁰² (Examples: *Hamburger Feuersturm* designed by Viennese sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka ('Hamburg Firestorm') in 1985 or *Eleven Emlékmű* (Living Memorial) located in Liberty Square, Budapest, Hungary, 2014 by civic initiation)¹⁰³¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Marcoci, Roxana. "Counter-Monuments and Memory." MoMA 3, no. 9 (2000): 2–5.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4420531>.

¹⁰³ Memorials in Hamburg-In Remembrance of Nazi crimes. Counter-memorial to the '76th Monument' <https://gedenkstaetten-in-hamburg.de/en/memorials/show/counter-memorial-to-the-76th-monument>

¹⁰⁴ Erőss, Ágnes. "'In Memory of victims': Monument and Counter-Monument in Liberty Square, Budapest". Hungarian Geographical Bulletin 65 (3). 2016. pp.237-54. <https://doi.org/10.15201/hungeobull.65.3.3>.

Museums and Exhibition Spaces: Holocaust museums and exhibition spaces are dedicated to preserving historical artifacts, documents, and testimonies related to the Holocaust. They provide comprehensive educational experiences for visitors to learn about the events and consequences of the Holocaust. (Examples: Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel established in 1953 or The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1993).

Memorial Gardens: Some memorials are designed as serene gardens or landscapes, providing a peaceful space for reflection and contemplation. Trees, flowers, and water features are often used to create a calming atmosphere. (Examples: Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial in London, 1983 created by Mark Badger or The Besser Holocaust Memorial Garden in Atlanta, Georgia US in 2010 owned by the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta)¹⁰⁵

Memorial services: For Holocaust victims are solemn and meaningful gatherings that are held to remember and honor the millions of lives lost during the Holocaust, a tragic period in history characterized by mass genocide and atrocities committed by the Nazi regime during World War II. These services are typically held at various times and locations, including Holocaust remembrance days, anniversaries of key events such as deportations of Jews, or as part of larger commemorative events.

Yizkor books (memorial books): Yizkor books represent a distinctive category within the typology of Holocaust memorials. Functioning as symbolic burial sites, these books serve as portable monuments that commemorate both individuals and the broader Jewish

¹⁰⁵ Patient, Alan. Holocaust Memorial - Hyde Park. On London Remembers webpage. Erection date: 1983. <https://www.londonremembers.com/memorials/holocaust-memorial-hyde-park>

community. Typically created by local Jewish communities, yizkor books include photographs, maps, illustrations, and narratives that honor their members and document their collective history. As “communal memorial projects”, they encapsulate a rich tapestry of personal stories and images, often featuring photographs of local martyr memorials and monuments.¹⁰⁶ Through their content and form, yizkor books play a vital role in preserving memory and fostering community remembrance.

Memorial Walls: A common typology is the memorial wall, which may display names, dates, gravestones or messages related to the victims. Visitors can often leave flowers, candles, or other tokens of remembrance. (Examples: Shoah Wall of Names Memorial in Vienna, Austria completed in 2021, “the Wailing Wall” Holocaust memorial wall in Kazimierz Dolny, Poland in 1984 designed by Tadeusz Augustyniak).¹⁰⁷

Holocaust Memorial Centers: These are comprehensive centers dedicated to Holocaust remembrance and education. They may include museums, research facilities, educational programs, and spaces for contemplation. Memorial centers often linked with memorial plaques or monuments on the site as well. (Example: The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest, opened in 2004).

Railway Memorials: Some memorials are located at former concentration camps or train stations that served as deportation points for Holocaust victims. These memorials often incorporate actual railway tracks and carriages to symbolize the deportation process.

¹⁰⁶ Horváth, Rita. “The Role of the Survivors on the Remembrance of the Holocaust: Memorial Monuments and Yizkor Books,” *The Routledge History of the Holocaust*, edited by Jonathan C. Friedman. London: Routledge, 2010. pp. 470-472.

¹⁰⁷ Sygowski, Paweł and Emil Majuk. Kazimierz Dolny – guidebook on "Shtetl Routes. Vestiges of Jewish cultural heritage in cross-border tourism" webpage. 2015.08.05. <https://shtetlroutes.eu/en/kazimierz-dolny-przewodnik/>

(Examples: The Track 17 memorial at Grunewald railway station in Berlin inaugurated in 1998 or “Holokauszt 60.” Railway memorial placed in Szolnok railway station in Hungary in 2004).¹⁰⁸

Stolpersteine (Stumbling Stones): Stolpersteine by German artist, Gunter Demnig are small, brass memorial plaques embedded in the pavement in front of the former residences of Holocaust victims. Each stone bears the name and fate of the person who once lived there, reminding passersby of the individuals who suffered during the Holocaust. Originally started in 1992 but the project is ongoing and have been installed in more than 20 countries so far.¹⁰⁹

Educational Pathways and Trails: Certain memorials are designed as pathways or trails, guiding visitors through various sites and providing historical information at key points.¹¹⁰

Digital Memorials: In the digital age, there are also online memorials, websites, and interactive projects, documents, images and videos dedicated to Holocaust remembrance and education. (Example: A digital monument to commemorate the fates of the Holocaust victims of the Szeged-Bácska region that acts as a “living archive” by the Foundation for the Szeged Synagogue, Hungary in 2021).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ The Track 17 memorial at Grunewald railway station. On History at Deutschebahn webpage. https://www.deutschebahn.com/en/group/history/topics/platform17_memorial-6929106

¹⁰⁹ Demnig, Gunter. “Stolpersteine”. Access date: 17. 06. 2024. <https://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home>

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, the pathway leading to the Martyr monument(1948) in Balf. In 2007, the monument was expanded to include a memorial garden and a newly created pathway. This polished stone pathway invites visitors to pause and reflect as they approach the column, while a small garden nearby encourages meditation.(in: Vargha, Mihály. Balfi kőtablák. On “Építészforum”. 2009.09.04. <https://epiteszforum.hu/balfi-kotablak>

¹¹¹A digital monument to commemorate the fates of the Holocaust victims of the Szeged-Bácska region. 2021 IHRA Grant Projects. 14. May.2021. <https://holocaustremembrance.com/news/2021-ihra-grant-projects#6-a-digital-monument-to-commemorate-the-fates-of-the-holocaust-victims-of-the-szeged-backa-region>

Combination Memorials: Some memorials may combine different typologies to create a more comprehensive and impactful commemorative space. For example, an architectural structure could house a museum or exhibition space, complemented by sculptures and gardens for reflection. (Example: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, Germany opened in 2005).

It's essential to remember that each memorial design is unique and intended to evoke a specific emotional response and understanding of the Holocaust's impact.¹¹² The typology chosen for each memorial often reflects the vision and intentions of the designers, as well as the historical and cultural context in which the memorial is situated. These memorials play a crucial role in remembering the Holocaust, honoring its victims, and educating present and future generations about the atrocities committed during that dark period in history. However, when analyzing these memorials, one ought to take into account that these memorials are always built with certain agendas by various actors whether they are state or civic initiatives. Additionally, the constructions of these memorials are undoubtedly part of a larger historical, political or social discussion, and that their aesthetics as well as their location play a significant role, would put the critical approach toward Holocaust memorials in a broader context of memory politics.¹¹³ Memory politics in this case serves as an instrument to critically understand the narrative behind the creation of these above-mentioned memorials and that will be further discussed in the following chapter.

¹¹² Niven, Bill, and Chloe E. M. Paver, eds. *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. p.10.

¹¹³ Pakier, Małgorzata, and Bo Stråth, eds. *A European Memory: Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. NED-New edition, 1. Berghahn Books, 2010. p.5.

I.II Memory politics

As it has been discussed in the previous part the wealth of source material on various facets of memorialization demonstrates that the concept is cross-disciplinary, allowing academics from diverse scholarly backgrounds to approach the topic of memorials in a multitude of ways. The aim in this section is to concentrate predominantly on the nexus between memory and political power and to apply a critical approach of political instrumentalization when looking at various layers of memorialization policies crafted by different agents from local, national, and supranational level.¹¹⁴ Memory politics has been extensively studied by scholars from various disciplines, including history, sociology, political science, cultural studies, and memory studies. Numerous academics have contributed to our understanding of how memory is used and manipulated for political ends, and how memory politics shapes collective memory and national identities.¹¹⁵ Memory politics refers to the deliberate and strategic construction, manipulation, and instrumentalization of collective memory for political purposes.¹¹⁶

Memory politics as the exterior canvas surrounding the overall topic refers to methods or ways in which collective memory is managed, occupies a place in between two major fields in the humanities. The first one is, history of politics (*Geschichtspolitik*) that defines the broad use and abuse of history for political purposes. The political interpretation

¹¹⁴ Miller, Alexei. Russia: Power and History, edited by Samuel A. Greene. Engaging History: The problems and politics of memory in Russia and the post-Socialist state. Working Papers No. 2. Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center. 2010. p.14.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Jeffrey K. Olick: The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility, Alexei Miller: The Convolutions of Historical Politics, Bill Niven and Chloe Paver: Memorialization in Germany since 1945, Jan-Werner Müller: Memory and Power in Post-War Europe, Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, Claudio Fogu: The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe

¹¹⁶ Müller, Jan-Werner, ed. Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p.20.

and manipulation of history associated with the events of the World War II represent a larger phenomenon of re-inventing wartime and postwar reality, as well as national self-representation in postwar Europe.¹¹⁷ The other is the relatively recently developed interdisciplinary scholarly field, memory studies. Memory studies examines the ways an individual or a collective representation of the past changes through social discourses and social practices.¹¹⁸ The increasing focus on memory politics is closely connected to the Holocaust and the idea of remembering or in various cases the idea of forgetting, which occupies an important role in the structural development of my thesis.

The key aspect of memory politics is the politics of commemoration via monuments, memorials, and remembrance of certain past events. The stakeholders behind shaping the way history is remembered plays a core element in this dissertation, thus categorization of the various agencies shaping collective memory will be discussed afterwards. Certainly, memory politics is often shaped by state actors, hence special attention needs to be paid on events or historical figures that are officially commemorated, as well as to what research gets funded, what archival sources are attainable for public, and what kind of publications attract most public attention. As noted by Alexei Miller in his introduction of *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*, the despotic style of Communist countries included a hegemony over every sphere of politics which made it possible to manipulate national narratives of history and memory.¹¹⁹ By censoring publications,

¹¹⁷ Miller, Alexei. Russia: Power and History, edited by Samuel A. Greene. Engaging History: The problems and politics of memory in Russia and the post-Socialist state. Working Papers No. 2. Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center. 2010. p.15.

¹¹⁸ Olick, Jeffrey K. The Politics of Regret : On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. 2013. p. 9.

¹¹⁹ Miller, Alexei. Introduction in "The Convolutions of Historical Politics" edited by Miller Alexei and Lipman Maria. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2012. pp.2-3.

historical research, and articles that sheds light on local histories of perpetration or on national responsibility during World War II, many historians and research institutions were exposed to governmental control.

It is important to note that despite such political predominance over commemorative functions of the Holocaust there were plethora of remembrance in Hungary since 1945 of which the dissertation will further explore. Nonetheless, after the fall of the Communism, amidst the newly established democracies in Eastern Europe, the general hegemony of the state was stirred by the emergence of other actors. With the gradually increasing civic engagement, diverse perspectives have emerged to challenge significantly the dominant narrative on Holocaust memorialization of the previous decades. Consequently, the palette of diverse actors that are significant in light of my thesis will not only include state actors, as political parties and politicians, but also supranational actors such as the European Union and NATO, as well as various civic initiations and research organizations, institutions, associations, and public media.¹²⁰

Therefore, I would like to accentuate the fact that collective memory is not exclusively nation related but a concatenation of various factors that ought to be scrutinize jointly, in order to accurately understand the evolvement of Holocaust memory as a phenomenon as well as a tool for past and present power constellation. Accordingly, in my research I intend to explore these different layers of memory politics, that exist also on distinct levels. In other words, I will focus on the state level and the civic society level but at the same time taking both the transnational, and supranational level into consideration.

¹²⁰ Miller. Alexei. Introduction in "The Convolutions of Historical Politics". pp.7-9.

The existence and even their entanglements of these memory strata demonstrate the presence of various collective memories.

In this part, I will further explore the multifaceted nature of memory politics, its role in nation-building, identity formation, and its impact on reconciliation and conflict resolution. Governments, institutions, and social groups employ memory politics to advance political agendas, foster national identity, and control historical memory.¹²¹ By critically examining memory politics, the aim is to illustrate the power and complexity of its nature in shaping historical narratives and influencing public perception. Another paramount point to consider when elaborating upon memory politics are the actors (organizations, institutions, politicians, historians, artists, activists, NGOs, who play a crucial part in shaping, transforming, and crafting memory). By shifting the focus on the act of remembrance to the actors of remembering, it allows us to explore the underlying social and political motivations and consequences behind them. Such perspective also prompts us to elucidate on the synergy of local, national, international, supranational, transnational, and global dynamics impacting memory.¹²²

Firstly, memory politics plays a pivotal role in nation-building efforts, where governments and political institutions selectively emphasize historical events and identities to foster a shared national consciousness. In constructing "official memory," ruling elites often promote a cohesive historical narrative that unifies citizens under a common heritage and shared destiny. By suppressing or marginalizing dissenting historical accounts,

¹²¹ Niven, Bill, and Chloe E. M. Paver, eds. *Memorialization in Germany since 1945*. Basingstoke [England]: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010. p.276.

¹²² Wüstenberg, Jenny. "Introduction.: Agency and Practice in the Making of Transnational Memory Spaces." In *Agency in Transnational Memory Politics*, edited by Jenny Wüstenberg and Aline Sierp, 1st ed., 4:3–23. Berghahn Books, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21hrgfv.5>. p.14.

memory politics seeks to create a homogeneous national identity and strengthen social cohesion. National and local governments often take initiatives to establish official memorials and monuments to commemorate historical events, individuals, or groups. The governmental agencies may provide funding, support, and legal protection to ensure the preservation of these sites.¹²³

In response to official memory, counter-memory emerges as an alternative version of the past promoted by marginalized groups or dissenting voices. Counter-memory challenges dominant narratives, seeking to correct historical injustices or expose historical myths perpetuated by memory politics.¹²⁴ Grassroots community organizations and NGOs focused on human rights, social justice, or specific historical issues are also involved in memorialization efforts and in preservation of local history and memory. These civic initiations and independent sectors might work to raise awareness about lesser-known historical events, advocate for the recognition of marginalized or oppressed groups, and create spaces that challenge dominant historical narratives.¹²⁵ Memory wars often ensue when state and civic initiations are confronted by one another in competing to establish their version of history as the dominant and favored memory.

Memory politics is also essential in post-conflict societies, where transitional justice mechanisms aim to address past atrocities and promote reconciliation. Truth commissions, reparations, and memorialization efforts become integral to shaping collective memory of

¹²³ Lebow, Richard Ned, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*. Duke University Press, 2006. pp. 3-4.

¹²⁴ Goldman, Natasha. "Introduction" in *Memory Passages : Holocaust Memorials in the United States and Germany*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 2020.p.7.

¹²⁵ Olick, Jeffrey K. *The Politics of Regret : On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. 2013. p. 123.

traumatic events and their aftermath.¹²⁶ This is very much the case for those Central-Eastern European countries when the possibility to join the European Union surfaced in the early 2000s and onwards. Consequently, international and supranational organizations such as European Union, European Commission, or UNESCO indicates major relevance within the stakeholders and could entice countries to use Holocaust memory to foster alliances or promote foreign political objectives.

Additional agencies of memorialization are the museums, galleries, and cultural centers that contribute to memorialization by curating exhibitions, artifacts, and educational programs by providing context and understanding of historical events. These institutions shape public perceptions of history and facilitate dialogue around complex issues however it is important to note that their envisioned narratives are often regulated by the state.¹²⁷ Similarly, educational institutions such as schools and universities play a role in shaping collective memory by teaching history and social studies. Educators have the power to influence how students understand and engage with historical events, impacting the formation of individual and societal memory. Yet in many countries, including Hungary, the textbooks for teaching history are required to follow the same narrative that was crafted by the government therefore promoting a politicized version of the history of particular events.¹²⁸

Artists and architects contribute to the physical manifestation of memory through the design and creation of memorials and monuments. Their creative choices in terms of

¹²⁶ Carrier, Peter. *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany since 1989*. 1st ed. Berghahn Books, 2005.p.179.

¹²⁷ Miller. Alexei. Introduction in "The Convolutions of Historical Politics". p.105.

¹²⁸ Ibid.96.

aesthetics, symbolism, and form can evoke emotional responses and influence the meaning attributed to these spaces.¹²⁹ Furthermore, media outlets and journalists play a role in shaping public memory through their reporting and storytelling. Whether it is documentaries, films, literature, memoirs or news coverage they can amplify certain historical events, shed light on overlooked stories, and provide ongoing coverage of commemorative events. Media is an undeniably powerful force in shaping memory politics, and its role extends beyond mere documentation still it could be used as an effective tool for political instrumentalization.¹³⁰

Holocaust memory politics is a multifaceted and ever-evolving realm that encompasses the intricate interplay of various factors, including shifting societal attitudes, advancements in historical research methodologies, dynamic political landscapes, and the active participation of a wide array of stakeholders. Rooted in the atrocities of the Holocaust, this subject matter is imbued with intense emotional significance and serves as a potent lens through which societies grapple with their past, confront their collective memory, and shape their present and future.

Societal attitudes toward the Holocaust and its commemoration have undergone significant transformations over time. In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the focus was often on mourning and memorialization, with survivors and their testimonies playing a central role. As years passed, the Holocaust became a global touchstone for understanding the depths of human cruelty and the dangers of unchecked bigotry. This evolution has led

¹²⁹ Young, James. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1993. p.2.

¹³⁰ Lebow, Richard Ned, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*. Duke University Press, 2006.p.10.

to more nuanced discussions about how memory intersects with broader historical narratives, fostering debates about national responsibility, complicity, and the challenges of memorializing a complex history.

Historical research has been instrumental in reshaping the way the Holocaust is understood. Advances in scholarship, including access to previously classified documents, survivor accounts, and interdisciplinary research methods, have yielded a deeper comprehension of the events, motivations, and systemic factors that underpinned the Holocaust. These insights have prompted a reassessment of various aspects, from the role of ordinary individuals to the collaboration of various institutions in perpetrating and enabling the genocide. This dynamic research landscape continues to challenge and enrich memory politics by presenting new layers of complexity and nuance to the prevailing narratives.

Political developments have also exerted a profound influence on Holocaust memory politics. The Cold War era, for instance, saw memory instrumentalized for political ends, with both Western and Eastern blocs rivaling to portray themselves as the legitimate heirs of the anti-fascist resistance.¹³¹ More recently, the rise of far-right movements, the resurgence of antisemitic sentiments, and debates over immigration have stirred new tensions in Holocaust memory politics.¹³² In some cases, memory has been weaponized to

¹³¹ Lebow, Richard Ned, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*. Duke University Press, 2006.p.25.

¹³² Knap, Árpád és Bartha, Diána és Barna, Ildikó. Trianon és a holokauszt emlékezetpolitikai jellegzetességeinek elemzése természetesnyelv-feldolgozás használatával. *Szociológiai Szemle*, 31 (4). 2021. pp. 28-62.

downplay or distort historical realities, making the struggle over accurate representation and commemoration all the more crucial.¹³³

A diverse array of stakeholders, ranging from survivors and their descendants to governments, museums, educators, and various interest groups, are engaged in shaping Holocaust memory politics. These stakeholders often hold differing perspectives on how the Holocaust should be remembered and commemorated, leading to complex negotiations over issues such as the appropriate language, imagery, and educational approaches. This multiplicity of voices can enrich the discourse but can also lead to disagreements about which narratives should be prioritized and how the memory of the Holocaust can be effectively harnessed for education and prevention. The way societies remember and commemorate the Holocaust carries profound implications for historical consciousness and identity formation. Holocaust memory is intertwined with broader narratives of national and collective identity, and its representation can impact how a society perceives its own history and its place in the world.¹³⁴ Moreover, the lessons drawn from Holocaust remembrance have far-reaching implications for the prevention of future atrocities, as understanding the conditions that led to genocide can inform efforts to recognize and address early warning signs of potential violence and discrimination.

In conclusion, Holocaust memory politics is a constantly evolving and intricate domain where shifting societal attitudes, advancing historical research, political dynamics, and the engagement of diverse stakeholders intersect. As a subject of deep sensitivity and emotional intensity, it shapes the ways societies come to terms with their past, construct

¹³³ Miller, Alexei. Introduction in "The Convolutions of Historical Politics". p.107.

¹³⁴ Lebow, Richard Ned, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*. Duke University Press, 2006.p.138.

their present, and work toward a future free from the horrors of genocide. Its significance extends beyond mere commemoration, it could use and abuse historical consciousness, identity formation, and the collective commitment to prevent the repetition of such heinous acts.

I.III Memory Studies

The last part of the typology section concentrates on the evolution and the role of memory studies in connection with politics of remembrance. Memory constitutes a significant realm for interdisciplinary investigation, encompassing a wide spectrum of disciplines including history, sociology, international relations, art, literary and media studies, anthropology, philosophy, theology, psychology, and neuroscience. Consequently, it serves as a nexus that harmonizes the domains of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences in a manner that is distinct and unparalleled. Memory studies as a topic of academic interest emerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, albeit it is known that the subject of memory or the art of mnemonics have fascinated people's mind since the ancient times.¹³⁵ Classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle offered lasting analogies, such as the comparison of the mind to a wax tablet or the form of memory and the idea of memorization.¹³⁶

Memory studies as an academic discipline is considered a relatively new area of research, still it has experienced three waves of evolution already and this section of the thesis aims to trace those key shifts in methodologies that have shaped the way individuals and societies construct and engage with their past.¹³⁷ As mentioned before memory studies stands at the crossroads of psychology, sociology, history, cultural studies, and other fields, offering a comprehensive framework to explore the multifaceted nature of memory. Examining memorialization through the lens of memory studies allows for a deeper

¹³⁵ Yates, Frances A. (Frances Amelia), 1899-1981. *The art of memory* / by Frances A. Yates University of Chicago Press Chicago 1966, pp3-4.

¹³⁶ Michael Specter, "Partial Recall," *The New Yorker* (May 19, 2014): 38-48.

¹³⁷ Erll, Astrid (2011) *Travelling Memory*, *Parallax*, 17:4, 4-18, DOI: 10.1080/13534645.2011.605570

analysis of the complex interactions between individual and collective memories, societal narratives, and the shaping of historical consciousness. The discipline has evolved over time, from its origins in the exploration of individual recollection to its contemporary engagement with collective memory, trauma, digital archives, and the intersections between personal narratives and broader societal contexts.

This interdisciplinary field draws from a diverse range of methodologies, including archival research, oral history, narrative analysis, material culture studies, and even neuroscience, to unravel the intricacies of memory.¹³⁸ By studying both individual and collective memory, memory studies shed light on the mechanisms by which societies come to terms with their pasts, commemorate significant events, and grapple with the challenges of reconciling diverse perspectives on historical truths. Within the following pages I will discuss the basis of the different waves in memory studies while acknowledging the scholars who investigated the interplay between memory and history.

The roots of the first wave of memory studies can be traced back to various intellectual currents, including psychology, sociology, history, and literary studies.¹³⁹ Scholars were influenced by the work of theorists such as Maurice Halbwachs, who emphasized the social and collective nature of memory, art historian Aby Warburg to whom we owe the term social memory, Sigmund Freud, whose psychoanalytic theories provided insights into the workings of memory on an individual level, and Emile Durkheim who coined the term "collective consciousness" to describe the shared beliefs, values, and

¹³⁸ Olick, Jeffrey K. *The Politics of Regret : On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis. 2013. p. 23.

¹³⁹ Erll, Astrid. *Travelling Memory*. *Parallax*, 17(4). 2011. p.4.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605570>

symbols that form the basis of social cohesion.¹⁴⁰ In addition to psychology, sociology, collective memory, shift in historiography, the traumatic events of the twentieth century's World Wars, cultural movements, philosophical studies likewise influenced the development of memory studies.¹⁴¹ The first wave of memory studies was characterized by an emphasis on the psychological, sociological, and historical dimensions of memory, setting the stage for subsequent waves of scholarship that would expand the field's scope and engage with new theoretical perspectives.

Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist and one of the pioneers of memory studies, introduced influential concepts related to collective memory and it have influenced a diverse range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, and cultural studies. Scholars continue to build upon his ideas, exploring the social and cultural aspects of memory, the politics of memory, and the ways in which memory shapes individual and collective identities. Maurice Halbwachs' legacy as a trailblazer in memory studies endures as his ideas remain central to ongoing discussions about how societies remember and interpret their pasts. Halbwachs's fascination with memory merged the perception of two significant figures in late nineteenth century France, philosopher Henri Bergson and sociologist Emile Durkheim. Halbwachs theorized that the ability of individuals to maintain a consistent and enduring recollection is reliant on their affiliation with specific social settings. These social frameworks serve as essential foundations for personal memory. Within these groups, the capacity to recollect is facilitated, and the manner in which we

¹⁴⁰ Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization : Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2011. pp.21-23.

¹⁴¹ Sierp, A. *Memory Studies – Development, Debates and Directions*. In M. Berek, K. Chmelar, O. Dimbath, H. Haag, M. Heinlein, N. Leonhard, V. Rauer, & G. Sebald (Eds.), *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung* Springer. 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26593-9_42-1

remember is guided, often with the assistance of the materials provided by the group. In essence, all personal acts of remembrance transpire within social settings, influenced by social prompts and cues. Thus, Halbwachs made a clear distinction between “autobiographical memory” and “historical memory”. “Autobiographical memory” pertains to personal life events that an individual recollects due to direct experience. In contrast, “historical memory” pertains to remnants of events that enable groups to establish an ongoing sense of identity across the passage of time.¹⁴²

Halbwachs points out that the presence of diverse collective memories, with each social group possessing its distinct collective memory that forms over a defined period, is shaped by the group's characteristics. While individuals are the agents of memory, their recollections are influenced by their membership within specific social contexts. They draw upon this context to recollect and reconstruct the past, with national celebrations evoking memories imbued with emotional resonance. According to him every collective memory necessitates the pillar of the group bounded by space and time.¹⁴³

The emergence of the second wave of memory studies was centered on the concept of nations as significant arenas of remembrance. This wave gained momentum with the publication of notable works by Pierre Nora (1984-1992) and Jan Assmann (1992) during the 1980s and early 1990s. Unlike the first wave, this phase exhibited a thematic concentration on nations and their engagement with the traumatic events of the twentieth century. However, it also attracted criticism for its assumption that memory communities

¹⁴² Olick, Jeffrey K. “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures.” *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/370189>. pp.334-335.

¹⁴³ Llobera, Joseph R. “Halbwachs, Nora and ‘History’ versus ‘Collective Memory’: A Research Note.” *Durkheimian Studies / Études Durkheimiennes* 1 (1995): 35–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44708512>. p. 37.

within nations were characterized by homogeneity and unity, and for its tendency to attribute the driving force of remembrance primarily to elite members of society. With such ideas concerns surfaces that social groups are reckoned as fixed constructs.

The term sites of memory or as in French *lieux de mémoire* coined by French historian Pierre Nora made a profound influence on scholars within the field of cultural history and memory studies. Nora argues that the desire to preserve *milieux de mémoire* – real environments of memory- that symbolizes the exchange of memories between individuals has shifted to the establishment of *lieux de mémoire* -sites of memories- that focuses more on how to remember reality. *Lieux de mémoire*, according to Nora, appears as a socially constructed approach that maintains memory ‘artificially’ throughout monuments, museums, and archives. Given Nora’s point of view this conscious act of the society for reconstructing the past via sites of memory may pose danger for the disappearance of ‘true memory’.¹⁴⁴ True memory, as the people’s of memory, their rituals and their tradition, when subjected to interpretation and revision through the lenses of history its loses its authenticity. A society that preserves its past in museums or in monuments can no longer claim to anchor its true memory but to exhibit an altered perception of it.¹⁴⁵

Aleida and Jan Assmann as mentioned above are also leading figures in memory studies, they both made substantial contributions to the study of cultural memory and collective identity. Aleida Assmann's exploration of cultural memory in Western civilization raises important questions about the politics of memory and the selective

¹⁴⁴ Nora, Pierre. ‘Between Memory and History: *Lieux de mémoire*’ in representations, No. 26, University of California Press. 1989. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520>. pp. 7-10.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p.13.

remembrance of certain events over others. She examines how cultural memory can be manipulated, contested, and even suppressed in the service of political agendas or social narratives. In other words, she states that with the construction of national memorials the process of remembrance becomes a governmental duty. In this respect, the state-sponsored commemoration will isolate not only the individuals' memory but their wish for a more personal remembering. On a further note, she asserts that 'while individual recollections spontaneously fade and die with their former owners, new forms of memory are reconstructed within a transgenerational framework, and on an institutional level, within a deliberate policy of remembering or forgetting.'¹⁴⁶ To rephrase it, without preserving individuals' memory there is a fear that the memory conveyed through either second or third generations of the postwar era or through state narratives will lead to misinterpretations and becomes distorted. Similarly, to Aleida, Jan Assmann also stresses the importance of institutions in manipulating memory. According to him, the way past is remembered, preserved, or valued gives us scholars an indication of the tendencies of that particular society.¹⁴⁷

The second wave in memory studies is also regarded as a memory boom in which the Holocaust plays a key part. It is true that already the First World War led to a different way of memorializations in the form of war memorials, but it was the Holocaust that truly transformed the significance, the actors, and the spectrum of remembrance. With the rise of television, film, and later digital media allowed for more widespread dissemination of information and stories about the Holocaust. Documentaries, feature films, and online

¹⁴⁶ Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>.

platforms played a significant role in educating the public and fostering discussions about the Holocaust. With the rise of these new media outlets, Holocaust survivors were encouraged to share their stories, their resilience and survival narratives that inspired people to engage with Holocaust memory and draw lessons from their experiences. Moreover, Governments and international organizations increasingly recognized the importance of Holocaust that led to the opening of museums, inauguration of various memorials. At last, Scholars from various disciplines, including history, sociology, literature, psychology, and cultural studies, contributed to a rich body of research on the Holocaust. This interdisciplinary approach added depth to our understanding of the Holocaust's historical, social, and psychological dimensions.¹⁴⁸ The memory boom evidently cannot be solely explained by the tragic event of the Holocaust, yet it led to critical discussions about memory, trauma, history, and the ethical responsibilities of societies to remember.

In the third stage of memory studies, there is a heightened focus on comprehending the intricate, multifaceted, and dynamic nature of remembrance. Recent research is considering global influences while still acknowledging the significance of local and national contexts.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, scholars in this phase are displaying renewed interest in examining the consequences of already existing research on memory that extend beyond national boundaries, operating within a global framework. Religion, ideology, ethnicity, media, and gender have emerged as pivotal factors around which research is centered (as

¹⁴⁸ Olick Jeffrey K Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy. 2011. *The Collective Memory Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press. Pp.29-31.

¹⁴⁹ Feindt, Gregor, Félix Krawatzek, Daniela Mehler, Friedmann Pestel, and Rieke Trimcev. "Entagled memory: toward a third wave in memory studies." *History and Theory* 53, no. 1 (2014): 24–44.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24543010>

seen in works by Reading in 2016 and Hoskins in 2018).¹⁵⁰ Within this context, Europe is being contemplated as a potential 'region of memory,' and the exploration of transnational memory connections at the European level is receiving sustained attention. Published studies examine the concept of collective memory in the age of globalization. "The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age," authored by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider is an example of such that focuses on the ways in which globalization, technological advancements, and transnational exchanges have impacted the propagation and reception of Holocaust memory.¹⁵¹ Globalization, waves of migrations, and digital age continues to shape the contemporary landscape of memory in which both individuals and communities engage with multiple layers of memory. With the number of platforms for publishing scholarly on memory studies expanded, a parallel development emerged in the form of the establishment of academic positions and degree programs, conferences, organizations such as the CES Research Network on Transnational Memory and Identity' chaired by Aline Sierp and Jenny Wüstenberg, the Memory Studies Association (MSA) current president Wulf Kansteiner, dedicated to specific fields of study. Thus, it is definite that the dialogue about memory practices is an enduring subject and only continue to evolve by occupying scholars attention for a long time.

In terms of this thesis comprehending the relationship between history and memory through the lenses of memory studies is essential. To put it rather simply historians are seen as the one who remembers or the guardians of collective memory, preserving the record of

¹⁵⁰ Sierp, A. (2021). Memory Studies – Development, Debates and Directions. In M. Berek, K. Chmelar, O. Dimbath, H. Haag, M. Heinlein, N. Leonhard, V. Rauer, & G. Sebold (Eds.), *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Gedächtnisforschung* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26593-9_42-1

¹⁵¹ Levy, Daniel and Sznaider, Nathan. *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. Temple University Press. 2006.

public events documented in writing for the recognition of those involved, unravel the narratives conveyed by the physical manifestation of memory. Both history and memory have become increasingly intricate subjects, no longer viewed as straightforward endeavors. Recollecting the past and chronicling it have lost their once-unquestioned innocence. Neither memories nor historical accounts maintain their former objectivity. In both realms, awareness of deliberate or unconscious filtering, interpretation, and distortion has arisen. These processes are influenced by societal, political factors and by stakeholders being involved. The dissertation attempts to combine the different approaches of memorialization to offer a comprehensive understanding of the discourses circling around the ways of Holocaust remembrance in postwar Hungary until 1990.

Chapter I. Hungary in the Postwar Period: From Restoration to Sovietization, 1945-1947

Chapter I.I Searching for Memorialization Practices - Introduction

*“She just sits and sits waiting for her daughter,
Like a stiff statue of pain into stone,
Bácska, Bánat cannot yield as much crop,
As much tears that wash her face”¹⁵²*

This chapter seeks to overturn the commonly held perception that Hungary's wartime responsibilities and Holocaust remembrance were silenced in the immediate aftermath of World War II. By revealing the existence of commemorative efforts and public debates, the chapter underscores the complexity of Hungary's engagement with its historical legacy. By linking these internal dynamics to the shifting international context, the chapter unveils a multifaceted narrative that encapsulates both Hungary's internal initiatives and its responsiveness to evolving global norms and expectations.

Hungary was linked to the end of World War II through the appearance of the liberating Red Army and the subsequent occupation. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the presence of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Soviet sphere of influence did not preclude Hungary's democratic aspirations during a period when the country sought to establish a pluralistic, democratic political system. While under Soviet influence, sovereignty diminished, and the political system ceased to be multi-party, accompanied by stringent restrictions imposed on both political and cultural life. Nevertheless, nuances and

¹⁵² “Csak ül és ül várja vissza lányát,/Mint fájdalom kőbe meredt szobra,/Nem terem annyi búzát Bácska, Bánat,/Mint amennyi könny az arcát mossa..” Gelléri, Miklós. A fájdalom szobra. (The statue of sorrow) in Újélet. Budapest. 1945. December 4.

changes characterized these processes. In his book, Romsics Ignác points out that this progression accelerated by 1947-48, culminating in the complete adoption of the new constitution in 1949.¹⁵³ The decision to limit the first chapter's scope from 1944/45 to 1949 raises intriguing questions, yet historian Palasik Mária introduces an interesting perspective. She underscores the coalition period between 1944 and 1947 as an opportunity for establishing the rule of law.¹⁵⁴ This brief timeframe harbored the potential for democratic and societal arrangements, which unfortunately gradually disintegrated from 1947 onwards. These transformations and nuances were not confined to the realms of politics and legal systems but were also palpable in the processes of remembrance. To adequately illustrate the transformation of memorialization process, I deemed it essential to further disaggregate the initial period from 1944 to 1949, thus scrutinizing the years specifically from 1944 to 1947.

Hungary's total losses within the state territory between 1941 and 1944 are estimated at approximately 830,000 to 950,000 individuals, with two-thirds of Hungary's wartime human losses estimated to be Jewish.¹⁵⁵ The majority of these losses comprise those who were deported and subsequently killed in labor or extermination camps, but many also perished in forced labor, during the Arrow Cross massacres in Pest, death marches, or within ghettos. It is only estimable that 80% of Hungary's Jewish population perished in the Holocaust, did not return, or left the country. The Holocaust fundamentally

¹⁵³ Romsics, Ignác. *Magyarország története a XX. Században*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó. 1999. Pp. 271.

¹⁵⁴ Palasik, Mária. *A jogállamiság megteremtésének kísérlete és kudarca Magyarországon 1944-1949 in Politikatörténeti Füzetek XVII*. Edited by György Földes. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. 2000.pp.15-16.

¹⁵⁵ *Magyarország vesztesége a második világháborúban in Magyar Elektronikus Könyvtár - Országos SzéchényiKönyvtár*. <https://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/74.html#:~:text=Magyarorsz%C3%A1g%20C3%B6sszvesztes%C3%A9ge%20az%201941%E2%80%931944,magyar%20C3%A9rkezett%20a%20jelenlegi%20ter%C3%BCletre>. And Don, Yehuda, and George Magos. "The Demographic Development of Hungarian Jewry." *Jewish Social Studies* 45, no. 3/4 (1983): 189–216. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4467225>.

altered Hungarian Jewish society in every aspect, as the significant loss of rural Jewish communities shifted the ratio between rural and urban Jews.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it cannot be claimed that this change influenced the proportion of remembrance regarding the deceased or victims between rural and urban areas. As evident in the chapters, the remaining rural Jewish population also placed significant emphasis on commemorating their martyrs through physical memorials and organizing communal remembrance events.

In the aftermath of World War II, Hungary grappled with the complexities of commemorating the Holocaust's victims, facing dual challenges: determining both the appropriate manner and timing for these remembrances. Different factions within the Jewish community proposed distinct dates for commemoration, reflecting the diversity of thought within the community. The Orthodox Rabbinical Council, for instance, designated the 20th of sivan in 1946 as a day of mourning for those lost during the war, a date strategically positioned between the first and last deportations from Hungary.¹⁵⁷ In contrast, the Neolog leadership chose March 19, the anniversary of the German occupation, as their designated day of remembrance, viewing this date as the beginning of a tragic chapter in the history of Hungarian Jewry.¹⁵⁸

Despite these formal designations, actual commemorative practices did not consistently align with these dates. In the early post-war years, especially in rural areas, memorial services were often organized around significant local events, such as the deportation of Jewish residents or their arrival at Auschwitz. These remembrances were

¹⁵⁶ Komoróczy, Géza. *A zsidók története Magyarországon II. 1849-től a Jelenkorig*. Pozsony: Kalligram. 2012. pp.881-882 and 923.

¹⁵⁷ Schück Jenő, "Az ortodoxia a felszabadulás után", *Új Élet Naptár 1959* (Budapest: Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselője, 1959). pp.157-158.

¹⁵⁸ Bohus, Kata. *Mártírunnepségek a háború után*. Published on Szombat.org. 2022.09.16. <https://www.szombat.org/tortenelem/martirunnepsegek-a-haboru-utan>

frequently held annually, often accompanied by the unveiling of memorial plaques or monuments, and they received regular coverage in the Jewish publication *Új Élet*. One form of commemoration was the *Jahrzeit*, organized by the community within a religious service, usually held on the anniversary of deportation, as the exact date of death of the community's victims was often unknown to surviving relatives.¹⁵⁹ This observation highlights that not only the dates of these commemorations were diverse, but their forms also varied significantly. This variation underscores the argument that it is impossible to speak of a homogeneous practice of remembrance from the very beginning.

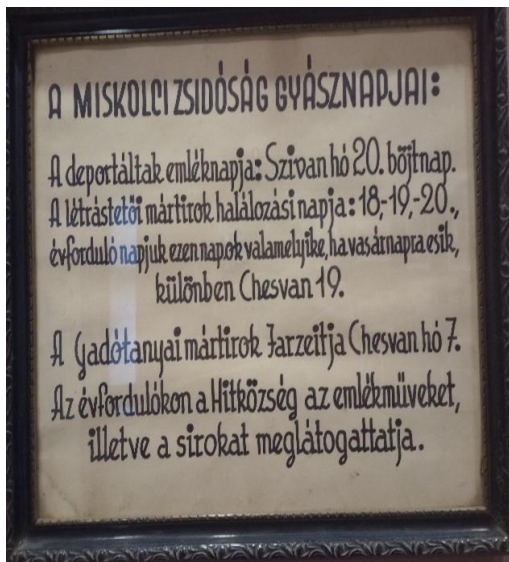


Figure 1 "Miskolci zsidóság gyásznapijai" (*Jahrzeit of the Miskolc Jewish community*) from 1946 courtesy of Tamás Búzafalvi from Jewish Museum Miskolc. 2024.01.10.

The extent to which the “Jewish question” was still a sensitive subject after the war is quite a noticeable topic within the first issue of *Új Élet*. The opening article by Lajos Stöckler, president of the Pest Israelite Congregation and the National Office of Hungarian

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 885-886.

Israelites, criticized the bureaucratic difficulties they faced gaining permission to start a weekly Jewish publication. Contrasted with other religious denominations, the relevance of an exclusively Jewish publication was debated as described in the journal among the political elite and the rights for printing were received much later than anticipated. Stöckler argued in his article that the antisemitism that still existed in Hungary after 1944 justified the legitimacy of a Jewish newspaper for the exact reason of bridging the Jewish communities and the gentile population of Hungary.¹⁶⁰

Based on reports in the journal, the year 1945 was not representative for commemorative events or erecting any memorial monuments. The majority of articles discussed the urgent need for the return of deportees and for the restructuring of Jewish local and national organizations. One explanation for the seemingly small number of commemorations is that it was simply difficult to reflect on the tragedy of the Holocaust within such a short timeframe; more importantly, however, rabbis rejected erecting monuments as it promoted the practice of idolatry.¹⁶¹ The fact that idolatry was an alien practice in the Jewish religion and that there was no national narrative yet on how to address such a recent yet sensitive topic as the Holocaust explains why the first memorials were not situated in public places but rather in locations that are closely tied to Jewish customs such as cemeteries, synagogues, and so on . Furthermore, it justifies the homogeneity in terms of actors' involvement in memorialization.

Despite the initial uncertainty surrounding how to commemorate the members of the Jewish community who were lost to deportation, concentration camps, or forced labor

¹⁶⁰ Stöckler, Lajos. Négy Nyilatkozat. (Four Declaration) in Új Élet. Budapest. 1945. November 12. p.4.

¹⁶¹ Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel. A véskorszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949. pp.1.

camps, various tensions and developments unfolded, creating fertile ground for the evolution of Holocaust memorialization methods in the years that followed. This chapter, - focusing on the immediate postwar years in Hungary will delve into several key aspects of Holocaust remembrance. Initially, it will scrutinize the challenges associated with the actors involved in commemoration, tracing the transition from grassroots initiatives to the gradual inclusion of political figures. This evolution will be explored in tandem with a notable shift in emphasis, moving from the exclusive remembrance of Jewish martyrs to a more overt acknowledgment of the role played by Soviet liberators.

A significant portion of the chapter will be dedicated to examining the resurgence of latent antisemitism, manifesting in pogroms, vandalism, and various forms of violence. The impact of these disturbing occurrences on the modes of commemoration and the content of speeches delivered during these events will be thoroughly analyzed. This exploration will shed light on the complex interplay between historical remembrance, political dynamics, and the persistence of antisemitic sentiments in the postwar Hungarian landscape.

Moreover, the chapter will delve into the genesis of commemorative events that emerged as pivotal markers for annual Holocaust remembrance. These events not only served as poignant moments for reflection but also paved the way for the development of diverse memorialization methods. The initial focus on memorial plaques will be traced, eventually evolving into the creation of more elaborate and artistic monuments. This trajectory signifies a nuanced progression in the visual and symbolic representation of Holocaust remembrance, reflecting the evolving socio-political climate and the changing dynamics of collective memory.

In summary, this chapter will provide a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted landscape of Holocaust remembrance in postwar Hungary, encompassing shifts in actors, the resurgence of antisemitism, and the evolution of commemorative events and memorialization methods. Furthermore, the chapter will analyze and describe the first initiatives of Holocaust remembrance in Hungary from 1945 to 1947. The first part will present an overview of the political and historical situation from 1944/ 45 with Hungary's attempt to establish a democratic and politically plural country after the end of World War II to the Communists' seizure of power in 1949. The second and third parts of the chapter will focus on the initial challenges to Holocaust memorialization and observe the way political turbulence and the reappearance of antisemitism in the immediate postwar years in Hungary affected the process of remembrance. This chapter will heavily rely on contemporary publications, specifically the Jewish journal, *Új Élet* (New Life) as its primary source.

Chapter I.II Political Overview

In the final stages of World War II, military operations occurred within Hungary. On August 23, 1944, Romania successfully exited the war, creating a challenging scenario for the German and Hungarian forces stationed along the Carpathians. This difficulty arose as the advancing 2nd Ukrainian Front moved forward and subsequently entered Transylvania. Soviet troops entered Cluj on October 11, and just eight days later, they emerged victorious in the tank battle against the Germans near Debrecen. Meanwhile, Miklós Horthy attempted to exit the war similarly to the Romanians, but his endeavor on October 15 failed due to resistance from certain officers and the apt removal of key conspirators by the Germans.¹⁶²

Despite a Hungarian delegation agreeing to preliminary armistice terms in Moscow on October 12, and the subsequent formation of the Temporary National Assembly on December 21, 1944, aligned with the Allies in Debrecen, on October 15 an announcement was made that Ferenc Szálasi had been appointed the new prime minister. Szálasi continued the war in full collaboration with the Germans. The Arrow Cross putsch for the Budapest Jews and alleged leftists marked the onset of heavy violence across the capital. Thousands of people were taken from the Jewish ghetto to the riverside and were persecuted in the middle of the night by Arrow Cross soldiers. While the Red Army, progressing from Yugoslavia and Transylvania, arrived at the Danube line and the capital in November,

¹⁶² Tarján, M. Tamás. Magyarországon hivatalosan véget ér a II. Világháború in Rubicon online. <https://rubicon.hu/kalendarium/1945-aprilis-4-magyarorszagon-hivatalosan-veget-er-a-ii-vilaghaboru>

ultimately resulting in the seizure of a ravaged Budapest on February 12, 1945, after enduring one of the longest sieges during World War II lasting 51 days.¹⁶³

Following the loss of Budapest, the German military leadership initiated one last major offensive within the territory of Hungary. The armed conflicts persisted until mid-April, causing destruction estimated to have annihilated 40 percent of the national wealth through bombings, ground battles, and the harrowing siege that reduced parts of Budapest to ruins.¹⁶⁴ The fate of Eastern-Southern European countries was decided during the second Moscow conference in October 1944, during which Hungary fell under the Soviet sphere of interest.¹⁶⁵ This shift thus emerged as a critical juncture for Hungary marked by complex negotiations, realignments of power, and the gradual emergence of a new political order. The fading influence of the Axis powers, and the establishment of Soviet dominance all converged to shape the trajectory of Hungary and its neighboring countries during this pivotal period of post-World War II history.

Due to these changes, we can clearly divide the next half century into distinct periods that not only reflect the varying levels of Soviet influence in Hungarian political and cultural life but are also representative of the country's portrayal of its controversial past. The first period, from 1944-1949, has been labeled as transitional by historian Mária Palasik, yet this can only be claimed retrospectively. The immediate postwar years in Hungary until 1947 unveil a narrative that this period was marked by political plurality and a private-sector-dominated economy. These coalition years between the two dictatorships

¹⁶³ Cornelius, Deborah S. *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron*. Fordham University Press, 2011. p. 365.

¹⁶⁴ Romsic, Ignác. *Magyarország története a XX. Században*. Budapest. Osiris Kiadó. 1999. Pp. 267-268.

¹⁶⁵ Resis, Albert. "The Churchill-Stalin Secret 'Percentages' Agreement on the Balkans, Moscow, October 1944." *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (1978): 368–87. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1862322>.

indeed provided an opportunity for establishing institutions ensuring power-sharing, limiting state authority, exercising human and civil rights, lifting censorship, and allowing for the free practice of religion and culture¹⁶⁶. Amid the transition from wartime to a short-lived peacetime between 1945 and 1947, a variety of political actors and factions emerged, representing diverse interests. The apparent political diversity would, over time, give way to the consolidation of power as dominant forces maneuvered to assert their control.

Despite the Soviet military presence in Hungary after 1944, there was rising optimism for the opportunities of equal legal rights and the establishment of a democratic state. This newfound optimism was grounded in the expectation that the Soviet liberating forces, having played a pivotal role in the nation's liberation, would soon withdraw once the conditions outlined in the armistice were met. The year 1945 witnessed a transformative shift in Hungary's political arena, a marked departure from the political homogeneity of the past. Hungary's political trajectory shifted from collaboration with Germany and Italy under the leadership of Regent Miklós Horthy and his right-wing conservative, antisemitic government, to the ascendancy of the far-right Hungarian fascist organization, the Arrow Cross Party, led by Ferenc Szálasi. As the war concluded, there emerged the prospect of a transition toward a fresh start, allegedly free from dictatorial regimes. Every stratum of society found representation in the emerging political discourse, and this inclusivity was seen as a beacon of progress and change. The diversity of voices and perspectives that emerged in 1945 was in stark contrast to the previous era, where the political arena had been dominated by a singular conservative ideology. This newfound plurality in politics reflected an aspiration to build a society that was more reflective of the complexities and

¹⁶⁶ Palasik, Mária. pp. 14-16.

aspirations of the entire nation from the Independent Smallholders Party (FKgP), the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (SZDP), the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), the Civic Democratic Party (PDP), to the National Peasant Party (NPP). Many celebrated the disappearance of the fascist regime, the redistribution of land among the peasantry, workers gaining more control over their production, and the reconstruction of a country devastated by war.¹⁶⁷

The Provisional Government of Hungary was established in 1944 in Debrecen with the aim to dismantle the last existing fascist elements in the country, rehabilitate those who were oppressed, ill-treated in an attempt to build a more democratic Hungary. Although this agenda was part of the main demands of the armistice with the Allied Powers, it was regardless a common objective of the Provisional Government that they took seriously. From 5 February 1945, the government overruled the anti-Jewish legislations and discharged those who had been imprisoned or discriminated against due to their race or religion.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, the government's decisive actions extended to banning fascist and anti-democratic organizations, signaling an unequivocal stance against ideologies that contradicted the principles of democracy. By guaranteeing the introduction of equal suffrage held by secret vote, the government sought to empower every citizen with the ability to participate in shaping the country's future, regardless of their background or beliefs.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Palasik, Mária. A jogállamiság megteremtésének kísérlete és kudarca Magyarországon 1944-1949 in *Politikatörténeti Füzetek* XVII. Edited by György Földes. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. 2000.

¹⁶⁸ 200/1945. M.E. sz. Rendelet. Magyar Közlöny, 1945. Március 17. and MOL XIX-A-83-a.

¹⁶⁹ Izsák, Lajos. *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 28, no. 1/4 (1982): 188–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42555692>.

It is important to note that such collaboration of the political parties was not necessarily in alignment with complete agreement of the nation's long-term goals. Even though all the parties agreed to distance themselves from their fascist past and made the reconstruction of postwar Hungary their priority, they differed on Hungary's political trajectory for the future. While the left wing aimed to establish socialism, the radical left wanted to develop a dictatorship of the proletariat, and the Independent Smallholders Party desired a civic democracy.¹⁷⁰ Evidently, in a democratic setting opposing ideas are part of an open conversation, however with the growing control of the USSR supported Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), radical changes were soon foreshadowed.

Having the Independent Smallholder's Party as their major opponent in the government, the Communist Party was planning to split from them and thrive for more authority from the beginning. Early on the Communist Party was bowed to apply the rules of coalition especially concerning the allocation of governmental functions (regulatory, legislative) albeit this was yet to change starting with positioning Communist Party members as the head of the political police. Under the Provisional Government, the Communists benefited from not only having the political police on their side -labeled as the fist of the Party- but they also managed to secure key governmental positions.¹⁷¹ Among those who criticized the authority of the police was the well-known Hungarian historian István Bibó, who emphasized the risk of monopolizing the police force based solely on party interest.¹⁷² As the room for opposing arguments shrank within the parliament, the more evident the Communist dominance became. As their next step to further limit the

¹⁷⁰ Romsics, Ignác. Magyarország története a XX. Században. Budapest. Osiris Kiadó. 1999. Pp. 292-293.

¹⁷¹ Kertesz, Stephen D. "The Methods of Communist Conquest: Hungary 1944-1947." *World Politics* 3, no. 1 (1950): 20-54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009010>. Pp.43-44.

¹⁷² Bibó, István. *A Magyar demockrácia válsága*. 1986, 2:41

Smallholders, the Hungarian Communist Party instigated the formation of the Left-Wing Bloc that included the Communists, the Social Democrats, and the National Peasants' Party.¹⁷³

The friction between the two main parties escalated to the point that it eventually caused a coalition crisis followed by the resignation of the formerly democratically elected Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy. While being on a holiday in Switzerland, the General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, Mátyás Rákosi, attempted a coup against Nagy by accusing him of having secret negotiations about vanquishing democracy in Hungary. Since Nagy was fully aware of the gravity of the situation, especially witnessing earlier the arrest of general secretary Béla Kovács of the Independent Smallholder's Party, he rather opted for an immediate resignation. By losing its key leaders and being further threatened with purges of the remaining party members, the Smallholder's Party and the National Peasant's Party had no choice but to accept the leadership of the Hungarian Communist Party.¹⁷⁴

Despite the fact the Communists had no intention to maintain a multi-party government, the myth of democracy had to be sustained during the 1947 elections. Electoral fraud, intense propaganda to increase the votes for the Communist Party has still proven to be insufficient for gaining majority in the governmental elections. The 45% of the votes gained by the Left-Wing Bloc revealed that the Hungarian population still favored private ownership and parliamentary democracy instead of socialism and Sovietization of the country. The newly elected Prime Minister Lajos Dinnyés, current leader of the

¹⁷³ Palasik, Mária. A jogállamiság megteremtésének kísérlete és kudarca Magyarországon 1944-1949 in *Politikatörténeti Füzetek* XVII. Edited by György Földes. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. 2000.

¹⁷⁴ Palasik. pp.211-215.

Smallholders', was more inclined to collaborate with the Communists in order to ease the political tension however, his term happened to be a short one and on December 10, 1948, was forced to resign.¹⁷⁵

Even though the Communist takeover in Hungary cannot be considered complete until 1949, it is evident from the overview above that even within this first phase from 1945-1949 one can distinguish sub-periods as in between 1945 and 1947 that gradually transformed Hungarian politics and society: from the potential for democratic parliamentarism, multi-party governmental system, and the chance for an integration into Western Europe to the increasing Soviet control that paved the way for the Communist seizure of power. Communist ideology as it was integrated at the level of national and local institutions gradually altered the historical narrative of the country's recent past. Contrary to the prevailing notion that Hungary's involvement in World War II and the remembrance of the Holocaust were entirely taboo subjects during the period in question, this chapter presents a nuanced perspective that challenges conventional assumptions. Instead of a blanket silence on these topics, historical evidence highlights the existence of initiatives aimed at commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, alongside fervent discussions within publications that tackled this very subject. By examining the intricate interplay between these initiatives and the evolving international landscape, this chapter seeks to shed light on the complexities that underpinned Hungary's engagement with its wartime history.

The conventional narrative often paints a picture of postwar Hungary as a nation reluctant to confront its wartime responsibilities, particularly regarding the Holocaust. However, this chapter unearths a more intricate reality, revealing that elements within

¹⁷⁵ Palasik. 229-232.

Hungarian society recognized the imperative of acknowledging and remembering the victims of the Holocaust. These initiatives, though perhaps not as widely acknowledged as they should have been, underscored a growing awareness of the need to grapple with the historical reality of the Holocaust and its impact on Hungarian society.

Crucially, the discussion and commemoration of the Holocaust were not isolated phenomena but rather situated within the context of a changing international arena. The international dynamics of the time, shaped by the aftermath of World War II, the establishment of the United Nations, and the ongoing Nuremberg Trials, played a significant role in influencing Hungary's stance on these matters. The emerging global consensus on human rights, justice, and accountability served as a backdrop against which Hungarian initiatives for remembrance and discussion gained traction.¹⁷⁶

As the chapter delves deeper, it examines the confluence of these internal initiatives and external influences. The changing international situation provided an environment conducive to open discussions about Hungary's role in the Holocaust and the moral imperative to remember the victims. The global spotlight on atrocities and the pursuit of justice influenced the national discourse, prompting conversations that had previously been suppressed or marginalized.

¹⁷⁶ Braham, Randolph L., and András Kovács, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*. NED-New edition, 1. Central European University Press, 2016. pp.197-198.

Chapter I.III Memorialization actors

Civic initiatives around memorialization and the actors involved were concentrated in the capital city, Budapest, in the immediate postwar year of 1945. In contrast, the Hungarian government refrained from engaging with Holocaust memorialization, deeming it a complex and contentious subject. As the rights for a Jewish publication were challenging to obtain, it seems it was equally difficult to construct a national narrative on how to approach Hungary's responsibility on coming to terms with its traumatic past. The lack of political stance mirrors the fact that there was no unity in the engravements on these memorial plaques and that they were rooted in personal desire to honor specific martyrs from the previous year. There is a change in the array of actors evident from 1945 to 1946, attributed to the resurgence of antisemitism and the increased influence of Soviet power in Hungary.

Three initiatives for remembrance took place in 1945. The first plan for remembering the victims came from the students of the National Rabbinical Training Institute (Országos Rabbiképző Intézet) who placed a memorial plaque dedicated to the 'Anonymous Jew' (*Ismeretlen Zsidó Emléktábla*) in the assembly hall of the university.¹⁷⁷ The idea for the plaque sprung from the desire to pay respect to the victims who became nameless and unknown due to the dehumanizing nature of the Nazi regime. Even though naming the deceased in order to preserve their memory is a common custom in Jewish traditions either by engraving them on plaques placed on the wall of synagogues or by reading them aloud at an end of year ritual, by dedicating this memorial inscription to the

¹⁷⁷ Gervai, Sándor. Az Ismeretlen Zsidó emléktáblája előtt. In *Új Élet*. Budapest. 1945. November 15.

Anonymous Jew, the students wished to reflect to the enormity of human losses that was impossible to grasp.

The second memorial plaque was inaugurated on 19 November 1945 on 12 Síp Street, in room number 43 on the third floor of the Budapest Jewish Community building. On the first day of the siege of Budapest in 1944, a grenade detonated in that room killed seven members within the institution. To honor the victims, widower Imre Várnai offered to place a marble plaque as remembrance. The inscription says: “To the martyrs of the Budapest Ghetto, Sándorné Braun, Erzsébet Müller, Klári Ormai, Sándor Szabolcs, Endréné Szebényi Dr., Imréné Várnai and their death is their redemption, maybe...”. After Lajos Stöckler delivered the plaque’s inauguration speech, the grieving crowd assembled in the Dohány Street Synagogue for a memorial service. At the inauguration event, a representative of the Ministry of Interior was also present marking it as the first state official tribute for commemorating Jewish victims of the war.¹⁷⁸ Similarly to the commemorative event on Síp Street, another memorial plaque was initiated by civilians dedicated to the tragedy occurred on 31 December 1944 in one of the Swiss protected houses (the Glass House)¹⁷⁹ on Vadász Street, in the center of Budapest remembering Arthur Weiss and other victims of the killings committed by Arrow Cross members.¹⁸⁰

In neither case were the perpetrators’ nor the martyrs’ Jewish identities mentioned which can be seen as rather typical of the period. Another important aspect is that the

¹⁷⁸ Felavatták a gettó első mártírjainak emléktábláját. In *Új Élet*. Budapest. 1945 November 15. p.8.

¹⁷⁹ The Glass House today is listed as a historic building, the building belonged to a glass merchant who was forced to give up his business due to the anti-Jewish legislations. During the Arrow Cross terror in Hungary, the house offered shelter and safety thousands of Jews, thanks to the Swiss diplomat, Carl Lutz. On 31 December 1944, members of the Arrow Cross rounded up Jews on Vadasz Street. The mass killings were stopped by Arthur Weiss who eventually could not escape death. Arthur Weiss and others were shot but managed to save the lives of many others; the memorial and the historic house honor their heroism.

¹⁸⁰ Gács, Teri. Vadász utca 29. A kegyelet emléktáblát állít. In *Új Élet*. Budapest. 1945. November 15. p.12.

inscriptions were only engraved in Hungarian. Within the following pages it will be clearer that along with the locations, actors, and the language of the memorials as well carry always an importance concerning for whom they are meant, or in other words who is the audience. Among Orthodox communities' Hebrew inscription was preferred but the Neolog communities used both Hebrew and Hungarian.¹⁸¹

Lastly, the most publicized commemorative event in 1945 that *Új Élet* informed its readers about was the honoring of the first female war heroine Anikó (Hanna) Szenes' memory. Anikó Szenes emigrated to Palestine in 1939 and later joined the Jewish Brigade Palmach (an underground Zionist military organization). She was one of the two only female volunteers who participated in a paratrooper operation that dropped into the former Yugoslavia, but she was captured by Hungarian forces and unlawfully executed in Budapest in 1944. The memorial event took place in November 1945 at the Heroes' Temple in the Dohány Street Synagogue. According to the report in *Új Élet*, a large crowd gathered to pay their respect during the plaque's inauguration ceremony. The event was organized by the Hungarian Zionist Organization and the speeches delivered there reflected on the connection between Anikó Szenes and their loyalty for the establishment of an independent state of Israel.¹⁸² This freedom to convey Jewish nationalist, Zionist sentiments was only possible until 1947, after which British foreign political actions in Palestine were harshly condemned by Eastern Bloc actors under Soviet influence.

Since 1946, the landscape of Holocaust memorialization in Hungary has undergone notable changes, expanding a broader spectrum of actors and extending commemorative

¹⁸¹ Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel. A vészidőszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949. p.3

¹⁸² Semper, Idem. Leleplezték Szenes Anikó emléktábláját. in *Új Élet*. Budapest. 1945. November 11.

efforts beyond the capital to various Hungarian towns. In response to the profound loss experienced by local Jewish communities, as well as a desire to honor and remember those affected, both community members and local authorities have been compelled to engage in memorialization activities. This marked a notable shift as representatives from various political parties, including the Social Democrats, National Peasants Party, Communist Party, and Socialist Party, began to participate, alongside figures from the police, military, and other authorities. However, it is essential to underscore that their presence during these events was not as pronounced, and there was no explicit mandate or expectation from political parties to actively engage or deliver speeches during this early period, unlike the subsequent years. As political tensions escalated within the multi-party system, along with the mounting pressure from the Soviet Union, political actors recognized the potential of these events as platforms to advance their party's ideological agenda. Further exploration of such instances will be undertaken. This evolving dynamic in actor participation reflects the complex postwar context and the evolving nature of Holocaust remembrance in Hungary.

To illustrate the transformation in participant roles, the dedication ceremony of a memorial in Szombathely in July 1946, a city located in the west of the country, near the border with Austria, serves as a noteworthy instance. The town erected a memorial, designed by János Hoch, decorated with a bronze menorah and marble plaque on the location of its former ghetto to commemorate the 4,228 Jews deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. On top of the monument stood tablets of stone inscribed with the tenth commandment and the Hebrew word *Yizkor*.¹⁸³ The event was attended by

¹⁸³ Balogh, Péter. Szombathelyi emléktáblák.in Honismeret, 23. évf. 3. sz. (1995.) pp. 44-45.
https://epa.oszk.hu/03000/03018/00123/pdf/EPA03018_honismeret_1995_03_041-046.pdf

the political elite, the Soviet representative of the Allied Control Commission, military delegates, the mayor of Szombathely, and by pastors of the local protestant and evangelical congregations. A feature article in *Új Élet* emphasized that the event was not merely attended these officials but also witnessed their active engagement by delivering speeches.¹⁸⁴

Local daily newspapers (*Szabad Vasvármegye*, *Új Vasvármegye*) described the event as respectful with a few hundred attendees, and with no disputes or conflicts.¹⁸⁵ *Új Élet* published only a selected excerpts from the speeches, among those by Chief Rabbi Dr. József Horovitz who characterized the monument as a weeping wall, and comments delivered by political representatives. Communist Party member Ferenc Reismann demanded the perpetrators be brought to justice immediately, whereas the Social Democrat Party representative stressed the importance of remembering their role and their losses within the Party during the traumatic years. The Social Democrat Party furthermore promised in the name of Hungarian workers that there should never be a barrier that divides Hungarian people from one another.¹⁸⁶ Other smaller commemorative events took place in Eger, a city in northern Hungary, where the local Jewish community erected a monument (16 June 1946) to remember the hundreds of Jewish students who were forcefully taken away from the Jewish community school and “what is left is nothing but empty silence within the corridors”.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ “Megrendítő beszédek keretében avatták fel a közhatalok, egyházak, és pártok szónokai a halálba hurcolt szombathelyi deportáltak emlékművét” in *ÚjÉlet*, 1946. Augusztus 22. p.6.

¹⁸⁵ *Szabad Vasvármegye*. 1946. július 9. and “Leleplezték a deportált mártírok emlékművét” in *Új vasvármegye*, 1946. július 9. p.3.

¹⁸⁶ Dr. Horovitz, József. “megrendítő beszédek kíséretében avatták fel a közhatalok, egyházak és pártok szónokai a halálba hurcolt szombathelyi deportáltak emlékművét. In *Új Élet*. Budapest. 1946. August 22. p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ Egerben egyetlen zsidó gyermek sem maradt életben-Felavatták az elhurcolt gyermekek emlékművét. In *Új Élet* 1946. Június 27. Page 3.

Reference to the Soviet liberators and the Soviet military presence became more frequent during these events as the year progressed. As in the case of the town Karcag (4 August 1946), located in the Northern Great Plain region of Hungary, where local Jewish community placed a memorial plaque for the victims in the Jewish cemetery, the memorial procession was combined with laying a wreath at the Soviet Martyr Monument.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, near the town Miskolc at the village of Hejőscsaba, a dual ceremony was held to honor simultaneously the Jewish martyrs and inaugurate the “Unknown Soviet Soldier” monument.¹⁸⁹

As evidenced by these instances, the process of remembrance often involved political actors, although these examples seldom received coverage in Hungary's most widely circulated publications (*Világosság*, *Népszava*, *Szabad Nép*, *Friss Újság*, *Hírlap*, *Szabadság* etc.), and thus failed to garner national attention. The newspapers of political parties only publicized the inauguration events of these martyr memorials when a relatively large number of party members were present, as observed in the case of Szombathely, which was reported by *Népszava*, the official newspaper of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (MSZDP).¹⁹⁰ However, it is evident that the desire to memorialize the Holocaust martyrs and commemorate their tragedy was of greater significance to the local Jewish communities, who took the initiative to organize, erect, and report on these memorials. Moreover, the resurgence of antisemitism in the postwar period raised legitimate concerns within Jewish communities, prompting them to prioritize collective

¹⁸⁸ Radó, Antal. “A karcagi zsidó vértanúk emlékezete” in *Új Élet*. 1946. August 29.

¹⁸⁹ *Új Élet* 1946 Október 29

¹⁹⁰ *Népszava*, 1946. július (74. évfolyam, 145–170. sz.) 1946-07-19 / 160. Szám Szombathely p.84.

memorialization as a means of recalling the trauma of the Holocaust and safeguarding against potential future atrocities.

Even though monumental representation for remembrance was foreign to the Jewish tradition, they attempted to find other ways to honor the people who were deported and perished during World War II. In the context of antisemitism in Hungary, contemporary Jewish journals frequently addressed several pressing concerns. These included fears surrounding the concept of Jewish revenge, particularly among peasants and residents of smaller towns who feared potential retribution from returning Hungarian Jews due to their perceived passivity or complicity in the fate of Hungarian Jewry. Additionally, there were discussions about national minority rights for Hungarian Jews, the need for rehabilitation and justice for Holocaust victims, and considerations regarding immigration to Palestine.

As the plan for the Soviet-supported Hungarian Communist Party's total control began to take shape, the more the state began getting involved in remembrance policies in order to dictate the narrative of what should be remembered. In the early postwar era, the Provisional Government neither discouraged nor interfered with the process of memorialization. This form of disengagement is also evident in the way the government was indecisive in establishing a national Holocaust Memorial Day in opposition to the 1947 regulation concerning the construction and maintenance of the Soviet Martyr Monuments in Hungary.¹⁹¹ The legislation known as the article XIX of 1947 mandates that municipalities must procure land allocated for Soviet-Russian military memorials. Additionally, each municipality is compelled to upkeep Soviet-Russian military memorials, hero cemeteries, and graves situated within its jurisdiction, with the associated costs

¹⁹¹ Szabad Nép, 1947. április (5. évfolyam, 74-97. szám)1947-04-04 / 77. Szám p.3.

covered by its budget.¹⁹² Therefore, due to the lack of any direction or financial support from the state regarding a national monument or a remembrance day to honor Hungarian Jews, it was up to every town's Jewish community to set a local commemorative date, which was typically the day of mass deportations from the location.

The following part of the chapter will deal with the coalition crisis in 1947 that gradually led to the Communist takeover and to the elimination of political opposition. As the Soviet domination strengthened in every sphere of Hungarian society, the process of remembrance was equally subjected to adopt the Stalinist model that highlighted the Soviet liberators and excluded the Jewish victims. This political shift starting with 1947 will undoubtedly influence the political actors engaged in memorialization and their utilization of commemorative events to promote Communist ideology. However, as noted, the absence of attention or support from the state did not deter Hungarian Jewish communities from finding means to honor their Jewish martyrs in their respective towns or villages. Consequently, 1947 can be regarded as the onset of the first memory boom in Hungary.

¹⁹² 1947. évi XIX. törvénycikk - a szovjet-orosz katonai emlékművek és hősi temetők kegyeleti gondozása tárgyában. <https://net.jogtar.hu/getpdf?docid=94700019.TV&targetdate=&printTitle=1947.%20%C3%A9vi%20XIX.%20t%C3%B6rv%C3%A9nycikk&dbnum=77&referer=1000ev>

Chapter I.IV Antisemitism and Jewish Revenge

The worsening economic situation in the immediate postwar period considerably fueled antisemitic sentiments that has begun resurfacing in the Hungarian countryside.¹⁹³ In 1945, an economic crisis exacerbated tensions in the postwar situation. Severe food shortages arose due to the war devastation and the drought of 1945, further compounded by hyperinflation. In addition to the prevailing economic hardships, the return of Jewish survivors and their restitution claims, coupled with fears of potential revenge, added to societal tensions. Furthermore, the high-ranking roles assumed by returning Jews in postwar reconstruction efforts heightened antisemitic sentiments. These escalating tensions manifested in various antisemitic actions across the country, including protests, distribution of antisemitic leaflets, vandalism, and physical assaults.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, rumors resembled the accusations of Jewish ritual murders at blood libel trials around the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In towns like Salgótarján, Miskolc, and Kunmadaras mob violence escalated throughout 1946 during which Jewish individuals were lynched.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Palasik, Mária. “*Antiszemita pogromok*” in *A jogállamiság megteremtésének kísérlete és kudarca Magyarországon 1944-1949* in *Politikatörténeti Füzetek* XVII. Edited by György Földes. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. 2000. Pp.170-175

¹⁹⁴ Csósz, László. *Népirtás után: zsidóellenes atrocitások Magyarországon 1945-1948*. On Társadalmi Konfliktusok Kutatóközpont.

http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148:nepirtas-utan-zsidoeellenes-atrocitasok-magyarorszagon-1945-1948-&catid=15:tanulmanyok

¹⁹⁵ Csósz, László. *Antiszemita zavargások, pogromok és vérvádak 1945-1948*. On Társadalmi Konfliktusok Kutatóközpont.

http://konfliktuskutato.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140:antiszemita-zavargasok-pogromok-es-vervadak-1945-1948&catid=16:esetek / These postwar antisemitic actions are extensively documented in contemporary journals and by scholars such as János Pelle (1995), blood libel trials by Tamás Kende (1995), and Péter Apor (1998), among others.

In addition to the cases in Kunmadaras, Miskolc, and Salgótarján, antisemitic actions escalated into vandalism when unknown perpetrators doused the Makó (in southeastern Hungary) Orthodox Jewish temple with petrol. The old building, considered a monument, turned to ashes. The Makó police determined that the Jewish temple in Makó was set on fire as an act of revenge. The offenders, as the police found out, were members of a fascist plan and similar to those in Kunmadaras, planned to organize a pogrom in the city.¹⁹⁶

According to an article published in *Új Magyarország* in 1946, the issue of the Jewish question, or, more broadly the matter of antisemitism, served as a true barometer for the state of Hungarian democracy, reflecting not only a universal concern but also a distinctive one in the context of Hungary. It acted as a crucial gauge for those fundamentally opposed to the principles of democracy. Individuals who criticized land reform, expressed a desire for the return of the displaced aristocracy that sought refuge in the West, viewed the People's Tribunals (Népbíróság), that was established to prosecute war criminals in Hungary following the Second World War, as an instrument of Jewish revenge, and, rather than embracing a thoughtful form of patriotism, engaged in nationalistic illusions and rhetoric, are the key indicators of this ideological opposition.¹⁹⁷ The government's failure to decisively address these antisemitic atrocities and address the compensation demands of Jewish survivors contributed to the resurgence and spread of antisemitism within the country in 1945-1946. Consequently, local Jewish communities took on the responsibility of using commemorative speeches as forums to address the pressing issue on antisemitism

¹⁹⁶ "Fasiszták felgyújtották a makói zsidótemplomot" in *Világosság*, 1946. április-június (2. évfolyam, 75-144. szám) 1946-06-02 / 123. szám

¹⁹⁷ Katona, Jenő "A zsidókérdés - Beolvadás, bosszúvágy, kivándorlás, magyarság" in *Új Magyarország*, 1946 (2. évfolyam, 1-52. szám) 1946-05-07 / 18. szám

in Hungary, while Jewish nonprofit organizations such as The Jewish Agency for Palestine endeavored to raise awareness about the ramifications of antisemitism.

In 1946 the Jewish Agency for Palestine organized an exhibition entitled “The Ones who Perished and the Ones who Fought for the Nation’s Honor.” It displayed a large number of documents and photos that told the cautious and tragic history of antisemitism that eventually led to the persecution of the Hungarian Jews. Public records from ghettos, newspaper articles from 1944, anti-Jewish legislation, excerpts by infamous antisemitic politicians and authors, propaganda posters, maps, and statistics were collected to exhibit in the building of the Department of Documentation at Ajtósi Dürer Sor in Budapest. As the review from *Új Élet* put it, the organizers’ aim with the exhibition was to educate the population on the catastrophic consequences of fascism and antisemitism.¹⁹⁸

Furthermore, it was a prevalent practice at the time to acknowledge and rectify instances of violent antisemitic actions in commemorative speeches, as exemplified in the case of Pápa. The town of Pápa situated in the western part of Hungary, in July 1946 solemnly commemorated the memory of the 3,200 Jewish martyrs who were deported and executed. Among the speeches, Dr. Kornél Donáth greeted those in attendance on behalf of the Jewish community in Pápa and eloquently expressed that the spirit of destruction must be eradicated from within and love should prevail. The Jewish community is guided not by a sense of revenge but by a desire to work together with all workers of different faiths in building a future for the city.¹⁹⁹

In the aftermath of World War II in Hungary, as was observed in numerous European societies, there was a prevailing inclination to suppress the memories of the war,

¹⁹⁸ Débé. “Akik meghaltak és akik harcoltak népünk becsületéért.” In *Új Élet*. 1946. January 1. P. 10

¹⁹⁹ “Gyászünnepe” in *Pápai Független Kisgazda*, 1946 (2. évfolyam, 1-50. szám) 1946-07-20 / 27. szám

particularly the uncomfortable recollections of the extensive atrocities inflicted upon the Jewish population.²⁰⁰ Within this narrative, the war was portrayed as a collective tragedy affecting everyone equally, and the Jewish suffering was not distinguished as a unique historical occurrence; Jews were not presented as distinct victims of Nazism. The intentional oversight of the mass deportations that were conveniently forgotten rendered the returning Jewish communities susceptible to acts of violence, while the atrocities themselves became susceptible to subsequent political manipulation. The notable omission of Jewish victims from the Communist interpretations of anti-Fascist narratives contributed to the attractiveness of these narratives for both Jewish individuals and anti-Semites alike.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. New York, New York, Penguin Books. 2006. pp.806-808.

²⁰¹ Apor, Péter. "The Lost Deportations and the Lost People of Kunmadaras: A Pogrom in Hungary, 1946." *The Hungarian Historical Review* 2, no. 3 (2013): 566–604. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43264452>. Pp.568-569.

Chapter I.V Commemorative Events

Affected by the return of hostility toward the Jewish population in everyday life, the religious community desperately tried to search for an appropriate form of remembrance. As erecting commemorative monuments implied idolatry in Jewish religious tradition, from which the community wished to remove itself, the idea for a weeping wall surfaced. As discussed in Jewish publications, a clear parallel was drawn between the extent of the devastation caused by the destructions of the Temples in Jerusalem and by the annihilation of Hungarian Jews.²⁰² According to the journalists, the magnitude of the atrocities committed against Jews first by the Babylonians and later by the Romans seemed very much comparable to the experience of Hungarian Jews throughout the Holocaust. József Aczél's reflection in 1946 in *Új Élet* is illustrative:

Should we erect a monument? A martyr monument? The memory no matter how artistic it is – it would remain impersonal, aloof. Symbol, but a soulless symbol. What could we do so that we construct at least even a tiny dot for the people wanting to find relief? I am considering the idea to build a weeping wall in the larger cemeteries. Yes, a weeping wall. Or the weeping wall is not an eternal emblem for Jewish grief? Oh yes, it is! And this weeping wall will not be an aloof symbol, will not be a soulless monument as we would place names on memorial plaques to honor those whose deceased body lie in unknown locations. This would be a dot, a definite and tangible, present and existing dot, that everyone could visit just like a tombstone where their relatives lie. The plaques and the wall combined would say much more than a heroic marble column ever could: belonging of the soul. It would be a sorrowful commemoration, but a unique one. The wall itself could replace the memorial in terms of monumentality and the plaques placed on the wall could represent the tears of loneliness.²⁰³

²⁰² Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel. A vészidőszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949. p.8.

²⁰³ "Emlékművet emeljünk? Hősi halottak emlékművét? Az emlék bármily művészi lenne is – személytelen maradna, közömbös. Szimbólum, de lélektelen szimbólum. Mit tehetnénk, hogy legalább valamilyen kis pontot teremtsünk a megkönnyebbülni vágyó embernek? Arra gondolok, hogy siratófalat kellene létesítenünk a nagy temetőkben. Igen, sirató falat. Vagy tán a siratófal nem örökké a zsidóság gyászát fogja jelképezni? Bizonyosan igen! S ez a siratófal nem lenne közömbös szimbólum, lélektelen emlékmű, mert apró táblákkal helyet adhatnánk rajta azoknak a neveknek, akiknek teste ismeretlen helyeken nyugszanak. Pont lenne ez, biztos és megfogható, jelenvaló és létező pont, hová bárki úgy mehetne, mint

As we will see in monuments that were subsequently erected, referencing biblical quotes on the destruction of the Temples in Hebrew was not uncommon (e.g., the Holocaust monument in Szombathely, 1946).

While it is true that despite few examples, 1946 began uneventfully in terms of erecting monuments to the Holocaust victims in Hungary, other forms of commemoration became frequent, even on a national level. In terms of organizing sermons commemorating the martyrs, not only was 18 January declared a national memorial day for the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto but subsequently many towns across the country felt the need to remember those unfortunates who were deported to concentration and extermination camps in Poland or Germany. However, although the initial commemoration of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto was observed nationwide, in subsequent years, major Hungarian towns opted to observe the day of deportation as their annual memorial day. Therefore, it was only 1946 that an event of such significance for Budapest Jews was commemorated on a regional level as well.

The year 1946 marks the poignant first anniversary of the liberation of the ghetto²⁰⁴, a momentous occasion that carries profound historical significance for the Hungarian Jewish community. The decision to commence Holocaust commemorations from this

a sírhoz, amelyben hozzátartozója pihen. A tábla, s a fal együttesen sok mindent mondana, olyant is, amit egy hősi márványoszlop sohasem fejezhet ki: a lélek odatartozását. Szomorú ünnep lenne kimenni ide, de egyéni ünnep. A fal maga pedig monumentalitásában pótolná az emlékművet. S a táblák rajta a magánosok könnycseppjei lennének.” Aczél József. Síratófal (javaslat) in Új Éélet. Budapest. 1946. May 23. p.3.

²⁰⁴ In November 1944, the Jews remaining in Budapest were ordered into ghettos. Those without protective documents were required to move to the 7th district area, where many fell victim to the terror of the Arrow Cross or perished due to dire living conditions in the ghettos. Liberation of the ghetto occurred between January 16-18, 1945, by the Red Army.

specific juncture is underscored by the desire to pay solemn tribute to the collective memory of those who endured the harrowing experiences of the Holocaust.

On 30 June 1946, throughout the country, commemorations took place in remembrance of the innocent victims on the anniversary of the deportations through memorial events and memorial services. As previously mentioned, Hungarian towns commemorated the day of deportation, highlighting the collaborative efforts of surviving Jewish communities across the country. *Új Élet* covered these commemorations, beginning with an article on the remembrance of the Jewish community in the city of Esztergom located in northern Hungary and its surroundings. In this area, the commemoration not only included reflective ceremonies but also featured the unveiling of a memorial plaque.²⁰⁵

The significance of these commemorative events was elevated in many places by the empathetic presence of authorities and representatives from various denominations. In some locations, such as Pécs and Csepel, mourning flags adorned buildings. The mayor of Pécs, in his address, emphasized that “this solemn anniversary is a sad day of mourning not only for the Jews and not only for the city but for the entire Hungarian nation. Therefore, we vow to eradicate the spirit that brought the Hungarian people to this point.” Sándor Róth, the president of the Jewish Community in Pécs, expressed the following: “Out of four thousand five hundred Jewish residents of Pécs, four thousand perished. We came to bury, yet I do not see a coffin that the dear motherland could embrace... We are building a symbolic resting place for our martyrs because only the flame of remembrance can thaw the soul and then fill it with peace”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ “Emlékünnepek a deportálások évfordulóján” in 1946. Július 18. p.7.

²⁰⁶ “Kegyeletes gyászünneppéggel áldozott Pécs város társadalma 4000 zsidó mártír emlékének” in *Új Élet* 1946 Július 11. p.11.



Figure 2 “Memorial for the 4000 deported Jews from Pécs inaugurated 1946”. courtesy of Kristóf Horváth. 2024.03.31.

Additional memorial events transpired in Kispest, Szolnok, and Marcali, Békésgyula, Győr, Csepel, Mohács, Debrecen, and Pápa, where in their speeches, the rabbis predominantly encouraged the assembled crowd of mourners to focus on reconstructing the fallen Jewish community. Sashalom, Rákosszentmihály, Cinkota, Mátyásföld, Gödöllő, and the surrounding villages with remnants of Jewish communities held memorial events and unveiled memorial plaques. During these ceremonies, representatives of authorities and political parties testified to their commitment to democracy, declaring their opposition to all forms of antisemitism.²⁰⁷

Alongside the annual commemoration of the deportations another anniversary will hold importance that is the anniversary of the ghetto’s liberation, the first commemoration of it took place on 18 January 1946. The Budapest Jewish community intended to honor both the liberators and the martyrs and heroes of the Jewish people during this commemoration. Annually, on January 18, a formal thanksgiving service is conducted at

²⁰⁷ “Emlékünnepek a deportálások évfordulóján” in 1946. Július 18. p.7.

the Dohány Street Synagogue. Invitations are consistently extended to government representatives, members of the Supervisory Committee, and authorities to participate in this event.²⁰⁸

In conclusion, the annual commemorative events marking the anniversary of deportations and the liberation of Budapest ghettos, instated in 1946 and observed nationwide, provided a significant platform for remembrance and reflection. These ceremonies, occurring regularly in Hungarian towns and villages, not only offered an opportunity to honor the martyrs but also facilitate the ritual of placing wreaths on both existing and newly erected monuments. The visibility of these actors, ranging from local communities to political representatives, became a noteworthy aspect for researchers tracing the trajectory of Holocaust memorialization. This visibility, however, was not merely a historical marker but also introduced an element of politicization, as the events served as a space where political figures expressed sentiments and positions related to the nation's history. Among the political speeches at the commemorative events, it is evident that there is sympathy, but without naming specific perpetrators and victims. Zalaegerszeg Mayor Ferenc Baráth apologized on behalf of the “executioners” to those who survived the “brutal times”, although without mentioning the real victims or the real perpetrators. Similarly, the chief notary of Pécs formulated similar vague words, vowing to eradicate the spirit that brought the Hungarian people to this point. Representatives of the Smallholders Party and the Social Democrats in Csepel also affirmed that they are responsible for the safety of all Hungarian citizens. The naming of the real victims remained the responsibility of local Jewish communities, while the fight against antisemitism was only declared by the

²⁰⁸ Január 18: A gettó felszabadulásának évfordulója in Új Élet Január. p.3.

Jewish Agency at the Sashalom commemoration.²⁰⁹ The political shift occurring in 1947 significantly influenced the content of commemorative speeches delivered by political actors. The onset of the establishment of a one-party Communist system and the elimination of opposing political parties were evident themes in subsequent political speeches. These speeches increasingly refrained from naming the victims, ceased to emphasize democratic values, and instead emphasized the heroic Soviet liberation or glorified Stalin.

²⁰⁹ "Emlékünnepek és gyászistentiszteletek a deportálások évfordulóin" in Új Élet, 1946. Július 11.pp. 7-9- And "Kegyeletes Gyászünnepséggel áldozott Pécs város társadalma négyezer zsidó mártír emékének" in Új Élet, 1946. Július 11. pp.11-13. And "Emlékünnepek a deportálások évfordulóján" in Új Élet 1946. Július 18. P. 7. And "Feltűnéseltő megnyilatkozások a vidéki városok emlék-gyászünnepélyein" in Új Élet. 1946. Július 23. pp.3-6.

Chapter I.VI Conclusion

This chapter on Holocaust memorialization between 1945 and 1946 serves as a critical exploration of a transformative period in Hungary's postwar history. Commencing with grassroots and civic initiatives, the memorialization landscape expanded to incorporate gradual state involvement, reflecting a dynamic interplay between local and national forces. A noticeable contrast emerged from 1946 between the political actors present at commemorative events, who carefully avoided addressing the antisemitic atrocities against Hungarian Jews in 1945-1946, or addressing the primary victims, and the perpetrators. In contrast Jewish communities focused on remembering the Jewish martyrs who were deported and acknowledged the prevailing atmosphere of antisemitism in postwar Hungary. This contrast is also evident in publications, where political parties' newspapers scarcely reported on one or two commemorative events for Jewish martyrs, while the Hungarian Jewish journal, *Új Élet*, endeavored to cover all commemorative efforts taking place in the country. The chapter underscores the importance of understanding how actors, from local communities to state entities, navigated the delicate task of memorializing a traumatic history while grappling with a postwar political landscape.

Antisemitism emerges as a persistent challenge throughout this chapter, with violent acts and vandalism, particularly in rural areas, underscoring the continued existence of deeply rooted prejudices. The struggle to find an appropriate form of commemoration is palpable, with the initial focus on memorial plaques giving way to more expansive commemorative events. Although the nationwide observance of the day of deportations or the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto emerged as significant events, fostering a collective

sense of remembrance throughout the country and receiving coverage in various national newspapers, it did not effectively mitigate the prevailing antisemitism.²¹⁰

This chapter focuses on the initial efforts in memorialization, which predominantly originated from Budapest in 1945, underscoring its pivotal role in shaping commemorative practices elsewhere in Hungary. The organization of a commemoration for the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto in January by the Budapest Jewish community and political actors served as a catalyst, inspiring other towns across the country to establish their own collective commemorative events, such as the anniversary of the deportation of Jews during the summer months. Additionally, this event motivated other towns as Szombathely, Eger, Karcag, and Miskolc to erect physical memorials and memorial plaques to honor their Jewish martyrs. This shift signifies not only a transformation in memorialization practices but also an attempt to anchor the collective memory of the Holocaust in the physical landscape. In subsequent chapters, further exploration of commemorative efforts beyond Budapest, particularly from 1947 onwards, will be presented and examined in greater detail.

²¹⁰ Reports on the commemorative events on deportations or the liberation of the Budapest ghetto are available for instance in: Magyar Nemzet, 1946. július (2. évfolyam, 143-168. szám)1946-07-07 / 148. Szám, Népszava, 1946. június (74. évfolyam, 122–144. sz.)1946-06-23 / 139. Szám, Világosság, 1946. április-június (2. évfolyam, 75-144. szám)1946-06-25 / 140. Szám, Szabadság, 1946. április-június (2. évfolyam, 75-144. szám)1946-06-26 / 141. Szám

Chapter II. Gratitude for the Liberators: Holocaust Monuments from the Soviet Era, 1947-1949

Chapter II.I the First Memory Boom in Hungarian Holocaust Memorialization - Introduction

*“The stairs of time are rising high,
the bridges are being built
and in the forests of ruin
flowers are blossoming
out of the soil of death.
Life is open-armed,
for the one who can live. But what beholds
for the one
who were left behind by God”²¹¹*

Even though the period between 1947 and 1949 was characterized by the gradual elimination of political pluralism and opposition also named as the ‘salami tactics’ by Mátyás Rákosi, this chapter emphasizes a lesser-known significance of this period, namely the first wave of memory boom in Holocaust memorialization. Originally the era after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the 1990s and early 2000s, are considered as the explosion of Holocaust remembrance. It is true that the more democratic settings in that period allowed more actors in the arena of remembrance, and in the twenty-first century we can see the emergence of a global Holocaust memory. However, amidst the gradual consolidation of Communist power and the establishment of a one-party state in 1947, there

²¹¹ Az idők lépcsője magasba nő,/ épülnek a hidak/és a romerdőkben/ virágok fakadnak/ a halál földéjben. Tártkaru az élet,/ ki élni tud. De mivé legyen,/ kit / itt felejtett Isten? Poem by Noémi Munkácsi. Akit itt felejtett Isten (Who were left behind by God) published in Új Élet, 1947. August 14. p.13.

is an extraordinary proliferation of memorial plaques and monuments erected largely outside of Budapest to remember those who perished in concentration camps or forced labor camps during World War II. One after another, Jewish communities in Hungarian towns and villages issued appeals, urging survivors and relatives to provide information about their departed loved ones thus those individuals could be appropriately remembered or to participate in fundraising efforts for erecting memorials.²¹² The goal was to enable communities to establish tangible memorials in remembrance of those individuals who would never return. The surge in memorialization initiatives in 1947, particularly outside of Budapest, signifies a grassroots and community-driven response to the aftermath of World War II. The significance of this memory boom occurring beyond Budapest reinforces the overarching argument that the memorialization process in the capital was intricately linked with political agendas dictated from the Soviet Union. The narrative of the marginalization of Jewish victims and the centralization of Soviet liberators in commemorations, as evidenced by the events of 1947, were not universally nor immediately embraced in villages or towns throughout Hungary.

The remarkable outpouring of local initiatives in this period emphasizes the importance of individual stories, community involvement, and collective commitment to memorializing the profound losses endured during the war and the Holocaust. The official memory culture in Budapest, shaped by government directives and prevailing political conditions, aimed to construct a particular interpretation of the past. However, this

²¹² 1947: Bonyhád, Dunapataj, Eger, Fegyvernek, Gyöngyös, Győr, Gyula, Harka, Hegyeshalom, Jászberény, Karcag, Kálkápólna, Keszthely, Kiskunfélegyháza, Marcali, Miskolc, Rákosliget, Sátoraljaújhely, Szentes, Szeged, Tiszadob. 1948: Abaújszántó, Balf, Balatonboglár, Budapest, Berettyóújfalu, Celdömök, Hódmezővásárhely, Kalocsa, Kiskunhalas, Makó, Mátészalka, Nagykanizsa, Nyírcsaholy, Óbuda, Pesterzsébet, Pécs, Salgótarján, Sárobgárd, Szécsény, Szekszárd, Szolnok, Tolna, Újpest, Verpelét, Villány, Zalaszentgrót

overarching narrative did not preclude the existence of local collective remembrance initiatives that occasionally diverged from official memory politics. Despite the emphasis on the role of Soviet liberators in the capital, a specific Holocaust memory culture in regional Hungary was often overlooked in official memory policy. Nonetheless, practices of remembering and commemorating Holocaust victims could still be identified at the regional level outside of Budapest. Exploring these instances and carefully assessing their significance undoubtedly adds to the regional dimension of Holocaust memory in Hungary.²¹³ As early as 1947 questions were emerging as to how the Holocaust should be memorialized in a world devoid of direct witnesses, or how the memory of the Holocaust can be leveraged to combat contemporary manifestations of hatred and discrimination – questions that are assumed to be quite post-Communist.

When examining the modalities of memorialization on regional level between 1947 and 1949, certain categories emerge as emblematic of this period. First, the diversity of actors were to be acknowledged, reinforcing the overarching argument that after the Soviet take over, memorialization was not uniform or solely state-driven. From local Jewish community leaders, politicians, and international participants to various church representatives, a myriad of actors played pivotal roles in these memorialization efforts.²¹⁴ The wide array of actors involved in memorialization activities in postwar Hungary underscores the vibrant engagement in commemorative practices. This challenges the notion that memorials were rare in Europe, particularly during the postwar and subsequent

²¹³ Rebrova, Irina. *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory: The Case of the North Caucasus*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020. p. 12 and p. 22.

²¹⁴ "Sokat vétkezünk a hazaidemokrácia és a szabadság ellen, most vezekelnünk kell! '■'-a'r — mondotta Dinnyés Lajos miniszterelnök Kaposvárott" *A Reggel*, 1947 (20. évfolyam, 1-52. szám) 1947-07-07 / 27. Szám. p.1-2.

Communist era. Even among the few initial memorials that did exist, there was a predominant emphasis on the role of Soviet liberators. Furthermore, the emergence of public discussions regarding the commemoration of the Jewish tragedy only became apparent after the downfall of Communist rule.²¹⁵

The second significant category pertains to the emphasis on naming individual martyrs. Prior to the installation of memorial plaques or monuments, extensive research was conducted on each person forcibly taken and killed in concentration or forced labor camps. The regional Jewish communities undertaking this research sought to provide a personal resting place for each deceased individual, signifying that their memory would not be consigned to nameless graves or tombstones.

A third noteworthy aspect is the influence of foreign entities on national Holocaust memorialization. The 1947 initiative to establish a collective memorial and museum dedicated to all Jewish Holocaust victims in Jerusalem, later known as Yad Vashem, undeniably affected Hungarian Jewish communities both in the capital as well as in regional level in terms of the scale of commemoration and the diverse purposes a Holocaust memorial could serve.²¹⁶

The fourth category of importance involves the rhetoric used in commemorative speeches or on the engravings of the monuments in large cities as in the case of Budapest

²¹⁵ Gyáni, Gábor. "Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary" in Braham, Randolph L., and András Kovács, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*. NED-New edition, 1. Central European University Press, 2016. pp.215-216 and Cole. Tim. "Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95" in Hornstein. Shelley and Jacobowitz. Florence's "Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust". Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. pp. 275-277.

²¹⁶ "Grandiózus emlékművet állít a zsidóság az elpusztult Galut-nak" in Új Élet. 1947. Február, 27. page 10.

or Szeged. The evolution in language addressing victims, liberators, and perpetrators is highly indicative of the contemporary political environment in the country.

Lastly, the fifth category addresses vandalism and antisemitism against memorials dedicated to Jewish martyrs. Such acts of hostility underscore the government's failure to decisively confront lingering animosity and hatred toward returning Jewish survivors and their demands for reparations. In the ensuing pages, archival and journal evidence will be utilized to substantiate the claim that these aforementioned categories were highly representative of the methods of Holocaust memorialization between 1947 and the consolidation of Communist power in Hungary in 1949. Following a notable shift in politics from 1947, characterized by the accelerated pursuit of Communist objectives aimed at dismantling the multi-party system and establishing hegemony across Hungarian society, the trajectory of memorialization lags behind these changes noticeably. Indeed, the years 1947 and 1948 witnessed a proliferation of commemorative initiatives and actions on a regional scale, along with numerous reports detailing grandiose plans for memorials and monuments dedicated to Jewish victims abroad, all of which left a mark on Hungarian remembrance culture. However, it became evident that the narrative propagated by political elites began to emphasize the glorification of Soviet liberators and Stalin, emerging prominently in commemorative events.

Chapter II.II Political Overview

In 1946, Hungary had held its first free elections in over two decades. These elections were initially seen as a beacon of hope for the restoration of democracy in the country. The Independent Smallholders' Party emerged as the largest party, winning a plurality of the votes. However, the political scene was marked by instability and polarization, and the coalition government was fraught with tensions and disagreements among the various parties. Between 1947 and 1949, Hungary experienced a dramatic transformation in its political landscape that saw the consolidation of Communist power and the establishment of a one-party state. These pivotal years laid the foundation for decades of Communist rule in Hungary.

The period from 1947 to 1949 marked a significant turning point in both European and global history. The establishment of a bipolar world order dominated by two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union - had profound effects on Central and Eastern Europe. The establishment of Communist governments closely aligned with the Soviet Union in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany created states characterized by authoritarian rule, censorship, and political repression.²¹⁷

The emergence of Europe into two opposing blocs and the impact of their political developments were indeed solidified throughout those two significant years due to key events such as the Truman Doctrine (1947), the Marshall Plan (1947-1951), the formation of Cominform (1947), The Berlin Blockade (1948-1949), the formation of NATO (1949),

²¹⁷ Balogh, András. "Az 1947-1948-as fordulat a világpolitikában" in *Fordulat a világban és Magyarországon*. Edited by Feitl, Lajos, Izsák Lajos, Székely Gábor. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó Kft. 2000. pp.9-12.

the Establishment of the GDR (East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) in 1949 and the growing Soviet domination over the Eastern Bloc. By this time the hemline of the Iron Curtain was heavily at floor sweeping length with the division of Germany and across the East Central European continent.

Following the founding meeting of Cominform, the international body of Communist parties in Europe founded by Moscow, held in September 1947 at Szklarska Poręba (Poland), the representatives of Hungary, including József Révai who was the member of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP), were informed that instead of implementing a gradual Communist takeover, an immediate Sovietization was the preferred path by the political leaders of the Eastern Bloc. The MKP's initial action involved ending political pluralism in Hungary by dissolving the primary opposing faction, the Hungarian Independence Party, and stripping it of its parliamentary representation in order to create a one-party system by merging the two socialist workers parties (Social Democrats and the Hungarian Communist Party). However, the enduring history of hostility between the Social Democrats and the Hungarian Communists remained unchanged, eventually leading to the liquidation of the Social Democratic Party and its members who dared to disagree with the merger. The Communist consolidation of power accelerated in 1948. On 12 June 1948, the two factions amalgamated into the Hungarian Workers' People's Party (HWP), with its president, then later general secretary, Mátyás Rákosi.²¹⁸ The political objective of the Hungarian Worker's Party was embedded in the Marxist-Leninist ideology and its purpose was to build a Hungarian version of socialism. Such phrasing that purposefully excluded the term Sovietization or nationalization seemed

²¹⁸ Romsics, Ignác. Magyarország története a XX. Században. Budapest. Osiris Kiadó. 1999. Pp. 292-293.

to be more reasonable for tactical purposes. Nonetheless, the cleansing of Smallholders continued, most of those who opposed the Hungarian Worker's Party were either forced to immigrate, ousted from the Party, or faced imprisonment. After the successful liquidation of people's democracy, the system that was established under the HWP became identical to the Soviet version of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not only was the type of political system assumed to be dictated by Stalin, but economic unity was also expected from the nations that were part of the Soviet bloc. Stalin's goal was that this type of uniformity should only exist with the dependency on the Soviet Union further fueled by an absolute loyalty toward its ideological beliefs. Consequently, such commitment eventually impacted all layers of Hungarian society starting with politics to culture, and its memorialization processes.²¹⁹

Starting in 1948, the Hungarian economy transitioned into a state-controlled system, although certain voluntary groups such as associations, trade unions, churches, and cultural institutions still maintained some degree of autonomy until 1949. While press freedom was already limited, and cultural diversity was beginning to homogenize, full control had not yet been established. In June 1948, church schools were nationalized, and Cardinal Mindszenty was sentenced to life imprisonment based on fabricated charges for speaking out against the atrocities perpetrated by the Communist regime against both the state and the Church. In 1948-1949, a series of cultural measures were implemented, leading to the closure of literary journals and the restructuring of artistic associations, ensuring that only individuals loyal to the Hungarian Working People's Party could assume leadership roles in these organizations. As a result of the takeover, this allegedly false

²¹⁹ Romsics. 290-291.

coalition evolved into a relatively unified political structure where actual authority rested with a small group of party leaders. The primary emphasis revolved around nationalizing of banks and factories, the collectivization of agriculture, the adjustment of political indoctrination within educational and cultural spheres, and the adoption of a cult of leadership closely adhering to the Soviet-style model.²²⁰

By 1947, the Communist Party's efforts to assert control over Hungary's political landscape were becoming more evident. The Smallholders' Party, a key member of the coalition, was pressured to leave the government, and the Communists moved to occupy key positions. This marked the beginning of a series of political maneuvers that would ultimately lead to the establishment of a one-party state. The process of Communist consolidation of power accelerated in 1948. The Hungarian Communist Party merged with the Social Democratic Party to form the Hungarian Workers' Party, effectively eliminating political competition. The coalition government was dissolved, and a single-party system was introduced. One of the key aspects of the Communist takeover was the implementation of land reforms and nationalization policies. Large landholdings were redistributed to peasants, and industries and key sectors of the economy were nationalized. This resulted in increased state control over the means of production and distribution.

However, the consolidation of Communist power came at a heavy cost. Hungary's alignment with the Eastern Bloc deepened during this period, and the country adopted the Soviet model of socialism. Hungary also became a member of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), which aimed to coordinate Communist parties and policies in Eastern

²²⁰ Rainer, M. János: "Magyarország a szovjet érdekszférában" in Magyarország Társadalomtörténete 1945-1989. Edited by Fokasz, Nikosz and Örkény, Antal. Budapest: Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, 1998. Pp.31-33

Europe. The Hungarian regime initiated a campaign of political purges and repression, targeting anyone perceived as a threat to the new order. This period of intense repression became known as the “Rákosi Era,” from 1949 to 1956 characterized by the suppression of opposition voices, imprisonment, and even execution of political dissidents. Influenced by the Soviet cult model Rákosi strived to present himself as “an omnipresent leader, a wise teacher, a benevolent father, and the epitome of the nation’s history”.²²¹ However, his policies fell short of achieving the popular support he desired, as his heavy emphasis on industrial development resulted in a decline in living standards. Moreover, he enforced collectivization among peasants, despite its adverse effects on agricultural production, while simultaneously curtailing political and intellectual freedoms.²²²

The 1949 elections marked the initiation of an enduring campaign focused on propaganda and mobilization. Rákosi initially assumed the role of HWP General Secretary during the merging congress held on June 12 of that year. Subsequently, on February 1, 1949, he was designated as the president of the newly established Hungarian Popular Front for National Independence, also known as the Patriotic People’s Front. Following the 1949 elections, he took on the position of president of the State Security Commission, maintaining all of his earlier responsibilities.

Historian Balázs Apor delineates that following the 1949 election, a comprehensive propaganda campaign orchestrated by Rákosi was initiated, with one of its notable instances being the trial of former Minister of Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs,

²²¹ Apor, Balázs. *The Invisible Shining: The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945-1956*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2017. p. 337.

²²² Gyorgy, Andrew. “Behind the Rape of Hungary. By Francois Fejtő. (New York: David McKay Company. 1957. Pp. Xv, 335.)” *American Political Science Review* 52, no. 3 (1958): 880–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055400297992>.

László Rajk, during the autumn period.²²³ An important moment in propaganda activities occurred in December with the celebration of Stalin's seventieth birthday. The intention was to sustain societal mobilization through the promotion of the inaugural Five-Year Plan, which was eventually introduced in 1950. Alongside the mobilization of society, the full-scale implementation of Sovietization in 1949 also played a role in the gradual formalization of state-societal interactions.

The establishment of the leader's cult represented the primary symbolic dimension of Sovietization. It served as a dual function by bolstering the regime's mobilization endeavors and formalizing social interactions. The cult, in essence, emerged as the primary tool for generating and sustaining public support for the regime and for imbuing the Party and its leaders with an almost sacred significance. Prior to 1949, the orchestrated adulation of Rákosi had already achieved an unparalleled scale in Hungarian political history. Although Rákosi's paramount position within the Party (and cult) hierarchy had been apparent since 1945, the continual attribution of the nation's accomplishments to his name during the coalition years cultivated a unique image. As the campaign to popularize Rákosi intensified during the years of takeover, the level of reverence soared to unprecedented heights within and after 1949. Images of the leader, through photographs, portraits, and

²²³ One of the most well-known show trials initiated under Soviet orders in the Eastern Bloc was the trial against László Rajk, a communist leader. László Rajk (1909–1949) served the establishment of the Rákosi dictatorship, promoting communist dominance in Hungary; however, he also orchestrated showcase trials and, as Minister of Interior, suppressed and labeled numerous civic organizations (such as religious and national organizations) as fascist. Nevertheless, on May 30, 1949, he was arrested on fabricated charges, sentenced to death by the People's Court on September 24 on charges of anti-state activities and treason, and executed on October 15. He was posthumously rehabilitated in 1955 and buried on October 6, 1956, at Kerepesi Cemetery, serving as one of the key precursors to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. (citation: Tamás, Tarján M. "Megszületik Rajk László." Rubicon Online. Accessed March 18, 2024. <https://rubicon.hu/kalendarium/1909-marcius-8-megszuletik-rajk-laszlo#>. And "Szeptember 24.: Ítélethirdetés Rajk Konceptió perében (1949)." Helsinki Bizottság. Accessed March 18, 2024. https://helsinki.hu/esemeny/szeptember_24_itelethirdetes_rajk_koncepcios_pereben_894/).

sculptures, pervaded the public sphere, creating an impression of Rákosi's ubiquitous presence, while the media overflowed with articles lauding his merits. Additionally, literary works made their contribution to the leader's adoration, with poems and short stories widely disseminated in newspapers and literary collections.²²⁴

Communist propaganda employed various tactics to enhance the Rákosi cult during the period of 1948–1949. A key method in constructing this cult was attributing political accomplishments to Rákosi. For instance, he was depicted as the “Architect of the Constitution” in 1949. Furthermore, he became linked to significant events such as the merger of the two workers' parties, the exposure of what was claimed to be a conspiracy led by former Interior Minister László Rajk, the initiation of the first Five-Year Plan in 1950, and even Hungary's achievements in winning gold medals at the 1948 Olympic Games in London.²²⁵

In Hungary, as the non-Communist parties were gradually dismantled, there was a simultaneous campaign of intimidation and control imposed upon the Catholic and Protestant Churches. This period also witnessed an extensive program of nationalization, the seizure of foreign investments, and a comprehensive purge within the Communist Party. During this latter purge, individuals like László Rajk along with a group of Communist leaders, were apprehended on charges of involvement in a Titoist conspiracy. The subsequent trial and executions in 1949 were strategically orchestrated to furnish material for anti-Titoist propaganda. Additionally, they served as cautionary measures to discourage

²²⁴ Apor, Balázs. *The Invisible Shining-The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945-1956*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2017. pp.69-71.

²²⁵ Apor. p.65.

any deviation from the official Party stance and to eliminate Communist leaders who were perceived as potential focal points for a domestic Communist movement.²²⁶

The construction of Communism, not only in Hungary but also in the Soviet Union and across the Eastern Bloc, brought about a comprehensive transformation of physical space. This transformation aimed to create a new world to accommodate the ideals of the New Soviet Men and Women.²²⁷ It involved both implementing grand architectural projects and reshaping existing spatial structures, such as renaming streets and squares, as well as replacing memorials and monuments dedicated to former national heroes and revolutionaries with those commemorating figures from Communist history and heroic Soviet liberators. The link between socialist development and Stalin was evident in the widespread use of the leader's name within the physical landscape. The many instances of renaming places and landmarks in honor of the Soviet Party secretary were intended to serve as symbolic markers, signifying progress along the path toward socialism. The alteration of symbolic spatial elements in Central and Eastern Europe commenced with the arrival of the advancing Soviet Army, even before local Communist parties assumed political control.²²⁸

²²⁶ Kertesz, Stephen D. "The Methods of Communist Conquest: Hungary 1944-1947." *World Politics* 3, no. 1 (1950): 20–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009010>. pp. 51-54.

²²⁷ Embedded within the political ideology of the communist movement is the concept of reshaping not only the mindset and psychology but also the biological characteristics or dimensions of individuals, with the aim of creating a "New Man." The formation of this new type of individual was an ongoing process that evolved throughout the entire Socialist period. Despite its continual evolution, the fundamental concept behind the new Soviet man was to cultivate an archetype of an exceptional builder of socialist society. (citation: White, Stephen. "The Making of New Soviet Man" in *Political Culture and Soviet Politics*, London: Red Globe Press, 1979, pp.69-70 And Kelly, Catriona, 'The New Soviet Man and Woman', in Simon Dixon (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Russian History* (online edn, Oxford Academic, 16 Dec. 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199236701.013.024> , accessed 18 Mar. 2024.)

²²⁸ Apor, Balázs, Péter Apor, E. A. Rees, and 1945-1964" Joint Workshop on "New Perspectives on the Sovietization and Modernity in Central and Eastern Europe. *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*. Washington, DC: New Academia Pub., 2008. pp.149-151.

In summary, the years 1947 to 1949 were marked by a tumultuous transformation in Hungarian politics. Hungary transitioned from a multi-party democracy to a one-party Communist state closely aligned with the Soviet Union and the broader Eastern Bloc. This period of intense political change, repression, and ideological transformation had profound and long-lasting effects on Hungarian society and politics for decades to come. The establishment of Communist rule in Hungary during this period laid the groundwork for the country's political landscape throughout the Cold War era. Interestingly, amidst the consolidation of Communist power and its attendant political and societal restrictions on memorialization, this period marked the emergence of what could be termed as the first "memory boom," characterized by a proliferation of memorials and monuments dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust. This paradigm highlights the convoluted relationship between top-down power structures and grassroots societal dynamics. While on the institutional level, opposition was quashed and a Soviet-style cult of leadership was being cultivated by Rákosi, at the grassroots level, there was a transfer of knowledge regarding memorialization practices and a diversity of voices emerged among those involved in commemorative activities in Hungary.

Chapter II.III the Diversity of Actors

The period between 1947 and 1949 marked a critical juncture in the postwar history of Hungary, a time when efforts to remember and commemorate the Holocaust victims began to crystallize. In the Hungarian urban and rural areas outside of Budapest, these efforts predominantly emerged from local Jewish initiatives and were often facilitated by local authorities. Having suffered grievous losses during the Holocaust, local Jewish communities across Hungary recognized the imperative of preserving the memory of their martyrs. They were determined to erect monuments that would serve both as tangible memorials to the victims and as symbolic statements of resilience. These initiatives were the result of community-driven actions, where survivors and their families took the lead in raising awareness and resources for these projects.

While local Jewish communities initiated these efforts, it is essential to underscore the collaborative nature of these undertakings. In many cases, local authorities played a pivotal role in facilitating the establishment of these monuments. Municipal support was instrumental in providing resources, permits, materials and occasionally even land for these memorials. Local leaders, mayors, party representatives, and in few cases international Jewish organizations, recognizing the importance of preserving the memory of Holocaust victims, worked closely with the Jewish community to realize these projects. As an example, documents from the Szeged Jewish archive includes letters from 1948 by the head of the Szeged Jewish community. In the first letter, the community leader requests unused construction materials and permission from the mayor of Szeged to erect a monument dedicated to the deportees of the Holocaust. In another letter, addressed to the Ministry of

Transport, the Jewish community seeks permission to acquire unused granite slabs from the remnants of the construction of the Ferihegy airport for use in their martyr memorial.²²⁹ These correspondences serve as evidence of municipal and state cooperation with Jewish communities to construct memorials commemorating their martyrs.

The presence of various church representatives, or in some cases the lack of it, at the unveiling of Holocaust memorials in Hungary also held profound significance, reflecting a broader societal engagement with the memory of the Holocaust. Beyond the political and state-driven aspects of memorialization, the involvement of church leaders added a moral and ethical dimension to the commemorative efforts. Their attendance signaled a collective acknowledgment of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust and underscored the universality of the human tragedy, transcending political and religious boundaries. By delivering speeches at these events, church representatives contributed to fostering empathy and moral reflection within the community, emphasizing shared values of compassion, justice, and remembrance, just in the case of the unveiling of Miskolc's memorial in 1947. In a society undergoing significant transformations, the existence of these memorials and the commemorative events associated with them, such as the extensive mourning ceremony held in Győr in 1947, served as a symbol of unity and solidarity. These events encouraged the public to confront the painful truths of the past and strive for a future characterized by compassion and tolerance.

This collaboration between local Jewish initiatives, authorities and other actors represented a profound response to the horrors of the Holocaust, exemplifying a shared responsibility for upholding historical memory and preserving the lessons of the past for

²²⁹ HU_SZSZH_A_II_5_1948_167_01 and HU_SZSZH_A_II_5_1948_167_09

future generations. The monuments that arose during this period were not only a means of honoring the fallen but also a declaration of local society's commitment to remembrance and the rejection of the hatred that had led to such tragedy. In the years that followed, these monuments continued to stand as testimony to the resilience of Hungarian Jewish communities and the enduring commitment to never forget the martyrs of the Holocaust.

It is also crucial to highlight the emergence of international actors or influences from other countries, given their substantial impact, albeit particularly on Budapest rather than the entire nation. Nonetheless, this aspect contributes to the multifaceted nature of the memorialization process occurring between 1947 and 1949, thus it will be undertaken in more details in the subsequent chapters. One of the first evidence of international actor involvement in memorialization took place in Budapest 1947, in the form of the Swedish Embassy that wished to place a memorial plaque in January to those who were murdered while seeking shelter in the building of Jokai Street during the Arrow Cross terror in Budapest up to 1945. The premises located 1 Jokai Street had been incorporated into the Swedish Embassy infrastructure and functioned as shelters, accommodating a substantial number of individuals, thereby earning them the designation of "safe houses." Regrettably, during the waning days of the siege of Budapest in January 1944, Arrow Cross members forcibly entered the Jokai Street building, forcibly evacuating officers, their family members, and anyone seeking sanctuary onto the streets. Tragically, approximately 170 individuals met their demise when they were ruthlessly shot and thrown into the icy river. In commemoration of their martyrdom, the Swedish Embassy installed a marble memorial plaque on the Jokai Street property on 8 January 1947, hosting a memorial event attended by the bereaved relatives and friends of those who fell victim to the ruthless acts of the

Arrow Cross. The gathering included not only representatives from the Swedish Embassy but also Rabbi József Katona, the chief rabbi of the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, Hungary, among numerous other attendees.²³⁰

Another illustration of international involvement is connected to the unveiling of Balf memorial on 17 May 1948, a memorial for the Jewish martyrs was consecrated from the Sopron region in far west Hungary who were lost and never returned. The memorial itself was initiated by a Polish Catholic Ernő Wosinszky, whose family saved the lives of hundreds of people and in every possible way alleviated the suffering of the persecuted during the horrors of that time. Rabbi József Fischer from the United States, who initiated and facilitated the realization of the memorial concept in America, was also present at the unveiling ceremony with his wife from New York. The memorial in Balf was funded through contributions from the American Jewish Refugees Aid Society, the First Hungarian Self-Education Circle, the Hungarian Central Literary Society, the Szatmár Region Association, the First Hungarian Independence Lodge, the Jewish Congress Hungarian Committee, the Pannónia Lodge, and the Boy Round Table associations. Representatives from various churches and political parties were also present at these commemorations.²³¹

The commemorative column, sculpted from raw stone, was unveiled on the fortress-like wall of the Catholic cemetery in Balf. This monument stands in memory of the 8,600 persecuted individuals who suffered martyrdom in the vicinity of Balf during the fascist Arrow Cross terror. Beneath two burial mounds in front of the memorial, the remains of approximately 800 persecuted women lie in repose. From this location, one can also see

²³⁰ 1947. Januar. 16 Új Élet

²³¹ 1948. Május.15. Új Élet

the building of the acidic spring, where thousands of coerced and severely mistreated forced laborers, both women and men, perished. The memorial itself, an imposing creation by the Sopron architect Oszkár Füredi, takes the form of a large, stylized exclamation mark – a response to the question of why so many innocent lives had to perish.²³²

Based on my findings, representatives of the main religions of Hungary generally made the effort to be present at memorial unveiling ceremonies across the country from 1945 onwards with the exception of the Rákosi era. The participation of diverse religious leaders in these events showed their understanding and cooperation in the face of shared historical trauma. However, their occasional absence from these ceremonies surfaced obvious tensions arising from the Jewish communities in regard to the Church's inability to protect Jews, or even their collaborations with the antisemitic regime of wartime Hungary. This was the case on 12 June 1947, when the Eger Jewish community observed a solemn commemoration in remembrance of the tragic destiny befalling 1,600 innocent Jewish individuals who were subjected to deportation and died in the Auschwitz gas chambers. The event also served as a mournful tribute to the former labor servicemen who endured brutal massacres perpetrated by fascist forces within the confines of Eger and the Kerecsendi Forest.

Throughout the course of this commemorative gathering, all Jewish organizations, workplaces, and administrative offices remained closed as a sign of reverence and mourning. *Új Élet* reported that even though both the Reformed and Lutheran Churches were involved in the commemorative event, the Catholic Church, represented by Archbishop Dr. Gyula Czapik of Eger, chose not to partake in this expression of solidarity

²³² Haladás, 1948 (4. évfolyam, 1-53. szám) 1948-05-20 / 21. szám

and commiseration with the Jewish community.²³³ Since the speakers who addressed the assembly underscored the necessity to sustain efforts in combating the ongoing undercurrents of antisemitism within contemporary society, it seemed that the Catholic Church in its absence not aligned with this fight.²³⁴

In the realm of Holocaust memorialization between 1947 and 1949 in Hungary, the diverse array of actors played a pivotal role in shaping the commemorative landscape. Beyond the commonly perceived top-down approach, this period witnessed a groundswell of initiatives involving Jewish communities, local individuals, politicians, church representatives, and international figures. These varied actors, each contributing to the memorialization process, added layers of complexity and richness to the collective memory of the Holocaust. Their engagement reflected a collective determination to ensure that the atrocities were remembered on both a national and individual level. The chapter endeavors to highlight the discrepancy in attention paid to Holocaust victims by the Hungarian government, particularly during the period from 1947 to 1949. Despite limited efforts in Budapest, where a significant portion of the Jewish population survived the Holocaust, little emphasis was placed on preserving their memory. However, outside the capital, grassroots-level activities among local Jewish communities, urban and rural authorities, and activists

²³³ Following the evident occurrence of mass deportations, the Christian churches initiated a collective response against the deportations and the persecution of Jews. Eger Archbishop Gyula Czapik participated in this initiative, expressing sharp criticism of the planned joint circular letter. In a declaration drafted in 1944, Archbishop Gyula Czapik formulated his stance, acknowledging that he did not find it appropriate how the Jews were being excluded from Hungarian life, stating: "Undoubtedly, many individuals in Jewry are complicit in the undermining of Hungarian economic, social, and moral experience. It is also undeniable that the leaders or groups within Jewry have never sought to curb the detrimental, destructive spirit emanating from their ranks affecting the life of the Hungarian nation." In Gergely, Jenő. A katolikus püspöki kar és a konvertiták mentése. Pp.27-30.

https://tti.abtk.hu/images/kiadvanyok/folyoiratok/tsz/tsz1984_4/gergely.pdf

²³⁴ 1947. Június 18. Új Élet

were observed. These initiatives aimed to commemorate victims, even in areas where few survivors returned from deportation. The multiplicity of voices and efforts underscored the communal responsibility felt at different levels of society to confront the traumatic past, an effort that remains significant in understanding the complexities of Holocaust remembrance in postwar Hungary.

Chapter II.IV Naming the Victims

When acts of cruelty are perpetrated with the intention of stripping away an entire race's identity and rights, reducing them to mere numbers, the perpetrators' objective is to obliterate them. Hence, it seemed controversial to adhere to the same line of thinking and memorialize the deceased members of a specific community or town with a generic, collective term such as victims or martyrs. Without a place to mourn, it became crucial for Jewish communities to restore individual names to those who were uprooted from their homes and faced their fate in concentration camps, forced labor camps, and mass graves. By featuring individual names on memorials, the focus shifted from a collective acknowledgment to a more personal and empathetic connection with the victims.²³⁵ This nuanced approach not only honored the memory of each person but also highlighted the diversity and richness of the lives that were extinguished.

In 1947–1949 a common form of commemoration was the installation of plaques or memorial tablets, bearing the names of the deported and lost individuals. These tablets were typically situated in Jewish cemeteries, synagogue walls, or at other historically significant sites. Since there was no possibility to appropriately bury the deceased members of their communities, this act of naming on memorial plaques or on monuments was able to facilitate individualized expressions of grief. Survivors and descendants could visit these memorials, find the names of their loved ones, and pay their respects in a deeply personal way, which transformed the memorial from a passive structure into an active site of remembrance and healing.

²³⁵ Bauer, Yehuda. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. New Haven [Conn.] :Yale University Press, 2001. p.19.

In contemporary times, a prevailing practice involves the deliberate inclusion of the names of Holocaust victims on memorial sites and in museums, exemplified by memorials in cities such as Bucharest, Vienna, and Berlin.²³⁶ Noteworthy is the Stolpersteine concept by the German artist Günther Deming, which entails the installation of commemorative stumbling blocks for individual Holocaust victims. By 2021, there has been 70,000 Stolpersteine installed in 21 countries across Europe including Hungary. While these practices are now facilitated by a wealth of available data, the postwar period presented a distinct challenge for Jewish communities nationwide. There was a concerted effort to uncover information about victims in this period, a task that heavily relied on community members, residents of towns or villages to piece together these historical details.

Such requests for information pertaining to Jewish deportees from various Hungarian towns and villages by the Jewish communities across Hungary were very common, research included comprehensive details concerning these individuals, including their full names, the locations of their last known whereabouts, their ages, their parents' names, and any available information regarding their fates, specifically whether they died in labor or concentration camps. The purpose of this information collection effort was to facilitate the creation of a commemorative monuments dedicated to the victims from numerous Hungarian towns that included Sátoraljaújhely, Miskolc, Szeged, and Győr, among others.²³⁷

²³⁶ "Naming Memorial" as part of The Vienna Project in 2009, The Shoah Wall of Names Memorial in Vienna in 2021, The Room of Names at The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin in 2005., Holocaust memorial in Bucharest in 2009.

²³⁷ 1947 Febr. 6. Új élet, page 14

Another illustration of the significance of names on Holocaust memorials is the inauguration of the Miskolc Chamber of Commerce's commemorative plaque on 2 March 1947. The event intended to pay tribute to the enduring memory of the merchant martyrs of Miskolc who died during World War II at the hands of the fascist perpetrators. The plaque serves as a repository of remembrance, bearing the names of 293 individuals. This commemorative occasion was not restricted solely to honoring the memory of the 293 Miskolc Jews whose names are inscribed on the plaque; it also encompassed a broader remembrance of all Hungarian Jewish individuals who were deported and tragically perished during this period. Imre Székely, serving as the Deputy Chairman of KOKSZ,²³⁸ articulated his tribute to the deceased:

*Throughout the expanse of Europe, mass graves are being excavated, saturated with a profusion of bloodshed. In our nation's capital, a continuous stream of funerals is taking place, where the remains of hundreds of thousands of victims are buried in countless coffins, all bearing anonymous identities. However, our martyrs are not nameless. In our homeland, they were denied even the smallest parcel of earth; for the majority, their souls ascended to the heavens through the chimneys of the gas chambers in Nazi Germany. Those of us who have survived solemnly pledge that we shall perpetually remember.*²³⁹

Dr. Sándor Bródy, the National Executive President of KOKSZ, fervently beseeched both those assembled at the commemorative event and the civic leaders of the city to forestall any resurgence of antisemitism. Representatives of the Reformed and Lutheran Churches also delivered addresses during the commemoration, vehemently denouncing the severe cruelties inflicted upon the local Jewish population.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Kereskedők Országos Központi Szövetsége (KOKSZ) – the National Central Association of Merchants.

²³⁹ Speech given by Székely Imre at the unveiling of the memorial plaque at Miskolc, published in Új Élet, 1947, Március 26

²⁴⁰ A miskolci mártíremlék leleplezése. In Új Élet 1947, Március 26

The Jewish community of Győr also wished to preserve the memory of their fellow believers who perished during deportation and forced labor service not only by the memorial they erected on 15 June 1947 but also by recording their names in a memorial book,²⁴¹ commemorating the names of the victims.²⁴² In a grand and somber ceremony on Sunday morning, the memorial for the 5,500 Jewish martyrs who perished during deportation and forced labor was unveiled in Győr. The event was attended by President Tildy Zoltán, Prime Minister Lajos Dinnyés, Justice Minister István Ries, Minister of Education Ernő Mihályffy, Minister of Culture Gyula Ortutay, and several other prominent figures in the political sphere. The rationale behind the heightened political engagement observed during postwar monument unveiling ceremonies was primarily driven by the perceived political expediency of the era rather than a genuine concern for Jewish suffering among political parties. András Kovács elucidates this phenomenon by noting that political factions, including Communists and Social Democrats, were cognizant of the prevailing antisemitic sentiments and the contentious issues surrounding restitution. However, instead of actively addressing these matters, they opted for verbal assurance of condemnation against antisemitism and rhetorical support for Jewish community reconstruction and compensation demands.²⁴³ Monument unveiling ceremonies provided suitable platforms for the dissemination of such political rhetoric, particularly in urban centers with larger

²⁴¹ As explained by Viktória Bányai and Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy; Following the Holocaust, many communities reinstated the practice of *Memorbuch*, akin to how the medieval Ashkenazi world documented various Jewish persecutions by recording the names of victims and detailing their experiences. This tradition evolved as survivors or descendants from a community published printed versions of the community's Yizkor book. These publications went beyond merely listing the names of the deceased and providing an account of the perilous era; they also delved into the community's history, recounting various stories and anecdotes related to its significant figures. In *A vézskorszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949*. p.2.

²⁴² 1947 április Új Élet

²⁴³ Kovács, András *Communism's Jewish Question. Jewish Issues In Communist Archives*. : De Gruyter, 2017. pp.5-6-

attendance. Despite sharing anti-fascist sentiments, members of the Communist and social democrat parties sidelined Jewish concerns to prioritize the consolidation of Communist power and the dismantling of the multi-party-political system in 1947.

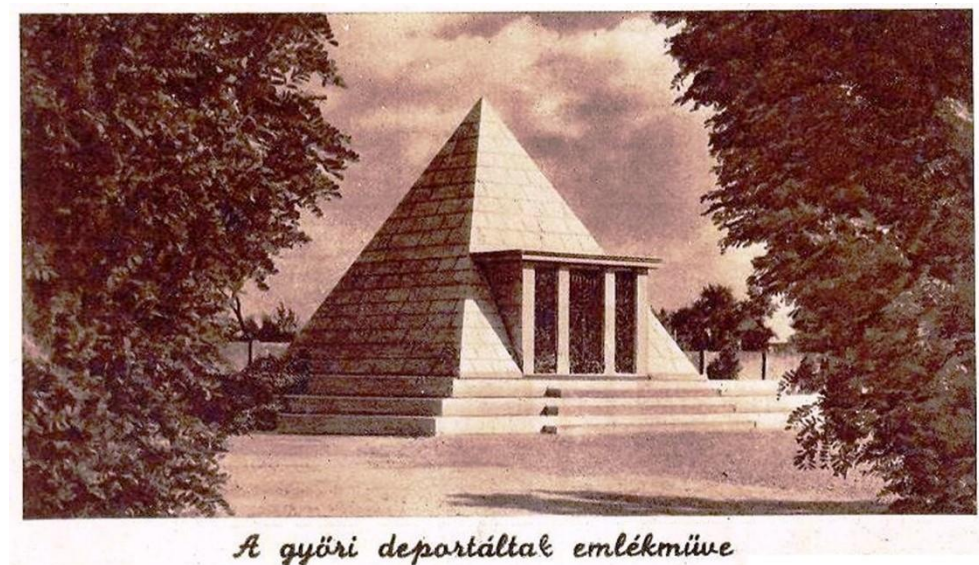


Figure 3 "A győri deportáltak emlékműve" Memorial for the Győr deportees inaugurated in 1947. Postcard. <https://regigyor.hu/ujvaros-sziget/a-martirok-emlekmuve/> 2019.06.04.

In a cemetery in Szombathely, an inauguration ceremony was conducted to unveil a memorial monument dedicated to individuals who had served in labor units, marking the second of such commemorative structure within Szombathely. The monument memorializes the memory of 4,228 martyrs who perished from the brutalities inflicted within the Szombathely Ghetto. The ceremonial proceedings were presided over by Rabbi József Horovitz and Chief Cantor József Halász, from Nagykanizsa. Notable addresses were delivered during the inauguration ceremony by Dr. Iván Hacker, the esteemed president of the Jewish community, who stressed that; while most of victims rested in unmarked graves, their names would be immortalized on the memorial being unveiled. Further relevant comment was made at the unveiling ceremony by Ernő Weinberger, the

last pre-war teacher of the Jewish school in Sopron who articulated his belief that the memorial column should ideally occupy a central location within the city, rising prominently as emblematic of remorse and ethical reparation on behalf of our innocent and tragically departed fellow co-religionists.



Figure 4 "Inauguration of the memorial for the Jews of Szombathely" inaugurated in 1947.07.04. Photo from the Szombathely Jewish Archive. 2024.04.01.

On July 8th, the third anniversary was solemnly observed, marking the arrival of a deportation train that transported one thousand Jews from Keszthely to Auschwitz. In commemoration of this significant date, a poignant mourning ceremony was conducted by the surviving residents of Keszthely. This commemorative event saw the closure of businesses, the suspension of work activities, and the assembly of individuals at the former ghetto site in Keszthely. Within the city of Keszthely, two prominent white marble memorials were erected on the sites where the wartime ghetto once stood. The first adorns the historic Goldmark House, featuring a plaque above the gate honoring Károly Goldmark, who achieved renown on a local and national scale through his contributions to music and

the arts.²⁴⁴ Notably, the gateway beneath this plaque provides access to the former ghetto area.

In the central square of the former ghetto, one can find the well-preserved Jewish temple, which boasts a remarkable history spanning more than 260 years. Adjacent to this venerable temple stands another white marble column, bearing the inscription: “Here in the 44th year of the 20th century, there was a ghetto... Remember...” The area surrounding this memorial column, adorned with flowers and candles, was once the marketplace of the ghetto and served as the venue for the initial segment of the mourning ceremony, dedicated to commemorating the martyrs. Subsequently, the attendees proceeded to enter the ancient temple, where white marble tablets displayed the names of those deported from Keszthely.²⁴⁵

Following liberation, approximately ten returning members of the faith community in Nyírcsaholy undertook the arduous task of restoring the extensive damage inflicted by the fascist regime. Their initial endeavor involved the meticulous restoration of the Sefer Torah, a sacred scroll containing the Jewish holy scriptures. This intricate task was effectively accomplished and it was consecrated during the Passover observance in 1946. Subsequently, a concerted effort was made to initiate the reconstruction of the severely impaired synagogue, which had been significantly vandalized during the period of fascist rule. A poignant feature of the refurbished synagogue was the commemorative inscription

²⁴⁴ Goldmark, Károly on Arcanum, Magyar életrajzi lexikon. <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-magyar-eletrajzi-lexikon-7428D/g-gy-757D7/goldmark-karoly-759A6/>

²⁴⁵ Dr Lukács, Mihály: A keszthelyi mártírok emlékezete in Új Élet 1947 július 17.

on its walls, bearing the names of the 94 Jewish martyrs hailing from Nyírcsaholy who were subjected to deportation and tragically never returned to their homes.

On 8 August 1948, the remaining Jewish community in Szolnok erected a memorial plaque in the antechamber of the local synagogue to honor those who perished during deportations and forced labor service. The mayor of Szolnok ordered on that day for public buildings to be adorned with mourning flags as a sign of solidarity from the city's workers. Simultaneously, he called upon the residents of Szolnok to display mourning flags at their homes. The names of the 798 deceased Jews were inscribed in black letters on the white marble tablet.

Abaújszántó, one of the largest and oldest Jewish communities in the Hegyalja region of northern Hungary, was home to approximately one thousand Jewish people. On 18 July 1948, the remaining members of the Jewish community unveiled a memorial plaque bearing the names of the nine hundred martyrs who perished during deportations and forced labor service.

On 2 May 1948, three men from Villány in southern Hungary who had returned from deportation unveiled a white marble tablet on the exterior wall of the town's synagogue. The tablet bore the names of 87 deportees from this southern Baranya village. On 26 April 1944, 92 individuals were deported, of whom only five returned. The three former deportees who still resided there took it upon themselves to organize the commemoration ceremony. This act of unveiling the memorial tablet served as a poignant reminder of the tragic loss experienced by the Villány community during the Holocaust. The inscription, with the names of the deported individuals, perpetuated their memory and signifies the commitment of the survivors to ensure that their fellow community members

will never be forgotten. The ceremony was a testament to the resilience and determination of the survivors to honor the memory of those who perished.²⁴⁶

In Budapest, the Jewish community instigated public debate around naming victims in memorials. In 1948 a colonnade project that was formulated to honor those deported from Budapest and those who met their fate within the city, with plans to inscribe the names of victims on columns, stirred the discourse when it became known that only eight to ten thousand names would be inscribed on the columns, the Budapest Jewish community responded with profound astonishment. An article published in *Új Élet* drew attention to the inadvertent distortion of historical facts inherent in this approach. This concern arose due to the estimation that the number of victims within the Budapest Jewish community approached one hundred thousand. Consequently, as Miklós Gelléri elucidated in the journal, there was a palpable apprehension that future visitors, lacking historical context, might encounter the memorial bearing only ten thousand names and erroneously infer that this represented the entirety of the losses sustained by the Budapest Jewish community. It is interesting to note that such concern regarding the falsification of history was already infiltrating public discourse as far back as 1948. It highlights the susceptibility of historical narratives to manipulation and the deliberate omission of critical facts, creating a situation where the full extent of historical events may not be accurately conveyed.

In the 1948 article, Gelléri duly acknowledges a counterargument pointing out the complete annihilation of certain families, rendering them lacking surviving relatives who could advocate for the inclusion of their loved ones' names on the memorial. Additionally, the author concedes the limited capacity of the newly unveiled 1948 memorial to

²⁴⁶ 1948 Május 20 Új Élet

accommodate only a fraction of the deceased individuals. Nevertheless, he offered a constructive proposal designed to preclude potential historical misrepresentation and to provide clarity for those who contemplate the memorial.

Gelléri proposed an explanatory text be inscribed on the memorial, to precede the listing of names, thereby elucidating: “This memorial is dedicated to the remembrance of one hundred thousand Budapest martyrs. Among them, due to the tragic loss of all surviving relatives in many cases, only the subsequent names have been verifiable...,” followed by the engraved names. The proposal extended to the establishment of a comprehensive memorial in Székesfehérvár, designed to honor the memory of the obliterated Jewish communities in rural regions. This monument would serve as a commemorative tribute to the five hundred thousand martyrs from the countryside, consequently offering an overarching numerical representation of Hungary’s six hundred thousand victims.

Regarding preexisting rural memorials bearing solely the names of identifiable victims inscribed in marble, the proposal advocates for a subsequent addition of the total number of victims. In specific locales, no Jewish individuals returned, while in others, the limited means of the few survivors might preclude the installation of commemorative plaques. For these diminutive communities, the proposal recommends, at the very least in numerical terms, the inclusion of the martyrs on the general memorial dedicated to the entirety of the rural Jewish population. It was now four years since their deportation, and the completion of these memorials was becoming increasingly imperative. They are

intended “to rekindle the flame of remembrance, a flame that must forever remain undiminished”.²⁴⁷

Already by 1948 in nearly every Hungarian town and village memorials had been erected to honor the victims who perished in deportation and martyrdom. Each of these memorials bore the inscribed names of individuals who did not return, providing a poignant space for surviving relatives to regard these carved names on the marble as symbolic gravestones commemorating their tragically departed loved ones. At these sites, individuals present flowers as an expression of their deep reverence and engage in acts of prayer to honor their departed relatives. The recognition of individual Holocaust victims has grown steadily over time, with survivor testimonies and memoirs serving as pivotal factors in underscoring the significance of commemorating each life lost. Moreover, numerous memorials, monuments, and museums, particularly since the early 2000s, have made deliberate efforts to honor individual victims by incorporating their names into exhibition projects or inscribing them on memorial stones. Notably, initiatives such as the “*everynamecounts*” campaign launched by the Arolsen Archives - International Center on Nazi Persecution in 2020 further underscore the importance of remembering victims as individuals rather than mere statistics.²⁴⁸ This chapter aims to elucidate that while there has been a discernible trend toward individual remembrance over the past 25 years, the practice of naming individual victims can be traced back to the immediate aftermath of World War II. During this period, discussions emerged regarding the imperative to authentically preserve the memory of every Holocaust victim. While it is accurate to acknowledge that

²⁴⁷ Új Élet p. 14 Miklós Gelléri: Mártíremlékművek 1948 szeptember 30

²⁴⁸ <https://everynamecounts.arolsen-archives.org/en/>

there may come a time when individual forms of remembrance transition into collective and even blended commemorations of World War II victims, this phenomenon will be explored further in subsequent chapters. However, the assertion that the memorials erected in the aftermath of World War II broadly commemorated victims such as those of fascism, does not universally apply to the initial commemorative efforts in Hungary.

Chapter II.V Foreign Influence

The international community often plays a crucial role in shaping the discourse around historical events, including the Holocaust. Nations often look to the experiences of others, drawing inspiration and guidance from foreign approaches to commemoration. One notable influence is the sharing of best practice in design, curation, and educational programming. Undoubtedly, successful memorial projects in one country can serve as a model for others, influencing decisions about the scale of the memorial, the message conveyed by the memorial, architecture, and public engagement strategies. Moreover, foreign memorials can contribute to a broader understanding of the historical event being commemorated, fostering a more nuanced and comprehensive perspective.²⁴⁹ The sharing of narratives, oral histories, and memorialization strategies across borders helps nations learn from each other's successes and challenges, or their way to interpret their own past. Additionally, international collaborations in memorial projects create opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, fostering empathy and a shared commitment to preserving historical memory. Ultimately, the exchange of ideas and practices in Holocaust memorialization on a global scale enriches the collective effort to honor the victims, educate future generations, and promote a more inclusive and reflective approach to commemorating this tragic chapter in history.

In 1947–1949 two relevant international cases affected Holocaust memorialization in Hungary. The first was a proposal for a grandiose memorial built in Israel to commemorate the six million Jews who perished during the Second World War. This

²⁴⁹ Young, E. James. "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument" in *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1993. p. 156 and p. 184.

memorial complex in Jerusalem would serve both as a center for scholarly activities and as a means of commemoration. An extensive archival project had been initiated, encompassing a wide range of historical materials, including official documents, eyewitness testimonies, legal transcripts, and personal recollections. These collective records documented the varied experiences of survivors and Allied soldiers who were involved in the conflict. Notably, the memorial aimed to honor the courageous individuals who risked their lives to rescue Jews from imminent danger, intending to inscribe their names as symbols of bravery. Each victim of the tragedy was to receive individual recognition, accompanied by detailed information about the destroyed communities, their historical narratives spanning centuries, and the brutality that led to their annihilation. As described in an article by the editor of Yad Vashem Jerusalem Magazine, Leah Goldstein, this memorial initiative was conceived as a lasting tribute and reminder of the Holocaust's enduring horrors.²⁵⁰ The responsibility for overseeing and implementing this significant endeavor rested with the committee of Yad Vashem and its designated board.

The planning of Yad Vashem to be not only a memorial but also an educational and research center influenced those engaged in Hungarian memorialization to also reconsider the role of Holocaust memorials and their ability to provide resources for educators, researchers, and students alike. Yad Vashem also initiated close collaborations with a consortium of Hungarian Jewish organizations, including Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael–Jewish National Fund, Keren Hayesod, the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency, the Zionist Federation, the Jewish Museum, the Rabbi Association, the Hungarian Hechaluc,

²⁵⁰ Goldstein, Leah. The Yad Vashem Story Chapter 2: Establishing Yad Vashem in the Jewish Homeland on Yad Vashem the World Holocaust Remembrance Center. 29 August 2022.
<https://www.yadvashem.org/blog/establishing-yad-vashem-in-the-jewish-homeland.html>

and the Teachers' Association. The board convened on 13 February 1947 marking the commencement of Yad Vashem's operations in Hungary.²⁵¹ Such a collaborative effort inspired the Hungarian Jewish community to begin engaging more actively in the documentation and remembrance of the Holocaust. Moreover, the memorialization methods and practices employed by Yad Vashem, such as the emphasis on naming individual victims therefore personalizing the tragedy by remembering individual stories impacted Hungarian Jewish communities' approach to commemorate this tragic chapter of history in a similar way.

Throughout the same period discussions began concerning the reopening of the National Hungarian Jewish Museum in Budapest. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the National Hungarian Jewish Museum stood as one of the most opulent repositories of cultural and historical documents pertaining to the Hungarian and European Jewish communities. However, like numerous other Jewish institutions, the museum did not escape the trials and tribulations brought about by the war. Nevertheless, owing to its leadership's foresight, the extent of the losses were relatively modest. In 1943, the most valuable artifacts were carefully packed into two crates and transported to the National Museum. Thanks to the efforts of art historian Magda Bárányiné Oberschall and cultural historian and writer Gabriella Tápay-Szabó, these artifacts emerged from the war unscathed. In the following years, numerous renovations and reorganizations of the museum exhibitions took place in order to be more appealing for a wider audience.²⁵²

²⁵¹ 1947. Február, 27. Új Élet page 10

²⁵² 1947 július 3 p 6 Új Élet

The second international case that directly created a response in Hungarian Holocaust memorialization was Nathan Rapoport's memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1948, Poland. The meticulously crafted, monumental memorial was unveiled on 19 April 1948, on the site of the Warsaw Jewish Ghetto in the presence of international representatives from American and European Jewry. This artistic creation, funded by the Jewish communities of Poland and the global Jewish diaspora, stood in commemoration of the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto and the six million Jewish martyrs who perished. The inauguration of this widely anticipated memorial ceremony drew the delegation of the Neolog Hungarian Jewish community. The impact of the memorial unveiling resonated significantly in Budapest, where a memorial service was held at the Rumbach Sebestyén Street Synagogue in honor of the victims of Warsaw, attended by the Bulgarian ambassador and representatives from the Yugoslav and Polish embassies.²⁵³ Subsequently, to honor the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance and, of course, influenced by the grand inauguration of the Warsaw memorial, the Polish Deportees Association and Hasomér Hacair (Jewish youth movement) unveiled a plaque in the courtyard of the Dohány Street Synagogue, Budapest, in memory of the Warsaw Ghetto martyrs. Various Jewish institutions and representatives from the Polish embassy participated in the commemoration.²⁵⁴ After the Warsaw memorial was revealed, Rabbi Dr. Zoltán Rác remarked that the Polish Jewish community's commemoration of the ghetto heroes served as an exemplary model for the Hungarians. Additionally, their endeavors to preserve a thriving Jewish cultural life were a source of inspiration.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Varsói emléktisztelet a Rumbach utcai templomban in *Új Élet* 1948. Ápr. 24. p.6.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Dr. Rác, Zoltán. A varsói ünnepségek lefolyása in *Új Élet* 1948 ápr 29. p.4-5.

In summary, this chapter examines the influence of foreign Holocaust memorialization initiatives on Hungary. By illustrating how these foreign memorials intersect with the Hungarian Jewish community's approach to remembrance, I seek to elucidate a multifaceted network of shared experiences and collective remembrance that extends beyond national boundaries. The global impact of monuments like the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial is evident in various manifestations, such as its recasting in 1976 in Israel and its depiction on stamps issued by both Poland and Israel.²⁵⁶ Moreover, the presence of grandiose, artistic monuments as the Rapoport's Memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising or the opening of a large-scale educational and memorial center in Israel has sparked significant discussions in Hungary. These discussions revolve around the purpose, location, and scale of future Holocaust memorials, drawing inspiration from international examples.

²⁵⁶ Young, E. James. *The Texture of Memory*. p. 156.

Chapter II.VI Antisemitism and Vandalism

Despite the criminalization of public expressions of antisemitism during the entire Communist era and the official condemnation of antisemitic ideology by Communist regimes, a significant portion of society retained deep-seated antisemitic prejudices. It becomes evident that anti-Jewish bias persisted beneath the surface of society continued in the four decades following World War II, despite efforts to prosecute public displays of antisemitism and the state's explicit rejection of antisemitic ideologies. The understanding of the Holocaust and the reintegration of Jews into postwar society faced resistance from the non-Jewish population. In the immediate postwar period, considerable tensions emerged in Central-East European states regarding issues of responsibility and legal accountability for the discrimination and persecution of Jews, the restitution of confiscated Jewish property, the fate of heirless Jewish assets, and reparations for Jewish victims. In Hungary by the end of 1945, an antisemitic narrative of "Jewish revenge" emerged, leading to anti-Jewish atrocities, blood libel accusations in several locations across the country. In 1946, the anti-Jewish sentiment escalated to pogroms in some areas. The pogroms in Kunmadaras and Miskolc drew both international and domestic attention to Hungary due to the fatalities involved. The non-Jewish perception of Jewish survivors' postwar status and social mobility further fueled tensions. The overrepresentation of Jews among Communist Party leaders and within the party, in general, once again became a focal point of attention in Hungary.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Kovács, András Communism's Jewish Question. Jewish Issues In Communist Archives. : De Gruyter, 2017. Pp.2-4.

The stances of political parties during this period were somewhat ambivalent. On one hand, all participants in the coalition government concurred those anti-Jewish laws and their legal consequences needed eradication, acknowledging the imperative for legal accountability regarding war crimes. In principle, they accepted the legitimacy and validity of the financial, proprietary, and compensatory claims of Holocaust survivors, Jewish communities, and institutions.²⁵⁸ It was a common practice that at the unveiling ceremonies of Holocaust memorials, politicians emphasized the necessity to crush any indication of antisemitism in the country. Despite the seemingly strong commitment for humanity and democracy in Hungary via commemorative speeches, the government hesitated to expedite their enforcement, possibly fearing potential provocations of those who had profited from the anti-Jewish laws and deportations. Such contradiction from the political elite allowed vandalism against Jewish martyr memorials, Jewish cemeteries to resurface.

During the commemoration ceremony at Győr, a joint session of the municipal and county legislative committees was convened at the Győr City Hall. At this gathering, president of the Hungarian Republic Zoltán Tildy arrived to pay his respects to the Jewish martyrs. The session was opened by József Udvaros, the municipal mayor, who extended a warm welcome to the president. Subsequently, Elek Fleischman, the president of the Jewish Community, greeted President Tildy from the platform. Following the ceremonial opening, President Tildy addressed the assembly, delivering a significant speech: “The leaders of the Hungarian Republic’s government have come to Győr today to pause with deep reverence and respect before the memory of those whose lives were torn from our midst by the forces

²⁵⁸ Barotányi, Zoltán. „Számontartották, ki zsidó” Interview with András Kovács, sociologist in Magyar Narancs. November 23, 2019. <https://magyarnarancs.hu/sorkoz/szamentartottak-ki-zsido-123961>

of hatred. They have come to express their deep and sincere sympathy for those who have lost their loved ones and everything they held dear. They have come to demonstrate their compassion for those who have emerged from the abyss of humiliation and suffering. Neither the Hungarian nation nor humanity can consign this era to oblivion without peril. The spirit and endeavors of this dark period may resurface. We must labor diligently toward genuine and lasting reconciliation. We must not forget what transpired here and elsewhere during those times, lest the spirit of malevolence, which cast not only a shadow over a specific segment, Hungarian Jewry, but also led the entire Hungarian nation to the brink of disaster, may rekindle. We must clearly recognize that antisemitism and, generally, all forms of religious and racial hatred, stand in opposition to universal humanity. It is imperative that we remain vigilant and take seriously any indications of the emergence of these malevolent elements, no matter how small. We must not trivialize the occasional sparks of antisemitism and minor manifestations of this phenomenon, for the fire that can arise from these may engulf us all, not only our nation but also humanity as a whole.”²⁵⁹

On 20 November 1947, *ÚjÉlet* reported an incident involving the desecration of the Marcali Jewish cemetery in north-western part of Somogy County, which occurred shortly after the vandalism of the Jewish cemetery in Dunaharaszti. This act of desecration entailed the toppling and deliberate fragmentation of tombstones within the Marcali cemetery.²⁶⁰ Notably, the Marcali cemetery had also previously fallen victim to acts of vandalism perpetrated by fascist elements in 1941 and in 1942. Those Jews who survived the harrowing tribulations of deportation and managed to return home exhibited remarkable

²⁵⁹ Felvidéki Népszava, 1947. január-június (3. évfolyam, 1-145. szám) 1947-06-17 / 134. szám

²⁶⁰ Huszár, Mihály. “Marcali zsidók Egyén és a közösség szerepe a magyar-zsidó történelemben.” (PhD Dissertation at Pécsi Tudományegyetem, 2023.) <file:///C:/Users/agnes/Downloads/huszar-mihaly-phd-2023.pdf> pp.476-478.

dedication to the restoration of the cemetery. This restoration effort primarily involved the reinstatement of the toppled tombstones to their original positions. However, the tranquility of the cemetery was not to endure, as it experienced yet another act of desecration during the Christmas season of 1946, which was reported in 1947.²⁶¹

On another occasion in November 1947, unknown perpetrators in Szombathely vandalized monuments dedicated to the deported by hurling stones, disturbing the serene atmosphere of the candlelit glass holders erected in their honor. On the Night of Atonement, the Szombathely Jewish community lit memorial candles to honor the memory of nearly four thousand five hundred Hungarian citizens who perished, however these solemn tributes were tarnished by acts of vandalism.²⁶² As the article's author, János Szentkirályi, noted: "Every honest, well-intentioned person is appalled by the desecrated candles. We should not think for a moment that this issue will stop at the borders of Szombathely."²⁶³ The author further argued that the recent disgraceful act, reminiscent of Hitler and Szálasi's spirit, occurred just after the ratification of the Hungarian peace treaty. The perpetrators, ignorant of the treaty's provisions against discrimination based on race, nationality, language, or religion, demonstrate a disregard for Hungarian democracy. Szentkirályi emphasizes that democracy and antisemitism are incompatible, asserting that one must prevail over the other.²⁶⁴

In January 1948, the Jewish cemetery plots in Farkasrét, Budapest also fell victim to vandalism, with the graves of Jewish heroes desecrated as tombstones were toppled. The

²⁶¹ Új Élet Meggyalázott temető-meggyalázott demokrácia. 1947 november 20, p1-2.

²⁶² Világ, 1947. november (727-751. szám) 18. 1947-11-15 / 738. szám p.81.

²⁶³ Szentkirályi, János: Új Auschwitz felé? In Szabad Vasmegeye, 1947. szeptember (3. évfolyam, 197-219. szám)1947-09-28 / 219. szám

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

investigation hit a dead end at that time, as eyewitnesses could not provide any descriptions or closer leads regarding the culprits. Two days later, another act of vandalism occurred, this time targeting the Rákoskeresztúr, Budapest Jewish cemetery where several students and young individuals had gathered at the cemetery and knocked over 39 gravestones. The cemetery administration promptly reported the incident to the police, who launched a vigorous investigation. The journal's article disclosed that preliminary investigations indicated the involvement of a group of high school students with fascist inclinations in orchestrating the vandalism of Jewish cemeteries, following premeditated instructions. Moreover, confidential information suggested their intentions were to target additional Jewish cemeteries and newly erected memorials for further desecration.²⁶⁵

In conclusion, the persistence of antisemitism and vandalism against Jewish cemeteries and memorials in Hungary from 1947 reflects a complex interplay of historical, social, and political factors. Despite the end of World War II, deeply rooted prejudices, postwar tensions, and the reckoning of responsibility contributed to an atmosphere of hostility. The political transitions and the rise of Communist influence, while officially rejecting antisemitic views, did not eradicate ingrained societal prejudices. Economic and social disruptions, coupled with lingering nationalism, fueled resentment and scapegoating, with Jewish communities becoming targets for frustration. The overrepresentation of Jews in certain positions within the Communist Party added a political dimension to the antisemitic sentiments. The continuation of antisemitism and vandalism underscores the challenges of postwar reconstruction, illustrating how historical grievances and societal

²⁶⁵ Világosság, 1948. január-március (4. évfolyam, 1-74. szám) 1948-01-17 / 13. Szám p 71

attitudes persisted, casting a shadow on the efforts to rebuild and reintegrate Jewish communities in Hungary.

Chapter II.VII Language

In addition to the diverse postwar discourses surrounding the Holocaust, the language used to discuss its atrocities reflects the nuances of the social and political landscape in 1947–1949. The narratives constructed around the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders not only depict historical events but also reveal the evolving attitudes and tensions within societies. The choice of terminology, the framing of events, and the emphasis on certain aspects of the Holocaust discourse all contribute to shaping public memory and historical interpretation.²⁶⁶ Analyzing the multifaceted nature of postwar Holocaust discourse unveils the intricate layers of how societies come to terms with their past, navigate collective memory, and negotiate the narratives that shape their understanding of this unparalleled historical horror. Moreover, the language used by political actors began to reflect the top-down narrative of Holocaust memorialization, which notably involved erasing the Jewishness of the Holocaust and instead emphasizing the role of the Soviet liberators.

The rhetoric employed in representing heroes, victims, and perpetrators during this era was intricately linked to the prevailing political and ideological climate. In 1947, the Jewish community's caution in explicitly naming perpetrators while readily acknowledging Soviet heroes and even honoring Stalin for the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto underscores the nuanced dynamics at play. This hesitancy within the Jewish community to explicitly name perpetrators might be indicative of a complex interplay of factors: It could

²⁶⁶ Much literature exist on the importance of language used on Holocaust memorials by James E. Young ("The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning", "At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture"), Jay M. Winter ("Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History"), Bányaí Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel (A vészorkorszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949), Harold Marcuse (Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre).

reflect concerns about potential repercussions, both locally and internationally especially due to the existing antisemitism, as well as a delicate balance in dealing with postwar power structures. The Communist regime at that time was consolidating power in Hungary and across the Eastern Bloc, and any explicit naming of perpetrators might have been sensitive given the political dynamics of the time. The government's narrative often sought to downplay internal conflicts and present a united front against external enemies. The readiness to acknowledge and honor Soviet heroes, including Stalin, suggests a degree of alignment with the dominant political ideology. The Soviet Union was a key ally, and emphasizing their role in the liberation of Budapest might have been a strategic choice to align with the political narrative of the ruling regime. This recognition of Soviet heroes also aligns with the broader trend of socialist realism, where narratives and representations were often shaped to fit the ideological framework of the ruling Communist Party.

At the commemoration for the second anniversary of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto, the Jewish community organized a solemn memorial ceremony hosted at the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest. Notably, the event drew a multitude of attendees, with the synagogue's vast capacity filled to its utmost extent. The gathering's purpose was to reflect upon the auspicious occasion of liberation, an event orchestrated by the efforts of the Soviet Red Army, which culminated in the emancipation of the Budapest Jewish community from the harrowing oppression inflicted upon them by antagonistic forces characterized as barbarous. Rabbi Fabian Herskovits delivered an address that vividly and metaphorically portrayed the ideological struggle between the forces of good and evil. It is noteworthy that Rabbi Herskovits specifically named the Soviet Army, Stalin and the Jewish victims in his discourse, albeit without explicitly designating the perpetrators

beyond the overarching characterization of “barbarians.” By using as general a term as “barbarians,” the focus shifts onto the acts themselves, the systemic nature of the crimes, rather than providing individual identities to those responsible.²⁶⁷

In addition to using generic terms, an alternative prevalent method to denote the perpetrators in commemorative speeches or articles was the characterization of them as “fascists” or depicting the victims as martyrs of extreme fascism. As reported in *Új Élet*, on the morning of 1 October 1947, the Szeged Jewish congregation unveiled a commemorative plaque dedicated to the memory of its martyrs.²⁶⁸ The plaque occupied a prominent position within the antechamber of the synagogue. This act of remembrance served as a tribute to the memory of approximately two thousand Jewish individuals whose lives were tragically claimed by the effects of fascist extremism, and whose final resting places remain unmarked.²⁶⁹



Figure 5 "Memorial for the Deported Jews of Szeged from 1947". <http://virtualis.sk-szeged.hu/>. 2023.11.17.

²⁶⁷ Emlékistentiszelet a Dohány utcai templóban. In *Új Élet*. 1947. Január 23. p.7-8.

²⁶⁸ Dr Katona, Dávid, *Új Élet* 1947 Október 2 p. 9-10.

²⁶⁹ Délmagyarország, 1947. szeptember (4. évfolyam, 198-221. szám) 1947-09-23 / 215. Szám p.2.

The notable absence of references to the perpetrators as Hungarians, German Nazis, or Arrow Cross members raises the inquiry as to why these specific identifiers were not employed. A plausible explanation emerges in the historical context of the postwar period, particularly with the Soviet Union's increasing influence. The prevailing narrative during this time portrayed the Soviet Union and its sphere of interest as anti-fascist, contrasting with others who were broadly categorized as fascists. This distinction, rooted in the era's geopolitical dynamics, sheds light on the selective terminology used in discussions surrounding Holocaust commemoration. Another explanation is that the nature of the political system during the Horthy era was often characterized by the labels of "fascism" and "fascist" in the period following 1945. In her writings from the time, historian Erzsébet Andics unequivocally classifies the Horthy regime as a fascist-type political system. Building on this, it could be assumed that when referring to the named fascist perpetrators during commemorations, they were also associated with Hungarian collaborators.²⁷⁰

In conclusion, the language employed to articulate the atrocities of the Holocaust during commemorative events, particularly the choice of descriptors for both perpetrators and victims, reveals a nuanced and often politically charged discourse. The deliberate avoidance of directly naming the perpetrators, opting instead for terms such as "fascist" or "barbarian," reflects the increased influence of the Soviet Union shaping a narrative that categorized its sphere of interest as anti-fascist and others as fascist. The language used in commemorative settings particularly by political actors becomes a lens through which we can observe not only the historical events but also the political and social dynamics that shaped the discourse surrounding the Holocaust. The linguistic discourse utilized by

²⁷⁰ Andics, Erzsébet: *Munkásosztály és nemzet* (2. kiadás). Budapest, Szikra, 1946. p.108.

political figures and leaders within Jewish communities during the political tumult of 1947-1949, amidst efforts to solidify a one-party Communist regime, demonstrates a significant convergence with Soviet directives. This period witnessed a discernible transformation in the discourse surrounding Holocaust commemoration at the state level, characterized by a reduced emphasis on Jewish specificity and an increasing tendency to glorify Soviet liberators and the leadership of Stalin. The deliberate selection of terms reflects an intricate dance between memory, politics, and the quest for a collective understanding of this traumatic chapter in history.

Chapter II.VIII Conclusion

The period between 1947 and 1949 marked a significant chapter in Holocaust memorialization in Hungary, characterized by a remarkable memory boom. This era witnessed an unprecedented surge in the construction of Holocaust monuments and memorials, challenging the prevailing notion that memorialization was scarce during this time. The diversity of actors involved in this process, ranging from Jewish communities and local individuals to politicians, church representatives, and international figures, underscores the multifaceted nature of the efforts to commemorate the victims. While politicians showed limited interest in addressing the needs of Jewish survivors or responding to their demands for compensation, they strategically utilized the platform of inaugural speeches at memorials and monuments. During this period, when a multi-party system still existed different rhetorics were voiced, certain politicians prioritized the promotion of democracy in postwar Hungary, while members of the Communist Party echoed narratives aligned with the Soviet Union's agenda, which focused on the heroic actions of Soviet liberators while downplaying the Jewish aspect of the Holocaust. Concurrently, there was a remarkable display of collaboration among local actors who sought to commemorate the Jewish victims of their communities. They engaged in civilian efforts such as researching the victims, compiling databases, funding memorials, and organizing commemorative events.

A crucial aspect of this commemorative wave was the concerted effort to collect and include the names of all victims on the monuments or memorial plaques. This reflected a commitment to honoring the individuality of those who perished and countering the dehumanizing tendencies of the Holocaust. The emphasis on personalizing the

remembrance of victims demonstrated a departure from collective terms and contributed to a richer, more nuanced understanding of the human toll of the atrocities.

However, amidst these commendable efforts, there emerged a troubling undercurrent of antisemitism and vandalism targeted at the very memorials erected to remember the victims. This resurgence of hostility underlines the persistent challenges faced by Jewish communities in Hungary, even as they sought to commemorate and preserve the memory of those lost during the Holocaust. The language used during this period to refer to the perpetrators or the victims further reveals the social and political tensions prevailing at the time, shaping the narratives surrounding the events of the Holocaust.²⁷¹

In essence, the postwar years in Hungary witnessed a complex interplay of remembrance and hostility, as diverse actors came together to construct memorials, collect names, and grapple with the language used to describe the Holocaust. This chapter sheds light on the multifaceted nature of Holocaust memorialization, revealing both commendable strides and persistent challenges in preserving the memory of the victims. This chapter aims to challenge the notion that there was a lack of commemorative actions or discourse surrounding the fate of Hungarian Jews. Previous chapters have demonstrated that conversations were sparked by the construction of new and elaborate memorials abroad, as well as discussions about the authenticity of the number of names engraved on memorials and what role their misrepresentation could play in memorialization. Additionally, incidents of existing antisemitism directed toward these Holocaust

²⁷¹ Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel “Az emlékművek nyelvezete” in *A vészidőszak zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949* pp.3-6.

monuments or Jewish cemeteries have further underscored the significance of remembrance in Hungary. It can be inferred that rather than silencing the topic, there was considerable attention surrounding remembrance practices in Hungary, which certainly have a continuity even after the regime change in 1989.

Chapter III. Remembering the Holocaust in the Rákosi Era, 1949-1956

Chapter III.I Silent Narratives - Introduction

“There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth
though they have long been extinct.
There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world
though they are no longer among the living.
These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.
They light the way for mankind.”²⁷²

This chapter will delve into the ideological underpinnings that guided the memorialization strategies during the 1950s, probing the intersection between state-driven narratives and the commemorative agenda. The intricate interplay between political developments and the shaping of collective memory will be examined, shedding light on how the commemoration of Jewish martyrs became entwined with the larger ideological objectives of the Communist Party. This era serves as a pivotal juncture in the trajectory of Holocaust memorialization, characterized by a deliberate shift in focus from acknowledging the suffering of Jewish martyrs to highlighting the role of the Soviet liberators. The evolving political landscape, coupled with the impending revolution, adds a layer of complexity to this transformation. By exploring these nuances, this chapter seeks to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how political shifts and historical contingencies influenced the memorialization practices of the 1950s in Hungary.

Furthermore, this period also represents a significant chapter in memorialization processes in the context of Budapest and regional aspect. Beginning in the early 1950s,

²⁷² Hanna, Szenes. <https://www.hannahsenesh.org/who-is-hannah-senesh/>

there were martyr commemorative events and mourning ceremonies held across Hungary, spanning locations such as Marcal, Jászberény, Mohács, Szekszárd, Bonyhád, and Debrecen. Additionally, a few memorials were erected during the 1950s in Nyíregyháza, Baja, Jánosháza and Törökszentmiklós. Concurrently, commemorative events marking the fifth anniversary of liberation took place nationwide in 1950, expressing gratitude to the Soviets. However, the scale and nature of these commemorations differed significantly from those honoring the martyrs. Notably, martyr commemorations in Hungarian towns evolved into predominantly Jewish affairs, devoid of political actors or representatives from other churches, with no corresponding media coverage. Though, these events were attended by rabbis and Jewish individuals from neighboring towns, paying homage to the Jewish martyrs of World War II.



Figure 6 "Memorial for the Nyíregyháza deportees inaugurated in 1950"
Photo from Zsidó épületek és emlékek Nyíregyházán. Riczu, Zoltán. 1992.

In contrast, Budapest witnessed minimal coverage of commemorations in *Új Élet*, with only sporadic events in certain districts. Noteworthy exceptions included the rare inauguration of martyr memorials, such as in Kispest in 1950, which attracted representatives from the Hungarian Working People's Party, the Ministry of Defense, and

even the Reformed Church. Speeches at these events often incorporated elements of Soviet propaganda, highlighting a marked contrast with commemorations outside of Budapest.

Following the Communist takeover, the Rákosi government formalized the status of churches through agreements. While these agreements formally recognized the autonomy of churches as organizations, in reality, they subjected both the organizations and their leaders to strict state control.²⁷³ Church organizations underwent restructuring, church schools were nationalized, and just like the voice of the oppositions newspapers and periodicals were abolished. Given the restrictions imposed by the Rákosi regime on religious and cultural activities, for Hungarian Jews these Holocaust commemorative gatherings held across the country served as vital venues to congregate. Although churches were permitted to maintain a church publication with permission, such as the case of *Új Ember* for the Catholic Church, publications like *Új Élet* for the Hungarian Jews were also allowed to continue albeit with a diminishing number of pages until 1953 when it could only be issued monthly, citing paper shortages.²⁷⁴

Prior to 1951, *Új Élet* had the freedom to engage in discussions on pressing political matters, including discourse or critical remarks concerning political responses to antisemitism, compensation, and Jewish status. However, following 1951 Communist regime tightened its control over Jewish public life, the scope of the newspaper's articles became restricted to the internal affairs of Hungary's Jewish religious community.²⁷⁵ This

²⁷³ Komoróczy, Géza. "A pártállam zsidó egyháza" in *A zsidók története Magyarországon*. Pozsony: Kalligram. 2012. p.995.

²⁷⁴ Horváth, Attila. *A Magyar sajtó története a szovjet típusú diktatúra idején*. Médiatudományi Intézet. <https://mek.oszk.hu/13400/13447/13447.pdf> 2013. p.82.

²⁷⁵ Frojimovics, Kinga. 2010. *Új Élet*. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Uj_Elet (accessed April 1, 2024).

primarily encompassed commemorative events and occasional monumental inaugurations, such as those in Nagykáta, a town near Budapest, or Apafa, located on the outskirts of Debrecen.

It can be inferred that, in theory, the state the notion to permit a form of restricted freedom of religious practices; however, the practical realities depicted a starkly contrasting scenario. The compulsory teaching of Hebrew was discarded, and the final opportunity to undergo a Hebrew matriculation exam occurred in 1949. Following this, Hebrew instruction became confined to a structured setting exclusively within the Rabbinical Seminary. Furthermore, mandatory religious education was terminated, resulting in substantial consequences not only for the transmission of religious knowledge but also impeding the evolution of Jewish consciousness.

The Communist antipathy toward Jews was further intensified in their opposition to Zionist and international organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Joint), with Hungarian Jews being accused of Zionist espionage.²⁷⁶ In 1953, among the leaders of Jewish Zionist organizations, Lajos Stöckler, who served as the President of the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK) after the war, was arrested and accused of harboring a large sum of money from the Joint Distribution Committee (Joint) in his residence. A year later, Stöckler and László Benedek, the chief physician of the Jewish Hospital, were arrested on charges of murdering Raoul Wallenberg in 1945, the Swedish diplomat who, along with his colleagues, saved Jews from Nazi and

²⁷⁶ Similar antisemitic campaigns were conducted throughout the entire Soviet bloc, exemplified by events such as the Doctors' Plot in the Soviet Union and the Slánský Trial in Czechoslovakia.

Arrow Cross deportations during the war.²⁷⁷ Although both were released in 1954, Benedek died in the spring of 1954 due to torture, while Stöckler remained dependent on care for the rest of his life due to the effects of the torture.²⁷⁸

The antisemitic stance of the Rákosi regime is evident in these show trials, but when the 1956 Revolution comes, antisemitic actions also come to the fore in rural counties now from the opposite side, which is due to the fact that the uprising masses associated Jewish identity with Communist involvement.²⁷⁹ Overall, it can be concluded that anti-Jewish movements continued during the Rákosi era, alongside the postwar pogroms. It is true that the only neutral space where they could be together, uncontested by politics, were the nationwide martyr commemorations. Additionally, these commemorative events served as crucial platforms for the Jewish community to unite and remember their losses amidst a politically charged environment.

Until 1956, the commemorative events honoring martyrs erected outside of Budapest remained devoid of visits from political parties or local officials. Rather, these occasions were predominantly attended by members of the Jewish community, who assumed a central role in delivering speeches and leading the commemorative proceedings. This phenomenon underscores the grassroots nature of Holocaust remembrance in Hungary during this period, highlighting the Jewish community's proactive engagement in preserving the memory of the victims independently of official political involvement.

²⁷⁷ Novák, Attila: *Ideology and Self-Identity. The 1953 Budapest Zionist Trial*. Committee of National Remembrance, Budapest, 2020. pp. 155-179.

²⁷⁸ Komoróczy. pp. 1006-1015.

²⁷⁹ Karády, Viktor. A magyarországi antiszemitizmus: kísérlet egy történeti kérdéskör megközelítésére. *Regio-Kisebbségtudományi Szemle* 1991. 2. Évf. 2.sz. pp. 9-11. https://real-j.mtak.hu/14801/1/Regio_1991_2.pdf

Chapter III.II Political Overview

The year 1949 marked a notable and significant transformation in Hungarian society. Coined the “Year of the Turn” by Rákosi, it marked the commencement of comprehensive Sovietization in Hungary.²⁸⁰ Undoubtedly, by 1949, the established system in Hungary fully embodied the concept of totalitarianism, characterized by a one-party regime, an overarching ideology regulating all spheres of society, and a terror apparatus that instilled fear in everyday life. While the parliament continued to operate after 1949, maintaining the appearance of a multi-party system, in reality, all power was concentrated in the hands of the sole party, the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP). The formalization of the role of the National Assembly (Országgyűlés) was evident in its infrequent sessions, which were convened only two or three times a year for a day or two each time. Then in 1950 the establishment of the Soviet-style council system marked the conclusive stage of the Communist ascension in Hungary. In that year, the Stalinist economic blueprint was further embraced with the initiation of the First Five-Year Plan. Ultimately, the consolidation of Communist authority in Hungary solidified Rákosi's leadership within the Party.²⁸¹

Commencing an illustrious political trajectory, Rákosi's initial foray into politics dates back to the early 1900s, marked by his affiliation with the Social Democratic Party.

²⁸⁰ Apor, Balázs. “Rákosi and the Hungarian Communists: The Road to Power” in *The Invisible Shining: The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945–1956*. Budapest–New York: Central European University Press. 2017. Pp.37

²⁸¹ Romsics. 344.

His early engagement culminated in his participation as one of the founding members of the Hungarian Party of Communists (KMP) in 1918. Despite enduring internment in a prisoner-of-war camp for the duration of World War I and subsequent imprisonment in a Hungarian penitentiary throughout the interwar period, his ascension to a leadership position encountered little questioning upon his eventual release. Taking on various leadership positions within the Party, Rákosi became the general secretary in 1945, assumed the presidency of the People's Front in 1949, assumed control of the informal Committee of Home Defense in 1950, and eventually rose to the position of prime minister in 1952. The parliamentary elections held between 1949 and 1953 allowed for voting only for candidates led by Rákosi's People's Front, shifting Hungary into being openly governed by a Communist dictatorship.²⁸²

Rákosi personally supervised the activities of the security police, (Államvédelmi Hatóság or ÁVH), intervening in investigations and actively organizing show trials against his political adversaries. The primary organ of state administration was the government, which, according to the constitution, was referred to as the Council of Ministers from 1949 onward. István Dobi served as the President of the Council of Ministers from 1948 to 1952, followed by Rákosi until the summer of 1953. Despite his undeniable authority within the Hungarian hierarchy, Rákosi's dependence on Moscow, and Stalin, was conspicuous, and his vulnerability became evident following the passing of the Soviet leader.²⁸³ Rákosi's unwavering support for Stalin and his leadership undoubtedly influenced the manner in

²⁸²MNL BKML XV.76.a, 1. sorozat, 7. tétel (Pártok, szervezetek), 56.

https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/bkml/rakosi_korszak

²⁸³Apor. 104.

which he sought to cultivate his own cult of personality and enforce his policies with a ferocious tenacity.²⁸⁴

The Rákosi regime also carried out purges and political persecutions targeting perceived political opponents, intellectuals, and members of the bourgeois class. These purges were aimed at consolidating Rákosi's power and silencing any dissenting voices within Hungarian society. The regime's ruthless suppression of opposition groups and the establishment of a pervasive surveillance apparatus contributed to an environment of fear and conformity, effectively quashing any challenges to the ruling authority. In Hungary, the primary instrument for this was the department of the Ministry of the Interior, originally tasked with locating war criminals, that was initially called the State Defense Department (Államvédelmi Osztály or ÁVO), and from September 6, 1948, the ÁVH. The organization later separated from the Ministry of the Interior in 1949. In addition to locating war criminals, it gathered information and fabricated false charges against individuals opposing Sovietization. The first victim was László Rajk, who was arrested on May 31, 1949, on various fabricated charges. In the spring and summer of 1950, out of several hundred detainees, 276 were interned and 154 were convicted. A total of 21 prominent leaders were imprisoned, including János Kádár. However, the politically significant show trials represented only a part of the institutionalized terror. In addition to these trials, various other methods were employed to maintain a constant state of fear within society.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Rees, Edward Arfon, Jones, Polly, Apor, Balazs, Behrends, Jan C., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2004. p.47.

²⁸⁵ Tulipán, Éva. *The Hungarian Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (2014): 452–55.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/43265215>.

In addition to the political sphere, a comprehensive transformation of the economy took place from 1948. Following a radical shift in ownership, centralized planning permeated all aspects of economic life. The economic development concept was based on the premise that Hungary needed to become an industrial country, a nation of iron and steel, in a short period. This economic concept did not prioritize infrastructure development and sought to extract mainly from agriculture. This concept disproportionately affected agrarian regions where there was a lack of raw materials, and industry had hardly existed before. During the formulation of the first Five-Year Plan, a high accumulation rate was determined, primarily in favor of heavy industry.²⁸⁶ In the centrally managed economy system, which mechanically copied the Soviet example, political considerations prevailed over economic rationality, sidelining technical development and quality. Everything was subordinated to quantity criteria. State expenditures only increased, and after the outbreak of the Korean War, defense spending consumed nearly a quarter of the national income. The irrational economic policy led to a decrease in the standard of living and supply disruptions in the country. In 1951, a rationing system had to be introduced, which did not eliminate the shortages.²⁸⁷

Furthermore, as highlighted in the introduction, Rákosi's government maintained strict control over cultural and intellectual expression, promoting socialist realist art and literature while suppressing dissenting or non-conformist voices. The media was tightly controlled, with propaganda and censorship serving as tools to uphold the regime's ideological narrative and suppress alternative viewpoints. The dogmatic policy of the

²⁸⁶ Apor, Balázs. "The Cult in the Party (1945–1947)" in *The Invisible Shining: The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945–1956*. Budapest–New York: Central European University Press. 2017. p.65.

²⁸⁷ Botár, József. *A Rákosi-diktatúra első évei. Dokumentumok Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megye történetéből 1948-1953*. Nyíregyháza: STÚDIUM Kiadó. 1991. p.21.

Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) was evident in not only cultural but in education life as well. Church schools came under state control, introducing a unified state public education system. From then on, religious beliefs and practices were generally at a disadvantage everywhere.²⁸⁸ In addition to education, music, film, and literature also became tools for political reeducation. No book, no newspaper, and no stage play could be presented to the public without undergoing strict censorship.²⁸⁹

The cult of the leader, crucial for solidifying unchallenged authority and manipulating public opinion about the leader, had already been present in the Soviet Union. Despite being initially surprised by the extent of the Stalin cult upon his arrival in the Soviet Union in 1940 after 15 years of imprisonment, Rákosi swiftly accustomed himself to it. Upon his return to Hungary, he emerged as the central promoter of the Stalin cult. The incorporation of the leader cult represented the most significant symbolic element of Sovietization, contributing not only to the regime's mobilization endeavors but also to the formalization of societal interactions.

Prior to 1949, the orchestrated deification of Rákosi had already achieved an unprecedented scale in Hungarian political circles. As his glorification escalated during the years of the regime's establishment, the level of reverence experienced an unparalleled surge after 1949. The public sphere was saturated with images of the leader, ranging from photographs to portraits and sculptures, all serving to emphasize Rákosi's omnipresence. Simultaneously, the media was inundated with articles extolling his virtues, while literary

²⁸⁸ Botár. p.22.

²⁸⁹ Rees, Edward Arfon, Jones, Polly, Apor, Balazs, Behrends, Jan C., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2004. p.8.

productions, including poems and short stories, further contributed to the celebration and idolization of the leader.²⁹⁰

As regards to the Jewish question during the Rákosi era, following the Communist ascension to power, the Party effectively nullified concerns related to the Jewish question. Through the proclamation of an end to antisemitism, the Party aimed to diminish the perception of Jews as a distinct group. The term "Jew" was expunged from publications, becoming a taboo in public discourse. Between 1945 and 1947, approximately 300 works were published annually on the Holocaust; however, from 1949 to 1955, the yearly publications plummeted to fewer than five. Even in secondary school textbooks, discussions were limited to portraying the victims of fascism as a collective group.²⁹¹

The Party's leadership aspired to relegate Hungarian Jews solely to a religious category, although even this religious distinction was closely monitored by the Party. In the summer of 1948, all religious schools, including Jewish ones, were nationalized, and the teaching of Hebrew was prohibited. This political dominance over every facet of life extended to journals as well; *Új Élet* was compelled to transition to a monthly publication in a significantly condensed format.²⁹²

Following Stalin's demise on March 5, 1953, an intense power struggle unfolded among prominent political figures, ultimately resulting in Nikita Khrushchev's ascendancy

²⁹⁰ Apor, Balázs. "The Cult in the Party (1945–1947)" in *The Invisible Shining: The Cult of Mátyás Rákosi in Stalinist Hungary, 1945–1956*. Budapest–New York: Central European University Press. 2017. pp.68–69.

²⁹¹ Goldstein, Donna Meryl. "From Yellow Star to Red Star: Anti-Semitism, Anti-Communism, and the Jews of Hungary." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 18, no. 1 (1995): 1–12.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24497960>. p.5.

²⁹² Völgyesi Zoltán. "A kommunista egyházpolitika szakaszai Magyarországon 1948-tól 1964-ig". In *Mediárium* - 5. évf. 4. sz. 2011. p.25.
https://epa.oszk.hu/01500/01515/00010/pdf/EPA01515_mediarium_2011_4_25-34.pdf

to party leadership. Despite Khrushchev's subsequent consolidation of power, the enduring contest for supremacy reverberated around the Soviet bloc, not least in Hungary. An integral component of this quest for absolute control entailed a reassessment of Soviet foreign policy, signaling a departure from the Cold War strategies pursued since 1945, ostensibly aimed at preempting the specter of a Soviet defeat.²⁹³

The Soviet Union government came to realize that an expected military readiness would demand increased efforts not just from the Soviet Union, but also from its satellite nations. Concurrently, the decline in living standards and the progressive tightening of the political environment resulted in escalating tensions within these satellite countries. This strain culminated in public discontent, initially observed in East Berlin in June 1953 and subsequently in Czechoslovakia.²⁹⁴ These occurrences played a role in strengthening the resolve of the new leadership in Moscow to consider modifications to the prevailing Soviet policy.

Nevertheless, Rákosi, who had remained staunchly loyal to previous Soviet expectations, did not align with Khrushchev's thaw and the principle of de-Stalinization, perhaps presuming that the political power struggle in Moscow would eventually subside and the prevailing state of affairs established during Stalin's era would continue unchanged. Rákosi was called upon when summoned to Moscow in June 1953 to resign from the prime minister's position and share his power with someone else, thereby altering the policy on living standards. A particular point of criticism was the high proportion of individuals of

²⁹³ Rees, Edward Arfon, Jones, Polly, Apor, Balazs, Behrends, Jan C., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2004. p. 19.

²⁹⁴ Apor. 281.

Jewish origin within the leadership.²⁹⁵ The Central Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party's meeting on June 27–28 followed the Moscow Council's instructions in every aspect, ultimately contributing to the appointment of Imre Nagy as the prime minister. The country's population learned about the turn of events from Imre Nagy's government program speech on July 4, 1953. The public's reaction revealed divisions, primarily between the countryside and the capital, as well as among the intellectuals. Imre Nagy held the reins of government from July 4, 1953, to March 28, 1955. During this nearly two-year period, numerous corrective measures were taken in the fields of economy, society, and cultural policy.²⁹⁶

Until the end of 1954 and early 1955, Imre Nagy enjoyed the Soviet leadership's support. However, a new turn of events occurred in Hungarian politics around the beginning of 1955 when, in January of that year, the Hungarian leaders, including Imre Nagy, were once again summoned to Moscow. There, Nagy faced strong criticism for the perceived radicalism of the reforms he had initiated. Additionally, other international events posed a threat to the Soviet Union's position, especially when the United States admitted West Germany to NATO on May 5, 1955.²⁹⁷ In response, the Soviet Union established the Warsaw Pact as a counterpart to NATO, and Hungary immediately joined.

Seizing the heightened tensions, in the spring of 1955, Rákosi launched a counteroffensive against Imre Nagy, accusing him of revisionism or rightist deviation. Consequently, Nagy was expelled from the Political Committee. This move was followed

²⁹⁵ Kovacs, András. *Communism's Jewish Question*. p.9.

²⁹⁶ Romsics. 382.

²⁹⁷ Mastny, Vojtech. "The New History of Cold War Alliances." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 4, no. 2 (2002): 55–84. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925183>.

by increasingly vocal dissent from the intellectual circles, demanding the party reflect on its policies over the previous few years and draw appropriate conclusions. Rákosi faced growing criticism not only from intellectuals but also from other political leaders, including General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, János Kádár. Under escalating pressure, Rákosi publicly admitted, amidst mounting criticism, that László Rajk had been unjustly executed, and he personally bore responsibility for his death. In this explosively tense situation, the Soviet leaders decided to dismiss Rákosi. He was taken to the Soviet Union on a plane along with his wife and did not return home again.²⁹⁸

By the summer of 1956, the Soviet leadership deemed it necessary to engage in another political intervention, as the situation had caused unrest throughout the entire socialist bloc. There were fears of "unexpected, unpleasant events" occurring in Hungary. The likelihood of such events increased following the movement in Poznań, Poland, where security forces violently dispersed workers protesting for improved living and working conditions, resulting in nearly a hundred deaths and hundreds of injuries.²⁹⁹ On October 6, 1956, László Rajk, along with his executed comrades, was ceremoniously reburied in Budapest. Following the funeral, students were first to mobilize, chanting anti-Stalin slogans and protesting in downtown Budapest on the afternoon of October 6.³⁰⁰

The student assembly held at the Budapest University of Technology on October 22, 1956, went even further. They not only decided to join the Hungarian University and College Students' Union (MEFESZ) but, inspired by the events in Poland formulated their

²⁹⁸ Romsics, Ignác. Chapter VIII, Kádár Korszak: Rendszerváltozás in Magyarország Története a XX. Században. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999. Pp. 380-382.

²⁹⁹ Fehér, Ferenc and Ágnes Heller. Hungary 1956 Revisited: The Message of a Revolution – A Quarter of a Century After. London: Routledge. 1983. p.16.

³⁰⁰ Apor. 194-195.

demands and announced a demonstration the next day in solidarity with the changes in Warsaw. Breaking from traditional methods, they did not submit petitions to the Party but presented demands, supported by a street demonstration.

The protest commenced at 3:00pm in the afternoon at the statue of Petőfi Sándor on Március 15. Square. From there, the crowd proceeded to Bem Square, singing revolutionary songs along the way. By the early evening hours, the protesters reached the parliament, where the events spiraled out of control. In front of the parliament, the crowd demanded to hear from Imre Nagy. Simultaneously, a group near City Park toppled the statue of Stalin, and a third group marched toward the Hungarian Radio building where they wished to announce their previously formulated demands. The radio station's leadership did not permit this, the protest turned into an armed uprising when, in the evening, an unknown person from among the defenders of the radio station fired into the crowd. Battles unfolded at various points in the city until late in the evening. In the early hours, Soviet tanks appeared to confront the armed protesters. On October 24-25, similar mass demonstrations occurred in numerous cities throughout the country, where protests also evolved into smaller or larger armed clashes.³⁰¹

On October 23, 1956, Imre was reinstated in the Political Committee and subsequently appointed Prime Minister by the Presidential Council. Initially, the new government was not in line with the protesters' demands, imposing a curfew and declaring martial law, which nobody adhered to. Nagy's stance was significantly influenced by another tragedy on October 25, when gunfire was opened into the crowd gathering toward

³⁰¹ Borhi, László. *Hungary in the Cold War 1945–1956* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2004. Pp. 243-244.

the parliament, further intensifying the armed resistance. Eventually, Nagy made the decision to stand at the forefront of the protesters. He not only sought to reshape the government but also initiated negotiations to ensure the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest and eventually from the entire territory of Hungary.

Although the possibility of allowing Hungary's independence was raised in the Soviet Union, ultimately, following the Yugoslav model, they decided against the suppression of the uprising and opted for the restoration of the previous status quo. The current geopolitical situation, particularly the tension surrounding the nationalization of the Suez Canal, played a significant role in this decision. Despite the inevitable failure of the 1956 Revolution, it can be considered as a milestone in the country's history, shaping the political trajectory of János Kádár, who would later be placed power.³⁰²

The Jewish experience during the 1956 Revolution was characterized by a complex duality.³⁰³ On one hand, as Róbert Szabo notes, there were enthusiastic sympathizers of the revolution, while on the other, a growing apprehension among Jews foreshadowed a potential resurgence of antisemitism following the revolution's success. Noting a few antisemitic incidents, Szabo posits that these occurrences were largely based on unfounded information or were concentrated in rural areas. Nevertheless, Szabó concludes that the revolution did not differentiate between Jews and non-Jews it was the voice of Hungarians against totalitarianism.

³⁰² Romsics, Ignác. Chapter VIII, Kádár Korszak: Rendszerváltozás in Magyarország Története a XX. Században. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999. Pp. 390-395.

³⁰³ Győri, Szabó Róbert .A Kommunizmus és a zsidóság. Budapest: Gondolat. 2006.p.256-257.

Szabó asserts that the new generation of the time was largely uninformed about the intricate nuances of the Jewish question, owing to its prolonged taboo status. Moreover, Szabo cites Miklós Szabó, who contends that the revolution's focus on regime-related issues relegated antisemitism to a secondary concern.³⁰⁴ However, according to Romsics's account, there were instances of antisemitic actions and even vandalism targeting local Jews in several counties across the country.³⁰⁵ As a result of these atrocities, there was a mass exodus in 1956, with 20,000 Jews leaving the country due to fears of Stalinist antisemitism, anti-Zionist sentiments, or the apprehension of being associated with Communists.

After the 1956 Revolution in Hungary, the government's response to the Jewish question remained ambivalent. While there was a seemingly positive development with the fortnightly publication of *Új Élet* reinstated, indicating a degree of openness, paradoxically, Jews often found themselves marginalized and occasionally excluded from active participation in the affairs of both the Party and the state. The Rákosi era in Hungary witnessed a manipulation of Holocaust narratives to fit the Communist ideology of anti-fascism. Jewish identity and the specific suffering of Hungarian Jews were subsumed into a broader narrative, reflecting the regime's control over historical memory and the suppression of distinct ethnic or religious identities.

³⁰⁴ *ibid.* 267. Szabó Miklós. 1956 öröksége. 1989.

³⁰⁵ Bács-Kiskun, Szolnok megyék, Kelet-Magyarország, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár, Hajdú-Bihar in Romsics. 1034-1035.

Chapter III.III the Absence of Actors

As elucidated in preceding chapters, the commemoration of Jewish martyrs across Hungary involved a diverse array of actors. These included not only governmental figures and representatives from the Ministry of Defense but also grassroots individuals, such as members and leaders of local Jewish communities. Additionally, foreign entities, such as American Jewish organizations like the Joint, played a significant role, providing financial support to Hungarian Jews. In the immediate postwar years, the impetus largely emanated from initiatives within Jewish communities. However, a discernible shift occurred from 1947 onward, marked by the increasing participation of representatives from political parties, churches, and authorities. Notably, the political overview in this chapter highlights a pivotal transformation in the 1950s, coinciding with the consolidation of Rákosi's totalitarian regime. This period witnessed the prohibition of numerous organizations, newspapers, and dissenting voices, exerting a profound impact on the commemorative landscape in Hungary.

A detailed examination of the examples reveals several noteworthy observations. Firstly, the conspicuous absence of political and church representatives from commemorative events during this era is striking. Indeed, the few monuments initiated during this time are attributed solely to Jewish communities, echoing a situation reminiscent of the postwar years in 1945/1946. Additionally, there is a discernible pattern involving the initial overemphasis on Soviet liberators during commemoration, with a pronounced inclination toward erecting monuments in their honor. However, as political

tensions escalated within the country, there emerged a conspicuous disappearance of Soviet heroes from the discourse surrounding memorialization.

Furthermore, a notable absence of reports pertaining to the scant Jewish memorials or commemorative events during this period is evident in non-Jewish journals. This contrasts starkly with previous years when regional and local newspapers actively covered these commemorations, even quoting speeches delivered during the events.³⁰⁶ In the post-1950s landscape, however, a conspicuous dearth of references to such events is apparent, indicating a noteworthy shift in the visibility and coverage of Jewish memorials within broader public discourse. From 1949 onwards, newspapers and magazines were systematically shut down, with the number of daily newspapers also reduced. The purges in the press were accompanied by a significant decline in quality. The Communist Party's newspaper, *Szabad Nép*, became the largest circulating newspaper. Churches were allowed to maintain one publication each, such as the *Paper of the Hungarian Israelites*, known as *Új Élet*, albeit in limited circulation. However, this was on the condition that they refrained from political and public topics, focusing solely on internal religious community affairs. Consequently, while *Új Élet* continued to report and keep records of martyr commemorations, which did not provoked Rákosi's propaganda agendas, other non-Jewish newspapers were prohibited from covering these events. This resulted in minimal discourse about commemorations outside the Jewish community in beyond Budapest.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ e.g. Haladás, Népszava, Szabad Nép, Világ, Világosság, Magyar Jövő, Képes Figyelő, Pápai Független Kiszgazda, Szabad Vasvármegye, Új Vasvármegye, Felvidéki Népszava etc.

³⁰⁷ Horváth, Attila. *A Magyar sajtó története a szovjet típusú diktatúra idején*. Médiatudományi Intézet. <https://mek.oszk.hu/13400/13447/13447.pdf> 2013. pp.33-37.

In addition to the installation of a few memorials nationwide, two noteworthy annual commemorative events held particular significance. Firstly, the dates of deportations from various Hungarian towns and villages were observed. Secondly, the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto constituted another pivotal commemoration. Intriguingly, the celebration of the day of liberation by Soviet heroes began to overshadow the annual remembrance of deportations. Notably, in major Hungarian towns, the anniversary events of the liberation was marked with festivities with the participation of state actors. According to records found in archival sources documenting city council proceedings, detailed plans formulated by the Party concerning Soviet hero commemorations were evident.³⁰⁸ These events gained significant media attention in the newspapers that were still in circulation at the time.³⁰⁹ In contrast, the commemoration of martyrs within Jewish communities outside of Budapest transitioned from being observed as local or even national events to becoming exclusively local Jewish affairs.

The commemoration events marking the fifth anniversary of Budapest's liberation, the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto, and the inauguration of the martyr memorial in Kispest in 1950, maintained a traditional character, drawing the participation of various actors. This included members of the Hungarian Working People's Party, representatives from the Ministry of Defense, and delegates from the Hungarian Reformed Church. On the fifth anniversary of the liberation of Budapest, delegates representing the city's workers gathered at the Soviet memorial in Szabadság Square to express their gratitude before the

³⁰⁸ MNL_HBML_XXIII_101 (Debrecen megyei jogú város tanácsának iratai), MNL_SzSzBVL_V.72 (Nyíregyháza Rendezett Tanácsú Város Közgyűlésének és Képviselőtestületének iratai, NML_ XXIII.36.

Nógrád Megyei Tanács V. B. Balassagyarmati Járási Hivatala Művelődésügyi Osztályának iratai,

³⁰⁹ "A Nagy Októberi Szocialista Forradalom 35. évfordulójánmegkoszorúzták a felszabadító szovjet hősök emlékműveit" Szabad Ifjúság Szabad Ifjúság, 1952. október-december (3. évfolyam, 230-306. szám) 1952-11-10 / 263. Szám. p.1.

memorial of Soviet heroes who sacrificed their lives in the battle for the liberation of our country's capital. In front of the memorial facade, a procession of factory workers, intellectuals, youth, and women paraded in long lines, their heads adorned with red and blue flags fluttering in the wind. The loudspeaker announcer proclaimed, "Eternal glory to the liberating Soviet Army," and then announced that the workers of the capital would commemorate the heroic Soviet warriors who died in the siege of Budapest by laying wreaths.

The wreath-laying ceremony commenced, beginning with the wreath of the Budapest Party Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party, laid by István Kovács, Secretary of the Party Committee, Kálmán Pongrácz, the mayor of the capital, József Harustyák, the president of the National Council, István Szabó, Major General of the Army, Gyula Oravecz, Colonel of the State Security Authority, and Gyula Balassa, Lieutenant General of the police, who placed their wreaths made of red flowers at the base of the memorial. Subsequently, the formations of the army, the state security authority, and the police paraded in front of the memorial. Ministers János Kádár, István Kossa, István Riess, and Zoltán Vass were also present at the ceremony. Even more extensive commemorations were orchestrated for the tenth anniversary of Budapest's liberation and the liberation of the ghetto.³¹⁰

During the 10th anniversary celebration in 1955, notable figures including representatives from the Budapest Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party, the Budapest City Council, and the Patriotic People's Front were present. The commemorative

³¹⁰ "A kispesti mártíremlékmű avatása". Új Élet, 1950. Március 30. and "Emlékezzünk felszabadulásunkra!" in Szabad Nép, 1950. március (8. évfolyam, 51-76. szám) 1950-03-29 / 74. szám

event featured a ceremonial performance at the Erkel Theater, attended by prominent leaders such as Mátyás Rákosi and István Dobi, the President of the Presidential Council of the People's Republic. Also in attendance were numerous members of the Soviet Union's embassy in Hungary and representatives of the Soviet Army, including several who participated in the liberation of Budapest. On the 10th anniversary of the liberation of the ghetto, Boldizsár Iván, the editor-in-chief of Magyar Nemzet and chairman of the Patriotic People's Front committee in the VII. district, delivered a speech. Following the ceremonial address, László Takács, the first secretary of the Party committee in the VII. district, unveiled a memorial plaque erected by the residents of district VII.³¹¹

The participation of non-Jewish and state actors in the fifth and tenth anniversaries of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto, as well as in the inauguration ceremony at Kispest, underlines the significance of state involvement and the establishment of a state-driven narrative of Holocaust remembrance within the capital during the 1950s. In contrast to events outside of Budapest, where commemorations of the liberation and remembrance of Soviet heroes took precedence, the annual commemorations of Jewish martyrdom were overshadowed. While political actors were actively involved in delivering speeches and attending ceremonies dedicated to the liberation of Hungary, there was a notable absence of state actors in towns outside of the capital remembering the Jewish sufferings. Consequently, the predominance of the narrative surrounding martyr memory in these

³¹¹ "Felszabadulási ünnepek a fővárosban/ Emléktáblát helyeztek el a gettó felszabadulásának 10. évfordulóján" in Népszava, 1955. január (83. évfolyam, 1-25. sz.) 1955-01-19 / 15. szám and "Ünnepi ülés Budapest felszabadulásának 10. évfordulóján" in Szabad Nép, 1955. február (13. évfolyam, 31-58. szám) 1955-02-14 / 44. szám

towns beyond Budapest rested largely upon internal actors within local Jewish communities.

In commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the liberation on April 4th, large-scale celebrations unfolded across the entire nation, expressing the gratitude and love of the Hungarian working people toward the Soviet Union and Stalin. According to reports, celebrations in areas outside of Budapest commemorating the liberation garnered significant public attendance. For instance, in Ózd, festivities commenced with a musical wake-up and a ceremonial fire. A procession of ten thousand individuals, adorned with flags and banners, marched to the sports field, where Ferenc Szatmári, the industrial party secretary, led the inauguration of the grand assembly. State Secretary for Transportation József Prieszol emphasized the profound importance of liberation, and the event concluded with a cultural program.³¹²

Tatabánya also witnessed the awakening of the city through music and choirs. In the morning, a large assembly was held at the market square for the workers of Tatabánya and the surrounding peasant population. In Debrecen, the city's working people participated in a massive parade along the route of the Red Army. Sixty thousand workers gathered in front of the Kossuth statue. Following the assembly, they laid wreaths at the Soviet heroic memorial and concluded the impressive and sincerely enthusiastic celebration with the ceremonial military parade.

In Győr, the working people marched in a massive procession to Szabadság tér on April 4th, where Károly Ott, the Minister of Finance, delivered a speech. After the speech,

³¹² Észak-Magyarország, 1950. április (7. évfolyam, 79-90. szám)1950-04-06 / 79. szám

the Győr workers presented a beautiful silk flag as a gift to Ivan Archimenko, a colonel representing the Soviet troops who liberated the city. The ceremony concluded with the laying of wreaths at the Soviet heroes' memorial.³¹³

In Pécs, the city's working people laid wreaths at the Soviet heroes' grave, followed by a procession to the adorned Széchenyi tér. Banners and signs led the workers from mines and factories in a grand assembly. János Beér, chief inspector of the Ministry of Interior, delivered a speech in front of the celebratory crowd. After the ceremony, mining groups presented a program.³¹⁴

In Szeged, at the festive assembly, József Köböl, the secretary-general of MÉMOSZ, delivered a speech. A cultural program followed the large gathering, and in the evening, a street ball took place in Széchenyi tér. In Diósgyőr, the workers of three major factories marched to Miskolc, where they participated in the peace square assembly. A symbolic release of 15 hundred white doves marked the event. István Ries, Minister of Justice, delivered a festive speech, followed by a ceremonial parade and the laying of wreaths at the Soviet heroes' monument. In Salgótarján, the city's working people gathered in Petőfi square to listen to the ceremonial speech of Mihály Zsofinyecz, the Minister of Heavy Industry, and later laid wreaths at the Soviet heroes' memorial.³¹⁵

The Jewish community in Debrecen organized two mourning ceremonies. Firstly, the burial of Torah scrolls took place following the prescribed rituals, which had been damaged and desecrated by vandal fascist forces and Arrow Cross members. The Torah

³¹³ Szabad Nép, 1950. március (8. évfolyam, 51-76. szám)1950-03-29 / 74. szám

³¹⁴ Szabad Nép, 1950. március (8. évfolyam, 51-76. szám)1950-03-31 / 76. szám

³¹⁵ Világosság, 1950. április-június (6. évfolyam, 77-148. szám)1950-04-06 / 80. Szám p.30.

scrolls were placed in a cemented tomb, and an eternal memorial was erected in the form of a marble obelisk. Then, a general fast was observed on the memorial day for the martyred Jews of Debrecen and its vicinity. The mourning and commemorating crowd then made a pilgrimage to the cemetery, where Chief Rabbi Dr. Weisz delivered a speech. Subsequently, the procession began, and the mourning masses marched to the mass graves of the forced laborers shot in the Apafa forest near Debrecen and the memorial column erected there. The memorial crowd then proceeded to the graves of Jewish soldiers who died heroic deaths in the First World War to pray for them as well. From there, they made their way to the well-kept graves of Soviet soldiers who fell in the heroic and glorious struggle for the liberation of Debrecen. The pilgrimage concluded at the symbolic grave of the martyrs of Mikepércs, where a beautiful memorial stone was erected by the remaining few Jews from Mikepércs. During the unveiling ceremony, Chief Rabbi Dr. Weisz commemorated the empty, abandoned synagogue, as there is no longer a single Jewish soul in the village willing to attend. The memorial in Debrecen was also established because there is no longer any Jewish presence in their original hometown.³¹⁶

The Hungarian municipalities that chose to install monuments were exclusively documented in *Új Élet*. The accounts of the unveiling ceremonies indicate that these memorials were not only instigated and funded by the local Jewish community but also attended predominantly by members of the same community, with an absence of any other official actors. As Komoróczy also mentions, state budgetary support for maintaining religious institutions was significantly reduced from 1949 onwards. This was particularly true for Jewish communities, whose confiscated assets during the war were scarcely

³¹⁶ 1950. július 19 Új Élet p. 6

covered by state aid, let alone sufficient to finance memorials. Consequently, there was a great need for support from the community, survivors, foreign organizations, or potential donors.³¹⁷

In March 1950, as noted above a memorial plaque to commemorate the martyrs of the community was unveiled in the Jewish temple in Kispest. On March 19, 1950, the remaining Jewish community of Törökszentmiklós unveiled a memorial in the temple to commemorate the martyrs who perished in deportation and forced labor. The marble plaque, adorned with a simple mourning border had a list of 301 names in black, signifying the loss suffered by the Jewish community of Törökszentmiklós. According to the article, the mournful relatives filled the temple and its galleries.³¹⁸ In 1950, both the Nyíregyháza and Baja Jewish communities held martyr memorial services. The congregations wishing to commemorate gathered in front of the erected memorials, where they collectively recited prayers and the Kaddish. In Marcali, Jászberény, Bonyhád, Szekszárd, Mohács, and several districts of Budapest, further martyr memorial events were held.

Nagykátá holds a distinct chapter in the history of Jewish suffering. Endre László, infamously regarded as the expert of Hungarian deportations, along with the local executioner of Nagykatá, Murai Lipót, instilled fear in the Jewish population of the village for five years.³¹⁹ The inhabitants of Nagykatá suffered the most throughout the centuries, with only a few returning from the labor service. The deportations were already carried out here in merciless manner, but even before the deportations, in 1940, it was a common

³¹⁷ Komoróczy. p.995.

³¹⁸ Új Élet 1950 March 26 p. 6.

³¹⁹ A deportáló államtitkár: Endre László. A Holokauszt Magyarországon.

http://www.holokausztmagyarorszagon.hu/index.php?section=1&type=content&chapter=14_3_1

occurrence for the Jewish residents to be brutally beaten. The unveiling of the martyr memorial was attended by surviving relatives, former labor service workers, mass organizations, and the working population of the village. The monument was erected through the efforts of the community's president, Lajos Spitzer. Chief Rabbi Jenő Schück Jr. stated that the unveiling of the memorial was conducted in the hope that the fraternal cooperation of the workers would wash away all the horrors that have been associated with the name of Nagykáta.³²⁰



Figure 7. "Martyr Memorial in Nagykáta inaugurated in 1950" Photo. A mártírok emlékezete. Basa, László. 2011.

In the early postwar years, sporadic mentions in non-Jewish newspapers hinted at the unveiling ceremonies of memorials dedicated to Jewish martyrs and occasionally acknowledged commemorative events associated with the somber dates of deportations from various Hungarian towns. However, this narrative underwent a transformative shift. A pivotal moment in this evolution was marked by the singular commemoration reported by non-Jewish newspapers—the fifth anniversary of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto. This event stands as an exemplar in the realm of Jewish-related commemorations, as it

³²⁰ Emlékműavatás Nagykátán. Új Élet 1950 december 18.

notably featured the presence of politicians and state actors. This departure from previous patterns reflects a nuanced alteration in the landscape of Holocaust commemorative events.

The commemoration of the liberation of the Budapest Ghetto presents a compelling case for state involvement, as it could be seamlessly linked to the broader narrative of Budapest's liberation and, by extension, Hungary's liberation, thereby facilitating the glorification of the Soviet forces. This instance holds significant importance within the realm of postwar Holocaust commemoration, as it exemplifies the prevalent narrative that commemorative events during the Communist period often marginalized the Jewish aspect and emphasized the role of the liberators. However, a closer examination reveals a different scenario outside of Budapest, where both commemorative events and the erection of a few memorials occurred. Although these events were often relegated to the periphery of state interest, they nonetheless took place within local Jewish communities, underscoring their significance and resilience despite the lack of state recognition.

Chapter III.IV Foreign Influence

In a manner reminiscent of the profound impact that the establishment of Yad Vashem had on the landscape of Hungarian Holocaust memorialization, both in terms of collaborative efforts, the expansive collection of data concerning Hungarian Jewish victims, and the grandiosity of the commemorative initiative, the memorial dedicated to the Unknown Jewish Martyr (*Tombeau du Martyr Juif Inconnu*) in Paris similarly left an enduring imprint on the Hungarian Jewish community but also on global Holocaust memorialization practices. Notably, France's decision to erect a memorial not exclusively for its own victims but as a universal homage to all European Jews who fell victim to the Holocaust marked a significant departure from conventional memorialization practices that were practiced before within the Eastern Bloc. The strategic placement of the monument in the heart of the city, eschewing the traditional locations of Jewish cemeteries or the adjacent gardens of local synagogues, ignited a discourse surrounding the crucial significance of the location of Holocaust memorials. Moreover, it sparked discussions akin to those surrounding the Yad Vashem memorial museum, regarding the multifaceted role of a memorial. This role encompasses not only commemoration but also the potential extension to include archives, research centers, educational facilities, and serving as a symbol of collective mourning.

The Parisian monument's construction commenced in 1953, and it was officially unveiled on October 30, 1956. Its primary aim was to create a unified and international memorial space for commemorating the persecution of Jews across Europe, despite the backdrop of the Cold War. The proposed four-story-high memorial, intended to be situated in the heart of Paris, carries historical significance due to its location on a street once inhabited by the French revolutionary figure Madame Roland upon her arrival in Paris in

1791. The memorial's design encompasses several key elements, including an artistically crafted grave commemorating the Unknown Jewish Martyr. Moreover, plans include the establishment of a library, archive, and research institute dedicated to documenting the atrocities of the Nazi era. Additionally, a spacious memorial hall is envisioned to house the names of the six million Jews who perished in Europe during the Holocaust.³²¹

Prior to its public introduction, the collection efforts sought to incorporate various items, such as parchment scrolls detailing the history of suffering, alongside photographs, martyr lists, archival records, and other commemorative artifacts. The research was directed toward gathering materials from all European countries, with an emphasis on Eastern Europe, where the majority of Jews were deported and tragically perished during the Holocaust.³²² In 1956, French rabbi Isaac Schneersohn, representing the World Committee for the Memorial of the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris, reached out to the leadership of the Hungarian Jewish community and the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH). His correspondence aimed to establish collaboration in organizing and gathering materials related to the tribulations endured by Hungarian Jews in the 20th century, with a specific emphasis on the events of World War II.³²³

In the autumn of 1956, several newspapers (*Magyar Szó*, *Új Kelet*, *Új Élet*)³²⁴ reported on the unveiling of the monumental Parisian memorial for the Unknown Jewish

³²¹ Debreczeni, József. A rettegés aktái (Párizsi riport a Magyar Szónak). *Magyar Szó*. 1956. Június. 24. p.4.

³²² Kékesi, Zoltán and Zombory Máté. Antifasiszta emlékezet újragondolva. Magyar történeti kiállítások Ósziéimben és Párizsban 1965-ben. Korall Társadalomtörténeti Folyóirat (22, 85) Globalizációtörténeti megközelítések. 2021. pp.154.

³²³ Bányai, Viktória – Csősz, László. Megillat Horthy / Horthy-tekerés –Egy elfelejtett emlékezés. http://real.mtak.hu/144662/1/targum_1_Banyai-Csosz.pdf pp. 173-175.

³²⁴ *Új Kelet*, 1956. augusztus (37. évfolyam, 2434-2460. szám), *Magyar Szó*, 1956. június (13. évfolyam, 148-177. szám), *Az Ismeretlen Zsidó Vértanú Emlékműve és a magyar zsidóság*. *Új Élet*. 1956. Augusztus.

Martyr, a statue created by sculptor Georges Goldberg, commemorating the 6 million Jews destroyed by Nazism. The articles also accentuated the collaborative endeavors of provincial Jewish congregations in gathering a comprehensive collection of sources and documents for the memorial. The Hungarian Jewish community also prepared a Megillah³²⁵, documenting the stations and details of the tragedy of the 600,000 Hungarian Jews who perished. In addition, the National Office of Hungarian Israelites wanted to collect all possible documentation for the extensive museum and archive to be housed within the memorial and to send it to the global committee established for the erection of the monument. To facilitate this work, the National Office issued a call to all the country's congregations, branch congregations, and essentially everywhere Jewish religious life is practiced. The survey included questions about the number of Jewish inhabitants in the locality, the number of those who perished, the number of children among the victims, the pre-ghetto existence of synagogues and Jewish schools in their locality, and how many of these were destroyed. Furthermore, the National Office requested the congregations to photograph any martyr memorials or plaques found within the community's territory, whether in the synagogue, the temple courtyard, or the cemetery, and to send these photographs. They also requested the sharing of any other documentation materials in the possession of the congregation, such as diaries, letters, or work service records, and to provide copies of those materials as well.³²⁶

The collaboration with the French government-supported Parisian memorial involved six East European countries and various Jewish organizations. In Hungary, this

³²⁵ Megillah is a scroll or volume (e.g. The Book of Esther), it is also an expression for a lengthy, detailed account.

³²⁶ Magyar Szó, 1956. június (13. évfolyam, 148-177. szám)1956-06-24 / 171. Szám p 232. / Új Kelet, 1956. augusztus (37. évfolyam, 2434-2460. szám)1956-08-24 / 2454. Szám / Új Élet Március 1956.

collaboration extended beyond Jewish institutions, including the Partisan Association, the National Széchényi Library, the Institute of Party History, and the Military History Museum.³²⁷ This level of collaboration, as discussed in the previous chapter, was uncommon during the Rákosi period, where Jewish remembrance largely remained an internal Jewish affair. Additionally, socialist countries' participation went beyond document transfer; their official state representatives and representatives of local Jewish organizations were also invited to ceremonial openings.³²⁸ By the early 1960s, the Parisian institution had become globally influential as a research institute, memorial site, and museum. Among the numerous international exhibitions they organized about the European Jewish tragedy, their 1965 exhibition "Les Juifs dans la lutte contre l'hitlérisme" (Jews in the fight against Hitlerism) became the permanent exhibition of the Paris memorial site.³²⁹

The Parisian memorial complex stands as a remarkable testament to the early formation of a pan-European Holocaust memory, even amidst the challenges of Cold War politics. Its significance is underscored by the unprecedented collaboration it fostered between Western and Eastern European countries, with western France actively encouraging participation from the Eastern Bloc. This collaboration extended beyond mere material contributions for the memorial exhibition, as representatives from socialist countries were invited to ceremonial events, signaling a notable diplomatic gesture. Equally significant is the impact of the memorial on Hungarian regional Jewish communities, who

³²⁷ Kékesi and Zombory. 157.

³²⁸ Sós, Endre. *Az Ismeretlen Zsidó Vértanú Emlékműve és a Magyar zsidóság*. Új Élet Március 1956. Augusztus.

³²⁹ Heuman, Johannes. *The Holocaust and French Historical Culture, 1945–65*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan 2015. p.137.

joined forces with non-Jewish institutions to comprehensively document the sufferings endured by Hungarian Jews before and during World War II.

The case of the memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr reveals the complexity of the Rákosi period, demonstrating that its focus was not solely centered on the glorification of Soviet liberators and the tabooing of Jewish subjects. The collaborative efforts between France and Hungary, not only for the establishment of the memorial but also working together on other exhibitions throughout the Cold War period, underscore the nuanced dynamics at play during this era. This collaboration highlights the existence of channels for communication and cooperation between Eastern and Western European countries, indicating a willingness to engage in dialogue and find a common ground despite ideological differences. Furthermore, the memorial serves as a foundation that foreshadows the development of a collective European Holocaust memory by bringing together various nations and organizations, it laid the groundwork for transnational remembrance efforts of the early 2000s. Finally, its presence also contributed to discussions surrounding the placement of Holocaust memorials in central urban locations, emphasizing the importance of visibility and accessibility in perpetuating remembrance.

Chapter III.V Conclusion

In conclusion, the period between 1950 and 1956, under the rule of Rákosi, witnessed a significant shift in the memorialization of Jewish martyrs. This period exemplifies a narrative that closely aligns with the overarching portrayal of the postwar and Communist era, particularly concerning memorialization practices. Rákosi's regime relegated the commemoration of Jewish martyrs and their suffering to the periphery, favoring nationwide state-sponsored celebrations of Soviet heroes. Apart from three notable occasions in Budapest—the inauguration of the memorial at Kispest and the commemorations of the fifth and tenth liberation of the Budapest Ghetto—political actors were conspicuously absent from Jewish remembrance events and discussions of Jewish topics more broadly. While the state did not outright prohibit Jewish communities from holding their annual events to honor deported and murdered members, they received no state support or media coverage. Rákosi's restrictions and censorship of religious communities severely limited their financial resources and hindered their ability to voice criticism on political matters, including issues related to compensation, antisemitism, and politics in Hungary. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the suppression of Jewish topics did not equate to a complete absence of commemorative initiatives related to the Holocaust and its victims in Hungary.

While the Rákosi regime imposed limitations on the diversity of actors involved in commemoration, especially with the marginalization of political and religious representatives, it is essential to acknowledge the persistence of commemorative efforts. Despite the challenging political climate, the few commemorative structures that emerged during this period demonstrated a resilience in the face of ideological restrictions. The shift in diversity of actors, primarily led by local Jewish communities, reflects a nuanced

response to the restrictive environment, with communities taking on a more prominent role in shaping the narrative of Holocaust commemoration.

The commemorations held outside of Budapest, such as in Nagykáta, Törökszentmiklós, Debrecen-Apafa, and Mikepércs, underscored the strong local commitment to preserving the memory of Jewish martyrs. These events involved not only the Jewish communities within individual towns but also collaboration with neighboring local communities, demonstrating a collective effort to honor the memory of those lost. While it is true that regional commemorations of the liberation following World War II often overshadowed Jewish martyr remembrance in terms of scale, meticulous planning, attendance numbers, media coverage, and involvement of various actors, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Holocaust memorialization was entirely obliterated.

Another case that challenges the notion of a homogeneous remembrance culture under Communism is the Hungarian involvement in the Parisian memorial for the Unknown Jewish Martyr. Here, both Budapest and provincial Jewish communities played significant roles, demonstrating a precedence for collaboration. Furthermore, non-Jewish organizations contributed to the collections gathered for a memorial erected outside of the Eastern Bloc, highlighting the broader participation and transnational nature of Holocaust memorialization efforts during this period.

Despite attempts to marginalize Jewish remembrance, local communities and international collaborations ensured the preservation of Holocaust memory, paving the way for future collective remembrance initiatives. In the subsequent chapter, the evolution of Holocaust memorialization under a changed political landscape will be examined. This shift will highlight the significance of memorial locations, the artistic symbolism imbued

within them, and the potential political utilization of Jewish martyrs' memorials, transcending their original community-centric purpose. This chapter asserts that the groundwork for these transitions was laid in the 1950s, highlighting the continuity and development of memorialization practices over time.

Chapter IV. Revitalizing Remembrance: Holocaust Commemoration in the Changing Landscape of Kádár's Hungary, 1956-1989

Chapter IV.I Shifting Tides: Actors, Spaces, and Symbols - Introduction

“Here are the names of ten thousand drowned in marble in the old cemetery hall,
They were killed in Auschwitz, Majdanek...
Alas, here our hearts tremble naked as long as we live,
in the chamber of death they suffocate.”³³⁰

The post-Rákosi era marked a pivotal period for the Hungarian Jewish community, where the interplay of domestic and international politics significantly influenced both their political role and methods of memorialization. In a nuanced dance of diplomacy and memorialization, then, the Hungarian Jewish community navigated between collaboration with the Hungarian political leadership, and by extension, the Soviets, while simultaneously avoiding outright condemnation of the State of Israel. A clear strategic editorial choice is evident by the Jewish journal, *Új Élet*, in vehemently critiquing West Germany while providing minimal coverage, if any, to significant events in Israel. The journal aligned itself with other non-Jewish newspapers that portrayed West Germany as a neo-Nazi haven.³³¹ It reported on incidents of fascist vandalism in the country, raising

³³⁰ “Itt vannak az ó-temető csarnokában márványba fulladt tízezer neve, megölték őket Auschwitzban, Majdanekben..Jaj itt remegnek meztelenül szívünkben amíg élünk, a halál termében fuldokolnak.” Poem by Vasvári István: *Vértanúk falánál* (At the wall of martyrs) in 'Vasvári István: A lélek naplójából. Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó. 1966. P.106.

³³¹ *Háborús bűnösök menhelye Nyugat-Németországban.* *Új Élet*, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám)1960-01-01 / 1. szám.p.5.

questions about the adequacy of West Germany's legal system in addressing the prosecution of former war criminals.³³²

The decision to pass the Statutory Limitation of War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity (*Verjährungsgesetz der NS-Verbrechen*) in 1968 within the Federal Republic of Germany further underscored the leniency toward the fascist legacy of West Germany, as it effectively allowed these crimes to expire without full accountability or justice for the victims of Nazi atrocities.³³³ This legal provision, allowing Nazi war crimes to potentially expire, presented an opportune moment for East European nations, including the Hungarian People's Republic, to showcase a steadfast commitment to the ongoing struggle against fascism. Consequently, the Hungarian government decided to annul the law on the statutory limitation of Hungarian war crimes in 1964.³³⁴ This strategic move to abolish the limitation on war crimes is notably intertwined with the subsequent occurrence of the Zugló Hungarian Arrow Cross Trial in 1967. This correlation is particularly significant given that the majority of Hungarian Nazi trials concluded in the years 1945–46, after which the focus of the State Protection Authority shifted from prosecuting war criminals to targeting perceived enemies of the socialist state.

While the Hungarian state and its Jewish community focused on the Zugló Arrow Cross Trial as a form of international relations, in the same decade the Hungarian authorities

³³² Magyar Szó, 1960. január (17. évfolyam, 1-25. szám)1960-01-08 / 5. Szám, Új Kelet, 1976. szeptember (57. évfolyam, 8558-8582. szám)1976-09-10 / 8566. Szám, Új Élet, 1983 (38. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1983-05-01 / 9. Szám, Új Élet, 1983 (38. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1983-04-01 / 7. Szám, Szabadság, 1971. május (81. évfolyam, 44-51. szám)1971-05-12 / 46. Szám, Igaz Szó, 1968. január-június (13. évfolyam, 1-12. szám)1968-03-01 / 5. Szám, Somogyi Néplap, 1962. szeptember (19. évfolyam, 204-229. szám)1962-09-26 / 225. szám

³³³ Miller, Robert H. "The Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity." *The American Journal of International Law* 65, no. 3 (1971): 476–501. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2198971>. P.478.

³³⁴ Sólyom, József-Szabó László. *A zugló nyilas per*. Budapest: Kossuth kiadó. 1967. p.9–10.

were careful in their approach to the Adolf Eichmann trial in 1961. They were aware that any official measures supporting Eichmann's defense and minimizing his involvement in the persecution of Hungarian Jews, even if framed as a general anti-fascist position, could adversely affect domestic politics. They also acknowledged the potential negative impact of an excessively forceful anti-Zionist campaign, as it could worsen antisemitism in Hungary due to historical associations between antisemitism and anti-Communism.³³⁵ Despite publicly maintaining a unified stance in political statements and engagement with "friendly" countries, the authorities adjusted their actions pragmatically to suit local conditions whenever they believed a different approach would not provoke a negative response from the Soviet Union.³³⁶

In the Six-Day War of 1967, President Kádár adopted a stance of deliberate detachment, asserting that the unfolding events in the Middle East should be regarded as matters of foreign policy.³³⁷ By articulating this position, Kádár effectively aligned with Soviet expectations, managing to avoid making a definitive decision to sever all diplomatic ties with Israel. While he refrained from a decisive political commitment, these actions nonetheless inflicted considerable harm upon diplomatic relations between Hungary and Israel. This diplomatic rift only began to repair after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, underscoring the enduring repercussions of Kádár's measured approach during the Six-Day War on the bilateral relations between Hungary and Israel.³³⁸

³³⁵ Szabó, Miklós. "A zuglói nyilasper". *Beszélő*, 1997. július-december (3. folyam, 2. évfolyam, 7-12. szám)1997. október / 10. szám / BESZÉLŐ ÉVEK pp.74-77.

³³⁶ Kovacs, András. *Communism's Jewish Question*. p.81-83.

³³⁷ *ibid.* p.136-139.

³³⁸ Győri, Szabó Róbert. "Zsidóság és kommunizmus a Kádár-korszakban. III. Zsidóság cionizmus, antiszemitizmus az 1967-es arab-izraeli háború utáni években. *Valóság*, 2008 (51. évfolyam, 1-12. szám)2008-05-01 / 5. szám / SZÁZADOK / pp.79-81

According to the Central Representative of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK), after the separation of state and church in 1959-1960, the equality and parity of the Israelite denomination were realized.³³⁹ This separation also symbolized how political power stood in relation to martyr commemorations. It mainly withdrew from domestic Jewish affairs in an effort to avoid foreign policy impacts, particularly to prevent the relationship with Israel from influencing the relatively peaceful relations between the Hungarian Jewish community and the Hungarian state, albeit sometimes providing financial support for synagogue renovations, museums, and memorial financing. During this period, compared to the Rákosi era, more memorials were built, attracting large crowds from Jewish communities to martyr commemorations and memorial events, especially outside Budapest. There was also an effort to strengthen the relationship of the Budapest Jewish community with rural Jewish congregations. An example of this is Sós Endre, the president of the Central Representative of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK), who from 1960 onwards aimed to visit larger cities outside Budapest to initiate discussions with the local Jewish community about the life of Hungarian Jewry and to assess religious education and cultural life in these cities such as Miskolc, Szeged, Gyöngyös, Békéscsaba, Debrecen, and Karcag.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, efforts continued where not only surrounding Jewish congregations supported each other's participation in martyr commemorations, but also the Budapest Jewish community regularly attended these events again.

One significant state intervention regarding memorialization emerged in the 1980s, characterized by a trend to amalgamate various victim groups in memorials. Instead of

³³⁹ A MIOK és a BIH vezetőinek látogatása az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal elnökénél. *Uj Élet*, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám) 1960-01-15 / 2. szám

³⁴⁰ *Uj Élet*, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám) 1960-02-15 / 4. szám / *Uj Élet*, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám) 1960-03-15 / 6. szám / *Uj Élet*, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám) 1960-04-01 / 7. szám

specifically commemorating Jewish martyrs, plaques began to reference victims of World War II in a general sense. This approach elicited tension within the Hungarian Jewish community, arguing against the collective remembrance of perpetrators and victims. The suggestion to blend victim groups, as articulated by the Jewish community, has the potential to foster misinterpretations of the past and misrepresentations of actual victims.³⁴¹ Regrettably, this form of memorialization persisted beyond that period and continues to be utilized today, often instrumentalized for political purposes. Simultaneously, there was a noticeable increase in artistic freedom in Hungary, manifested in the diverse forms of monuments erected during this period. Discussions regarding the role of monuments and their placement in public spaces are lively mostly in the countryside, stemming not from the Soviet model of commemoration but influenced by Western memorialization practices.³⁴²

During the softening phase of the dictatorship, Hungarian politics deftly negotiated a delicate equilibrium, simultaneously striving to meet Soviet expectations while also pursuing improved relations with the West. This nuanced approach mirrored the duality observed in memorialization politics during this era. The multifaceted dynamics within memorialization practices underscored the intricate interplay between political imperatives, artistic expression, and the evolving socio-cultural context in Hungary at the time. This highlights the complexity of navigating between ideological pressures and international relations, shaping the memorial landscape as a reflection of broader political and societal dynamics in Hungary during the Kádár era.

³⁴¹ Kardos, Péter. Összemosás in *Új Élet*, 1989 (44. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1989-02-01 / 3. Szám p. 9.

³⁴² *Új Élet*, 1984 (39. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1984-07-15 / 14. Szám p.97.

Chapter IV.II Political Overview

Following the Rákosi dictatorship and the unsuccessful 1956 Revolution, which resulted in Hungary remaining within the Eastern Bloc, it became evident that the strict Stalinist policies of the Rákosi era were unsustainable. By November 1956, it became apparent to the whole Hungarian nation that neither the United Nations nor the United States were rushing to aid Hungarian revolutionaries against the Soviet Union. Although the goals of the 1956 Revolution were not achieved, the subsequent Kádár era provided more room for negotiations in Hungary's domestic and foreign policies. Despite a desire for change within Hungarian society, there was resistance regarding Kádár and his government. Kádár's reputation was further strained by his implementation of reprisals against those implicated in pre-1956 transgressions or deemed threats to the government. This challenging socio-political context posed difficulties to Kádár's efforts to gain acceptance for his administration, as the population remained cautious and disapproving in the aftermath of the preceding political turmoil.³⁴³

The prolonged Kádár era commenced with the formation of the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, or MSZMP) in 1956 and endured until the late 1980s, coinciding with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc. The initial phase that lasted until 1962-1963 was marked by the violent suppression of the revolutionaries, the reinstatement of dictatorial institutions, the consolidation of Kádár's personal authority, and the subsequent acknowledgment of the regime on an international

³⁴³ Kontler, László. Chapter 2. The Fifties: Stalinism, the 'new course' and the 1956 Revolution and Chapter 3. 'The longest path from capitalism to capitalism', or the limitations of Realsozialismus in A History of Hungary, Millennium in Central Europe. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2002. pp.429-433.

scale.³⁴⁴ During this time, it became apparent that while the primary objectives of the 1956 Revolution could not be achieved, a return to the pre-1956 Stalinist policies was also unviable.

Despite Kádár's efforts to garner broad support and compliance, several distinct segments of society demonstrated opposition, both overtly and implicitly. Ignác Romsics identifies three key groups: the Catholic clergy and their followers; the intellectual class, particularly within literature, who openly expressed dissent against the regime; and the agrarian population, especially private landowners, who continued to resist state policies.³⁴⁵ Another significant challenge for the regime was the lack of international recognition. Efforts to normalize relations with the Catholic Church began in February 1957 and resulted in tangible outcomes by 1959, including increased state support for the Church and provisions for religious education in schools. Similarly, tensions with writers eased as previously silenced authors began to publish their works.³⁴⁶

To address rural discontent, the state implemented measures between 1956 and 1957 to improve conditions for individual farmers, although collectivization remained the long-term goal.³⁴⁷ In July 1957, the Central Committee of the MSZMP announced plans for collectivization, shifting from coercion to persuasion and agitation. Agitator brigades

³⁴⁴ Romsics. p.399.

³⁴⁵ Romsics.p.399.

³⁴⁶ Horváth, István. Templomból a kultúrházba. In: Múlt-kor. https://mult-kor.hu/20070816_templombol_a_kulturhazba 2007.08.16.

³⁴⁷ Helmreich, Ernst C. "Kadar's Hungary." *Current History* 48, no. 283 (1965): 142–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45311256>. pp.145-147.

were dispatched to villages, aiming to convince influential farmers to join cooperative farms, resulting in a significant increase in membership by 1961.³⁴⁸

The second phase was characterized by the stabilization of the Kádár regime, spanning the 1960s to the 1970s and 1980s. This period gave rise to the term “Goulash Communism,” through a relaxation of the oppressive nature of the dictatorship, with greater autonomy and liberty in economy, education, science, and culture. While economic activities were still largely determined by the planned economy, some limited application of market-oriented principles found a place within it. Cultural policy was influenced by György Aczél’s “three Ts” (tiltott, tűrt, támogatott)³⁴⁹ theory, so the system allowed for regulators through which the hegemony of Communist ideology could somewhat diminish, and liberalization in intellectual-cultural life could gain some ground.³⁵⁰

The third phase in the 1980s was unmistakably defined by a deepening crisis that ultimately led to the downfall of the entire Kádár period in 1989. This final phase of the Kádár era was characterized by an increasing sense of disillusionment among the population, accompanied by growing calls for political and economic reform. As economic stagnation persisted and living conditions failed to improve significantly for many Hungarians, dissatisfaction with the regime’s policies began to escalate. Calls for increased political transparency and the demand for a more democratic system gained momentum, reflecting a widespread desire for a departure from the authoritarian practices that had

³⁴⁸ Kontler, László. *A History of Hungary. Millenium in Central Europe*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. 2002. p. 434.

³⁴⁹ (forbidden, tolerated, supported)

³⁵⁰ Kádár-korszak és rendszerváltás at Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár.
https://mnl.gov.hu/mnl/pml/a_kadar_korszak

defined the earlier stages of the Kádár era.³⁵¹ The mounting pressure from within the country, coupled with the changing political landscape in Eastern Europe, eventually led to the Kádár regime's collapse, marking the end of an era that had played a pivotal role in shaping Hungary's political and social trajectory in the latter half of the twentieth century.³⁵²

When addressing Hungary's foreign policy between 1956-1989, János Kádár always sought to align with the Soviet Union, primarily to maximize his own domestic maneuverability. However, while diplomatic relations following 1956, Jewish immigration to Israel, and the Eichmann trial in 1961 prevented Hungary from openly displaying hostility toward Israel, the situation shifted with the Six-Day War in 1967. This event placed Israel in the same category as Western imperialists, fostering close relations with these Western fascist countries.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the heightened sense of nationalistic sentiments during the 1956 Revolution was at times intertwined with antisemitism linked to critical perspectives on Communism. Kádár, in his efforts to consolidate power, sought to balance these forces, aiming to suppress both overt nationalism and overt antisemitism within the Party.³⁵³ In addition to managing domestic concerns, Kádár faced the challenge of navigating foreign political situations that aligned with Hungary's interests without contradicting Soviet expectations. The relationship with Israel posed a particularly complex diplomatic challenge, given Israel's emerging strong alliance with Western powers.

³⁵¹ Kontler. pp.457-460.

³⁵² Romsics, Ignác. Chapter VII, Kádár Korszak: Megtorlás és politikai konszolidáció in Magyarország Története a XX. Században. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999. pp.399-401

³⁵³ Ständeisky, Éva. Antisemitizmus a Kádár-korban. Kritika 40. 2011. Március. pp.18-19.

Already, prior to 1956, Soviet policy required its satellite states to distance themselves from Israel due to the close relation between Israel and the West³⁵⁴. Following the Hungarian Revolution, the Israeli government played a significant role in extending diplomatic recognition to Kádár's regime, which was grappling with international isolation. The groundwork for relations between Hungary and Israel, even predating the revolution, was laid through discussions on trade expansion initiated by the Hungarian government. In the revolution's aftermath, the Hungarian authorities promptly moved to restore the diplomatic connections that had been severed in 1956. Evidently, breaking free from its international isolation was a top priority for the newly established Kádár administration. The Israelis were convinced that this diplomatic flexibility and the rapid development of relations between the two nations would facilitate the emigration of Jews from one of Europe's most substantial Jewish communities to Israel.³⁵⁵

The initial catalyst that strained the perception of Israel within Hungarian Jewish communities was its decision to sell weapons to its former adversary, West Germany.³⁵⁶ This development, entailing a relationship between Israel and West Germany—a state deemed fascist or neo-Nazi in Hungarian and Eastern Bloc media—undoubtedly elicited concerns and laid the foundation for accusations regarding Zionist collaboration with fascist Germany. The Eichmann trial of 1961-1962 exemplified Hungary's challenge in navigating Soviet expectations, which advocated for the Eastern Bloc's detachment from

³⁵⁴ Győri, Szabó Róbert. Zsidóság és kommunizmus a Kádár-korszakban. III. Zsidóság cionizmus, antiszemitizmus az 1967-es arab-izraeli háború utáni években. p.79.

³⁵⁵ Kovács, András. Communism's Jewish Question: Jewish Issues in Communist Archives. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110411591>. p.32.

³⁵⁶ Brecher, Michael. "Images, Process and Feedback in Foreign Policy: Israel's Decisions on German Reparations." *The American Political Science Review* 67, no. 1 (1973): 73–102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958528>. p.95.

Israel due to its alignment with the West.³⁵⁷ While acknowledging Eichmann's central role in the mass deportations and death marches of Hungarian Jews, Kádár faced the delicate task of framing the trial's narrative in Jerusalem without provoking accusations of antisemitism that could undermine domestic politics.³⁵⁸ Consequently, Hungary focused its stance on condemning fascist actions in West Germany, where even 15 years after the war other former Nazi leaders were still sheltered. Despite willingly cooperating with Israel to provide evidence of Eichmann's guilt, Hungarian authorities aimed to underscore the collaboration between Zionists and Nazis, thereby demonstrating their allegiance to the Soviet Union.³⁵⁹

Sociologist András Kovács argues that while from the end of 1956 to the summer of 1957 emigration to Israel was allowed freely and legally, it was subsequently halted. The reason for it was rooted in the diplomatic pressure exerted by the Soviet government and Arab countries to cease emigration.³⁶⁰ In the summer of 1967, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) adopted an anti-Israel and pro-Arab official policy, leading Hungary, like other socialist countries, to sever diplomatic relations with Israel. Subsequently, the official anti-Zionist stance prohibited any expressions of sympathy toward Israel. However, the Hungarian political leadership did not demand that the domestic Jewish community and its leaders publicly participate in condemning Israel. Later, after 1967, the Kádár leadership demanded loyal adherence to the Soviet line from

³⁵⁷ Komoróczy. pp.1041-1042.

³⁵⁸ "Megkezdődött AdolfEchmann bűnpere" Új Szó, 1961. április (14. évfolyam, 91-119.szám)1961-04-12 / 101. szám, szerda

³⁵⁹ Koncsek, László. "Az Eichmann-per szégyenletes kompromisszuma". Népszabadság, 1968. június (26. évfolyam, 127-152. szám)1968-06-20 / 143. szám

³⁶⁰ Kovács. pp.23-24.

Jewish-origin cadres, ordinary party members, and even the Jewish community outside the party.³⁶¹

Although, compared to other socialist countries, the Kádár regime was not considered openly antisemitic, policies relating to Jews existed beneath the surface. An underlying conviction persisted that Jews could potentially act collectively as agents of the regime's opponents and thus warranted vigilant scrutiny. As a result, Jewish matters remained a persistent presence on the political agenda, albeit discreetly. The restoration of Hungarian Israeli diplomatic relations only occurred in the late 1980s. The anniversaries of deportations in Hungary in 1974 and 1984, marked by the unveiling of memorials, always brought changes to the situation of the Hungarian Jewish community, particularly in terms of expressing solidarity with Israel and Jewish consciousness.³⁶² Between May 6-8, 1987, the Executive Committee Meeting of the World Jewish Congress was held in Budapest, with 120 delegates representing Jewish organizations and communities from 36 countries. This was the first time such a meeting took place in a country within the Soviet bloc. Foreign delegates gained insight into the institutions of Hungarian Jewry, including unique facilities in Central and Eastern Europe such as the Rabbinical Seminary and the Jewish Charity Hospital in Budapest. The conference addressed general issues concerning Jewry and featured local reports from Jewish congregations and communities.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Győri, Szabó Róbert. Zsidóság és kommunizmus a Kádár-korszakban. III. Zsidóság cionizmus, antiszemitizmus az 1967-es arab-izraeli háború utáni években. pp. 80-83.

³⁶² Komoróczy. A zsidók története Magyarországon. pp.1043-1045.

³⁶³ Budapesten tanácskozott a Zsidó Világkongresszus Végrehajtó Bizottsága. Új Élet, 1987 (42. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1987-05-15 / 10. Szám pp.1.3. and Maram Stern. Navigating the Communist Years: A Jewish Perspective. <https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/85th-anniversary/navigating-the-communist-years-a-jewish-perspective>

By the early 1980s, Hungary's economic predicament had deepened significantly and the inadequacy of foreign trade to meet loan interest payments brought Hungary perilously close to bankruptcy by 1982. In response to this economic crisis, Hungary sought recourse by joining the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The Political Committee moved strategically to augment foreign currency earnings with a resolution meant to reinvigorate relations with Israel. Covert diplomatic negotiations between Hungary and Israel were again initiated in the spring of 1987, exploring the expansion of bilateral relations such as considering diplomatic ties being restored. While initial perspectives indicated the impracticality of such a step, an accord for the reinstatement of diplomatic relations was formalized between Hungary and Israel on September 14, 1989, just a few months before the collapse of the Communist regime.³⁶⁴

In conclusion, the Kádár regime witnessed a complex interplay of factors that ultimately led to its failure. Several key reasons contributed to the downfall of this socialist regime. Economically, the rigid socialist economic model implemented by the Kádár regime faced insurmountable challenges. Despite modest economic growth during certain periods, the centrally planned economy proved inefficient and unable to foster long-term prosperity. Economic stagnation, coupled with inequalities in wealth distribution, created discontent among various segments of the population.³⁶⁵ Politically, the regime's authoritarian rule and limited political pluralism were significant contributors to its failure. The regime's attempts to enforce a homogenized socialist identity by suppressing

³⁶⁴ Kovács p.137.

³⁶⁵ Kontler.p.443.

nationalist sentiments also faced resistance, particularly in the realm of national and cultural issues.³⁶⁶

In the 1980s, calls for political reform gained momentum both domestically and internationally. Influenced by the reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, demands for greater openness and political pluralism emerged in Hungary. The regime's inability to adapt to these changing circumstances, coupled with its failure to meet the evolving expectations of the Hungarian society, ultimately led to its downfall. The extraordinary party congress convened on May 20–22, 1988, marking the removal of János Kádár from the position of general secretary, a post he had held for over 30 years within the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. By 1988, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party led by János Kádár had lost the support of a significant portion of its party members and broad segments of society. The majority of the population sought radical changes. Opposition organizations emerged in 1987-1988, serving as precursors to future parties such as the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), and the Alliance of Young Democrats (FIDESZ).

In the continuation of the transition to a new political system, the government that came to power considered it crucial to persist in the privatization process, uphold political pluralism, and, in terms of foreign policy, sought integration with Western organizations, aiming to join the European Union and NATO. The aspiration to join the European Union and NATO reflected a strategic commitment to align the nation with broader geopolitical frameworks. This integration not only symbolized a geopolitical reorientation but also

³⁶⁶ Romsics. pp.494-495

signaled a desire for closer collaboration with democratic nations and the embrace of shared values and principles.

Membership in supranational institutions such as the EU has necessitated a reckoning with the legacy of World War II. Prospective member states are expected to demonstrate their commitment to confronting their traumatic pasts by establishing state-sponsored Holocaust memorials. Consequently, the 1990s marked the onset of a new phase in memorialization politics, characterized by the continuation and evolution of earlier commemorative practices commenced during the Kádár era.

Chapter IV.III Resurfacing Actors

With the diminishing grip of dictatorial repression on Hungary following the Kádár regime's process of stabilization, there emerged a renewed proliferation of diverse actors actively engaged in the process of memorialization. The earlier Rákosi era had witnessed the commemoration of Jewish martyrs primarily confined to the involvement of local Jewish communities. However, the consolidation of the Kádár regime, accompanied by the spirit of "glasnost," marked a turning point.³⁶⁷ Signaling its willingness to embrace internal democratization within the existing system, the state fostered a more inclusive approach to memorialization. This shift was evident in the commemoration of the martyrs of deportations and forced labor, where representatives of local authorities and international actors, collaborative efforts between Jewish organizations in Budapest and the countryside, and members of the Patriotic People's Front (Hazafias Népfront) played integral roles. The subsequent sections examine the reemergence of various actors and their roles, illustrating how foreign political events influenced commemorations and highlighting the contrasting nature of important commemorative events on liberation anniversaries between Budapest and the regions.

Indisputably, the diplomatic stance toward Israel wielded substantial influence on the intricacies of domestic Jewish politics. This influence was particularly pronounced throughout the Kádár era, during which a series of external events unfolded, leaving an indelible mark on the phases of the party-state's "Jewish policy." The policies relating to Israel, as well as significant external occurrences like the Eichmann trial and the Six-Day

³⁶⁷ Fazekas, Csaba. Kultúrbéke 1987. In Népszabadság 1987. december 18. pp.1-5.

War in 1967, played pivotal roles in shaping the approach of the Hungarian party-state toward managing internal “Jewish affairs.”³⁶⁸ The echoes of these influences are perceptible in the orations delivered during memorial inaugurations, where contemporaneous political themes, notably those linked to Israel, were not previously addressed.

The state had previously provided little financial support to Jewish communities for the renovation of synagogues or the establishment of memorials or monuments. After 1945, the primary responsibility for funding such endeavors largely rested on the Jewish community, which either had to raise funds independently or depend on charitable contributions. In 1958, the Hungarian government provided a grant of half a million forints to aid in the commencement of the renovation work on the Dohány Street Synagogue, which was set to celebrate its centenary the following year. It was later reported that with the assistance of the state and the capital city, the restoration of the Óbuda Synagogue would also take place.³⁶⁹ Initially, the government undertook the restoration of one significant historical church for each of the four denominations with additional renovations carried out on the Dohány Street Synagogue.³⁷⁰ However, the Jewish community expressed the view that the offer made during the assembly for the extensive renovation of the synagogues was merely symbolic. They emphasized that the Hungarian Jewish community, which extends

³⁶⁸ Kovács, András. 2019. *A Kádár rendszer és a zsidók* ('The Kádár Regime and the Jews'). Budapest: Corvina. pp.9-12

³⁶⁹ Dercsényi, Dezső. “Tíz év magyar műemlékvédelme” in *Magyar Műemlékvédelem 1949-1959, Országos Műemléki Felügyelőség Kiadványai 1*. Budapest, 1960. p.22.

³⁷⁰ The restoration of the Esztergom Basilica, The Great Reformed Church, The Lutheran Church of Buda, and the synagogue in Óbuda

beyond the Budapest Jewry, sought not only to refurbish its temples but also to revitalize itself and its traditions.³⁷¹

As highlighted in the introduction, a significant partnership emerged between the Jewish community in Budapest and various regional Jewish communities across Hungary starting in the late 1950s. This collaboration was notably evident during the Rákosi era, wherein the state gradually disengaged from local martyr commemorations, leading to Holocaust remembrance becoming primarily the responsibility of local Jewish communities. Consequently, even before the mid-1950s, instances of cooperation and mutual support among neighboring Jewish communities beyond Budapest were observed, this collaboration was further bolstered by the active involvement of the Budapest Jewish community. Acting as a paramount link between the capital and regional localities, the Budapest Jewish community played a pivotal role in strengthening these collaborative efforts during the Kádár era.

The Central Representative of Hungarian Israelites (Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselőtársasága, illetve Központja - MIOK), established in 1950-1951, was initially tasked with organizing and maintaining religious life. However, during the Kádár era, Jewish communities under the oversight of the State Office for Church Affairs (Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal - ÁEH) shifted focus away from substantive religious activities to more symbolic gestures.³⁷² The MIOK concentrated on fostering connections between Budapest and other major cities and revitalizing religious life through official visits and cultural events. Certainly, a notable demonstration of collaborative initiatives between the urban center and

³⁷¹ A Magyar állam ötszázezer forintot adott a Dohány utcai zsinagóga restaurálására in Új Élet XIV. Évfolyam. 3.szám. 1958.Március. 1. pp.1-2

³⁷² Az izraelita felekezet (1945–1989) <https://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/278.html>

rural areas is discernible in the cultural evening orchestrated by the Jewish community of Nagykanizsa.³⁷³ This event showcased the talents of musicians, poets, and an opera singer from Budapest. A similar event occurred in Karcag, where Endre Sós, the president of the Central Representative of Hungarian Israelites (MIOK) sought to demonstrate the Budapest Jewish community's commitment to revitalizing the communal life of Karcag Jews. This was evidenced by offering financial assistance for the immediate renovation of the damaged roof of the Karcag synagogue. Additionally, the presentation of the newly renovated cultural hall by MIOK provided a venue for important discussions and speeches delivered by leaders of Jewish communities from Debrecen, Tisztántúl, as well as representatives from Karcag and Budapest. The event concluded with performances by opera singer Mária Szendrő and actress Mária Róbert.³⁷⁴

Furthermore, the 1958 visits by president Endre Sós and Steiner Marcell, the vice president of the MIOK, to several Hungarian towns including Sátoraljaújhely, Nagykanizsa, Balassagyarmat, Karcag, Kisvárda and Tata, marked a pivotal moment in the history of Hungarian Jewish communities.³⁷⁵ Their engagement in joint commemorative activities for the martyrs from these towns not only symbolized the collective remembrance of the tragic past but also served as a catalyst for fostering a deeper sense of communal solidarity and unity. Through their efforts to address concerns regarding the restoration of synagogues and the rehabilitation of deportees, the Central Representative of Hungarian Israelites demonstrated a commitment to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, underscoring the significance of safeguarding the collective memory of the nation.

³⁷³ A vidéki zsidóság él és élni akar in Új Élet. 1958. Április 1.p.3.

³⁷⁴ Megfogyatkozott számban éli tovább vallásos életét a karcagi zsidóság. Új Élet. 1958 April 1.

³⁷⁵ Új élet, 1958 April 1

Additionally, their initiatives to bridge the gap between the urban Jewish community in Budapest and the dispersed communities in the countryside contributed to the revitalization of a shared identity, fostering a renewed sense of belonging and kinship within the broader Hungarian Jewish population. Moreover, such collaborative occasions underscored the nuanced nature of the Jewish community in Hungary, emphasizing that it is not a homogeneous state-controlled entity. Distinct differences in the memorialization process and the actors involved were evident between the Jewish communities in Budapest and those in the rural areas. These endeavors played a crucial role in nurturing a harmonious relationship between different segments of the Hungarian Jewish population, reinforcing the significance of continuity and resilience in the face of historical adversity.

In the intersection of politics and commemorations, a notable trend emerged since the Rákosi era, wherein commemorative speeches often incorporated rhetoric rooted in contemporary foreign political issues. These speeches frequently invoked political figures such as Soviet heroes while condemning entities like Western Germany as fascist. However, the negative portrayal of Israel in such contexts was previously unheard of until it aligned with Soviet expectations. The burgeoning alliance between the West and Israel sparked apprehension not only within the Soviet Union but also among the Hungarian Jewish community. A notable instance illustrating this dynamic is the commemorative event held in Debrecen in 1959. During the commemoration speeches, notable reference was made to the diplomatic relationship between Hungary and Israel.³⁷⁶ By the close of 1959, the predominant concern of the Israeli government vis-à-vis Hungary revolved around the issue

³⁷⁶ Új Élet 1959 augusztus 15 Hatezer debreceni mártír emlékművének avatása- A béke és az antifasiszta harc mellett tettek hitet a szónokok a gyászünnepségen. pp.3-4

of immigration. Israel aspired to augment the number of migrants to its homeland, expressing dissatisfaction with Hungary's limitations on the volume of people allowed to relocate. Nevertheless, in 1959, public attention was drawn to an unexpected development when Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion of Israel sanctioned the sale of Israeli-manufactured arms to West Germany.³⁷⁷ This revelation sparked considerable consternation within the Jewish community, as it brought to light not only diplomatic relations but also the controversial sale of weapons to Germany, the perpetrators of the Holocaust.

The commemorative event drew a substantial and enthusiastic attendance by the Debrecen Jewish community, with representatives from diverse official bodies and individuals. András Szombati, a senior ecclesiastical officer from the State Office for Church Affairs, and Imre Szathmári-Nagy, the delegate of the National Patriotic People's Front representing the City Council of Debrecen, were present, as well as representatives from the Patriotic People's Front of Hajdú-Bihar County and Debrecen. Notably, delegates from various Transdanubian Christian churches, including the Reformed and Evangelical churches, were also in attendance.

Prominent leaders of the Hungarian Jewish community, including Endre Sós, Károly Haas, Imre Wittenberg, and Dr. Jenő László, were present, alongside representatives from the South Transdanubian Israelite District Community, the North Hungarian and Transdanubian Israelite District Community, and the Miskolc congregation, among others from Budapest and different parts of the country. In his address, he voiced his objection, on behalf of the hundred thousand Hungarian Jews, against the Israeli government's supply of

³⁷⁷ Brecher, Michael. "Images, Process and Feedback in Foreign Policy: Israel's Decisions on German Reparations." *The American Political Science Review* 67, no. 1 (1973): 73–102. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1958528>. p.24.

weapons to West German militarists, fascists, and anti-fascists. He stressed that individuals of Jewish descent should never form an alliance with those responsible for the atrocities against their ancestors, parents, siblings, and children.³⁷⁸

In examining Győr's annual commemorative ceremony, which honors the thousands of congregation members lost during labor camps and deportation, alongside the emigration wave of 1956, it becomes apparent that this event encompasses a diverse array of participants. Beyond its solemn remembrance, the significance of this gathering lies in the varied actors who contribute to the commemorative process. This multifaceted engagement highlights the collaborative nature of memorialization within the Győr Jewish community, revealing the diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions that collectively shape the narrative of loss and resilience. The event draws attendees not only from Győr and its surrounding areas but also from other Jewish communities residing in the capital and other regions, often including individuals who have traveled from abroad to honor their deceased relatives.

According to reports from *Új Élet*, on June 26, a solemn ceremony was held with an audience of about 300 gathered before a monumental, pyramid-shaped martyr monument—a truly unique structure in the country. The attendees reverently walked through the interior of the building, adorned with marble tablets inscribed with the names of death camps such as Dachau, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, Gunskirchen, Statthof, Bor, Balf, Fertőrákos, Kopháza, Kőszeg, Sopron—sites where Jews of Győr tragically perished. At the center of the building, a symbolic grave was adorned

³⁷⁸ *Új Élet* 1959 augusztus 15 Hatezer debreceni mártír emlékművének avatása- A béke és az antifasiszta harc mellett tettek hitet a szónokok a gyászünnepségen. pp.3-4

with a profusion of flowers as a mark of reverence, while nearby, an eternal flame illuminated the pages of a martyr's album, ensuring the names of the victims would be immortalized.

Several notable actors attended the mourning ceremony, including Ferenc Horváth, representing the Patriotic People's Front Győr City Committee, Sós Endre from MIOK, Dr. Mihály Borsa from KSZB (Központi Szociális Bizottság - Center of Social Committee), and Dr. Imre Benoschofsky, the Deputy Chief Rabbi of the country, representing the Jewish community from the capital. The event commenced with a funeral lament by Zoltán Szirmai, a member of the State Opera House, followed by Dr. Árpád Vértes, Győr's rabbi, who as described in the article, underscored the significance of the day and traced the origins of deportations back to the anti-Jewish measures of the Horthy era. Dr. Artúr Geyer, a rabbi from Budapest, delivered his speech highlighting the ongoing struggle against fascism, emphasizing the obligation to uphold the memory of the martyrs. Dr. Imre Benoschofsky outlined the future tasks ahead, urging alignment with peace and constructive forces rather than destruction and war, in accordance with the spirit of the martyrs.

Sós Endre's concluding remark emphasized the importance of collaboration among Jewish communities across Hungary: "Every Hungarian Jew must pledge that we will never forget our martyrs; that we will build the future of Hungarian Jewry in the spirit of the martyrs; that we will fight against war and fascism in the spirit of the martyrs' memory;

and that strengthened by the spirit of the martyrs, we will work to prevent the hands of the new fascists preparing for further mass murders.”³⁷⁹

Another example of the actors’ multifaceted participation that shows the communal bonds and collective memory can be observed in Monor a town in Pest County. On September 1, 1963, a monument dedicated to the deported was revealed in the Jewish cemetery in the town, constructed by MIOK. During the period of Horthy-era fascism, approximately 15,000 individuals subjected to forced labor were transported from this town to foreign execution camps, with the majority not to return. Moreover, over 20,000 Jewish individuals from the neighboring area were assembled at the brick factory transit camp under the German fascist occupation and subsequently deported to Auschwitz and other extermination camps, although only a small fraction managed to make their way back.³⁸⁰ The ceremony marking the memorial’s unveiling, held on Sunday September 1, honored the memory of those 35,000 Jewish martyrs and drew attendance of local political leaders and representatives of the Reformed Church representing diverse social organizations, delegates from the Patriotic People’s Front, officials from the District Council and the Village Council, local agricultural cooperatives, representatives from the Women’s Council, members of the KISZ (Communist Youth League) leadership, the director, and several instructors from the József Attila High School, and a delegation from the Reformed Church. During the event, Chief Rabbi László Hochberger from Budapest delivered an address, underscoring that the “memorial stone of our martyrs should act as a beacon of

³⁷⁹ Uj Élet, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám)1960-07-15 / 14. Szám p.82. (*A mártírokkemléke jegyében küzdönka háború és a fasizmus ellen*)

³⁸⁰ Klacsmann, Borbála. “Ten Days in the Brick Factory: The Monor Transit Camp” in *Between Collaboration and Resistance Papers from the 21st Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Camps and Extermination Sites*. Edited by Karoline Georg, Verena Meier, Paula A. Oppermann. Berlin: Metropolis Verlag. 2019. p.75.

guidance for the living.” Dr. László Harsányi, serving as the president of the Budapest Israelite District Community, stressed the significance of not simply acknowledging the erection of the monument but also engaging with the extensive body of literature chronicling the era of persecution, thereby ensuring that its lessons resonate with forthcoming generations.³⁸¹ Observation like Harsányi’s reveal that earlier memorials and museums (e.g. Paris, Jerusalem), serving as educational and research centers, laid the groundwork within the Hungarian Jewish community for discussions on the diverse roles a memorial could play beyond being a symbolic place of mourning for the local community.

In certain instances, a memorial’s initiation was not derived from or proposed by the local Jewish community; instead, in Sümeg, a small town located north from Lake Balaton, for example, it was championed by representatives of the Patriotic People’s Front. While the Patriotic People’s Front was a political organization, not a political party, its aim was to tie all elements of the political system together at that time, including the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), mass organizations, as well as social and cultural entities.³⁸² An example of the Patriotic People’s Front's initiative was the proposal and implementation of installing a commemorative plaque honoring the martyrdom of the approximately three hundred Jewish citizens of Sümeg, a town in Veszprém county. Despite once having a thriving Jewish community, by 1968, Sümeg was home to only around ten families, some of whom resettled there following liberation.

The unveiling of the plaque on the former synagogue wall commenced on October 20, with the inauguration event witnessing a significant turnout of Sümeg's residents and

³⁸¹ Uj Élet, 1963 (19. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1963-09-01 / 17. Szám p.98.

³⁸² A politika intézményei 1956–1957

http://gepeskonyv.btk.elte.hu/adatok/Tortenelem/14Szab%F3_Marjanucz/html/9_8.htm

youth. Representatives from various social organizations in the county and district also attended the ceremony. Imre Jankó, the secretary of the Patriotic People's Front, delivered the commemorative address, expressing, "May this plaque serve as a harbinger of the distressing past, reminding us of the ongoing imperative to tirelessly combat contemporary neo-fascism and genocide."³⁸³ Situated at the base of Sümeg Castle, the Mártírokútja became notably infamous during the fateful summer of 1944. This location once housed the synagogue, serving as the spiritual center for the 360 Jewish members of the Sümeg community. On May 12, 1944, the Sümegi Jewish populace, subsequently confined within the Zalaegerszeg collection camp and transported by death trains, was forcibly assembled in this street. By the 1960s, the Jewish population in Sümeg had dwindled to only ten individuals.³⁸⁴

During commemorative events between 1956-1989, such as the anniversaries marking deportations or liberation, local, national, and sometimes international communities undertook a significant collaborative effort. The purpose was to collectively honor the fallen martyrs, acknowledge the heroic Soviet liberators, and draw lessons from the historical past. This collaborative approach in participation was exemplified, for instance, during the 25th anniversary commemoration of deportation in Szeged, the third largest city in Hungary situated near the southern border of Hungary. Representatives from Yugoslavian Jewish communities were invited to join the event, alongside Hungarian Jewish representatives, other church representatives, and politicians.³⁸⁵ This inclusive

³⁸³ Felavatták a sümegi mártírok emléktábláját. *Új Élet*, 1968 (23. évfolyam, 1-24. szám) 1968-11-01 / 21. Szám p. 129.

³⁸⁴ HU HJMA X-118. Sümeg (1885 - c. 1958), Administrative History. HJMA - Magyar Zsidó Múzeum és Levéltár <https://archives.milev.hu/index.php/sumeg;jsad>

³⁸⁵ Háromnapos gyászütőnaple Szegedena vidéki zsidóságdeportálásának 25. évfordulóján. *Új Élet*, 1969 (24. évfolyam, 1-24. szám) 1969-07-15 / 14. szám p.2.

gathering aimed to foster collective remembrance and reflection on the shared history about the victims of antisemitic atrocities during World War II.

Three days of mourning took place in Szeged to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the rural Jewish population's deportation. During the event, Szeged town's rabbi Raj Tamás, in his speech, addressed not only issues of mourning and remembrance but also the perils of neo-fascism and the notion of peace. He concluded his speech by saying: "It is often said that silence reigns like that of the grave. Yet, there are graves that do not remain silent; their voices cry out to the heavens. These are the unmarked graves. Following ancient Jewish tradition, when we visit the cemetery, we place a stone on the graves of our loved ones. Nowadays, on the unmarked graves of the martyrs, a stone is placed, symbolizing the Jewish community and the temple."³⁸⁶ A prominent event within the three-day memorial ceremony in Szeged was the ceremonial gathering with representatives attending from the Hungarian Israelite Religious Community (MIOK) and the Central Bureau of Hungarian Israelite Communities (BIH). Dr. Géza Seifert, president of MIOK and BIH, and his wife, Dr. Sándor Scheiber, Director of the National Rabbinical Seminary, and Dr. László Salgó, Chief Rabbi and Director of the Budapest Rabbinate, were also present.

Among the international attendees there were representatives of the Yugoslavian Federation of Jewish Communities and the Jewish Community of Novi Sad and other members of the leadership of the Szabadka Jewish Community, Ladislav Kadelburg, the President of the Savez komunista Jugoslavije (The League of Communists of Yugoslavia),

³⁸⁶ Háromnapos gyászütőnaple Szegedena vidéki zsidóságdeportálásának 25. évfordulóján. Új Élet, 1969 (24. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1969-07-15 / 14. szám p.2.

and his wife, Bendon Lem, the Vice President of Savez were also present. Among the audience were relatives of former Hungarian rabbis from Caracas and England in attendance. The Szeged churches were represented by Dr. Antal Molnár, the Roman Catholic prelate canon, Pozsgay Pál, the Roman Catholic parish priest, and Zoltán Seress, the Reformed presbyter, along with distinguished professors from the University of Szeged.

In front of this assortment of commemorators, Dr. Géza Seifert, MIOK and BIH president, took the floor. The main theme of his speech was one of mourning and empathy, paying homage on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the deportations to the six hundred thousand Hungarian Jewish martyrs, including the memory of over 3,000 victims deported and killed from Szeged. The significant presence of diverse actors at the 25th anniversary commemoration of the deportation from Szeged reflects a recognition and engagement with historical memory and collective trauma. Particularly noteworthy is the involvement of Communist political party members from Yugoslavia, suggesting a shared commitment to international solidarity and historical remembrance. or the Communist parties of Hungary and Yugoslavia, this event presented an opportunity to reaffirm their dedication to anti-fascism and solidarity with victims of wartime atrocities, while also avoiding direct acknowledgment of their own nations' historical culpability and treatment of Jewish citizens.

Round-number anniversaries of events such as liberation and deportation often receive heightened attention from both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens, as well as political leaders in Hungary. The specific way in which memorials and commemorations were conducted during these anniversaries carried significant political symbolism and meaning. With the softening of Kádár's dictatorship, diplomatic relations between Hungarian leaders

and the West began to emerge. The inclusion of these diplomatic efforts became particularly significant in the context of the national 30th anniversary ceremony of liberation in Budapest in 1975. Numerous commemorative events were predictably organized at significant locations such as the Dohány Street Synagogue and the former ghetto.³⁸⁷ The speeches delivered during these events extended beyond the remembrance of victims of Nazi terror in Hungary, encompassing tributes to victims and heroes from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, England, and America. Emphasizing the preservation of Jewish traditions and the reconstruction of the Jewish community, the speeches underscored the active participation of Hungarian Jewry in the socialist construction of the nation.³⁸⁸ Concurrently, public exhibitions featuring photographs, artworks, and sculptures were organized in Budapest by the Hungarian Partisan Association's Committee of Victims of Nazism,³⁸⁹ shedding light on the horrors of concentration camps for a broader audience. The reconciliation with West Germany held significant importance, highlighted by the participation of the Budapest Jewish delegation in the 30th anniversary commemorative event in the GDR, along with Jewish representatives from the Soviet sphere, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Soviet Union.³⁹⁰ Additionally, on September 5, 1975, Helmut Schmidt, the Chancellor of West Germany, laid wreaths at the memorial for the victims of fascism in the Kozma Street Cemetery in Budapest.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Koszorúzás a gettó harmincadik évfordulóján in *Új Élet*. 1975. Február 1. XXX. Évfolyam 3.szám p.1.

³⁸⁸ A Magyar zsidóság felszabadulási ünnepe in *Új Élet*. 1975. Március. 15. XXX. Évfolyam 6. Szám pp.1-3.

³⁸⁹ A Magyar Partizán Szövetség Nácizmus Üldözötteinek Bizottsága

³⁹⁰ A Magyar zsidóság delegációja az NDK-ban in *Új Élet*, 1975. Május 1. XXX. Évfolyam 9. Szám. pp.2-3-

³⁹¹ Földes, György. "Jegyzőkönyv Kádár János és Helmut Schmidt nyugatnémet kancellár tárgyalásairól" in *Kádár János külpolitikája és nemzetközi tárgyalásai 1956–1988 II. Válogatott dokumentumok*. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó. 2015. p.563.

To further underscore the depth of involvement from rural Jewish communities in these commemorative events that also occurred outside of Budapest, a case in point is Balassagyarmat, where not only did the local Jewish community place significant emphasis on a diverse array of commemorative programs but also erected their inaugural martyr memorial in 1975. Plans initiated by the government were already underway in Balassagyarmat, town in northern Hungary, and its surrounding areas in 1974 to commemorate the impending 30th anniversary. Documentation from the Head of the County Council, István Hoffer, outlined the preparations for these celebratory activities. The state proposed that local schools engage in diverse and multifaceted activities to appropriately celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of liberation. The central theme of the various initiatives - competitions, contests, exhibitions, and ceremonies - is the historical significance of the liberation that provided an opportunity for the popular democratic transition and socialist development. This commemorative concept precisely reflects the significance of 1945 in Hungarian national history. However, in the planning and implementation of jubilee activities, as Hoffer implies one must not forget that 1944-45 is not only an important date for Hungary but also holds great significance in the history of every nation, and the national importance of our liberation unfolds in full richness within an international context.³⁹²

In Budapest, the state ensured that the 30th commemorative events marking the anniversary of liberation served a dual purpose, with a strong emphasis on honoring the Soviet liberators while also involving the Budapest Jewish community in ceremonies at the

³⁹² Balassagyarmat Város Tanácsa VB. Titkársága 2681. Postafiók: 14. Szám: 397 /1975 Szeptember 4. Munkásmozgalmi emlékek felmérése Irattárjel: 20h0. pp. 3-5.

Dohány Street Synagogue. However, in Balassagyarmat, the state's guidelines for commemorative events of the liberation completely disregarded any reference to the Jewish community. The official document stated that it was imperative to highlight: the immense sacrifices made by the Soviet people and the Red Army for the freedom of the Hungarian nation; that the Communist-led working class was at the forefront of national liberation and revolutionary struggles everywhere; and that the prominent role of the Communist parties and the working class in the resistance and partisan movements, anti-fascist uprisings, and the struggle for social progress was a guarantee of democratic and socialist development and the establishment of the socialist world order.

Individual schools determined the organizational and methodological question of where, when, and in what form the 30th anniversary commemoration would take. The National Institute of Education released guidelines stating that the commemoration could take place in history or homeroom classes, school events, excursions, or as part of the high school Communist Youth Union (KISZ) programs.³⁹³ Since it was paramount from the county council perspective that the commemoration fulfilled educational objectives, the Comrade Library Director (Könyvtárvezető Elvtárs) and the County Cultural Department (megyei Művelődésügyi Osztály) were contacted to do everything possible to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the country's liberation. Cultural centers and club libraries coordinated a series of lectures, and each village in the district is expected to host political-themed ceremonies and exhibitions. The Moziüzemi Vállalat (Cinema Enterprise) organized screenings of Hungarian and Soviet films related to the liberation. The Ballasagyarmati

³⁹³ Balassagyarmat Város Tanácsa VB. Titkársága 2681. Postafiók: 14. Szám: 397 /1975 Szeptember 4. Munkásmozgalmi emlékek felmérése Irattárjel: 20h0. pp. 3-5.

Irodalmi Szinpadi Napok (Ballasagyarmat Literary Stage Days) presented performances, and the Youth Clubs hosted intimate gatherings. The maintenance of Soviet graves and memorials were entrusted to the school and the Pioneer Corps (úttörő csapat). It is evident that the state viewed these commemorative opportunities as a means to provide socialist education for the youth, emphasizing the Soviet liberation as the focal point, while simultaneously excluding local or national Jewish history and memory from the narrative.

As demonstrated, during the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of liberation, the Hungarian state exerted considerable efforts to influence and orchestrate the events, especially in educating the youth about the importance of liberation. Meanwhile, separately from the government's initiatives, the Jewish community of Balassagyarmat endeavored to establish a memorial dedicated to the deported and deceased members of their community, thus conducting their own remembrance activities. József Róth, the president of the Jewish community at the time, played a pivotal role in this initiative for more than three decades until his passing in 2003. Given the unavailability of the names of the deported and deceased individuals, efforts were made to elicit participation through public announcements published in various newspapers, including *Új Élet*, urging relatives to contribute to the memorial. Approximately 400 names were subsequently inscribed on the memorial, representing roughly one-sixth of the individuals lost from Balassagyarmat and its environs.³⁹⁴

On July 7, the Balassagyarmat Jewish community, one of the oldest Jewish congregations in Hungary, inaugurated an impressive martyr monument in the cemetery,

³⁹⁴ Interview with Bauer, József (Head of the Jewish Community in Balassagyarmat) by Agnes Kende October 20, 2023.

combining the ceremony with a solemn commemorative event marking the thirtieth anniversary of the deportations. Besides the local residents, a significant gathering of fellow believers from Budapest, Salgótarján, Eger, Slovakia, Vienna, Switzerland, West Germany, the United States, and Australia, as well as numerous others from Balassagyarmat and its diaspora, attended the renovated cemetery, prepared with particular care by István Kertész for this occasion. Among the attendees from the capital city were prominent figures such as Dr. László Harsányi, the vice president of the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, and Sándor Ungár, the vice president of the Orthodox Section of the Balassagyarmat Israelite Community. The ceremony concluded with funeral chants and a collective recitation of the Kaddish, with the participation of a delegation from the Catholic Church Council, a numerous delegation led by Pastor Lajos Róka from the Reformed Church, and representatives of the Lutheran Church led by Senior Pastor Lajos Garami.³⁹⁵

The research findings highlight an intriguing contrast in the state's involvement in jubilee celebrations, particularly during events such as the anniversary of liberation in Budapest. In the capital, there appears to be a more concerted effort by the state to collaborate with the Jewish community. This collaboration extends to active participation in commemorations, delivering speeches, and providing financial assistance for commemorative projects. However, a distinct pattern emerges when examining the rural areas, where the state's presence is predominantly symbolic. Local authorities and members of the Patriotic People's Front occasionally attend, but their involvement in the local rural Jewish community's commemorative activities is limited.

³⁹⁵ Új Élet (1974 Új Élet, 1974 (29. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1974-08-01 / 15. Szám, P 88)

In these rural areas, the focal point shifts toward commemorating the Soviet side, exemplified by the case of Balassagyarmat and its surrounding region. Activities include organizing school events, screening Soviet films, and hosting commemorative gatherings at statues dedicated to Soviet liberators. Noteworthy is the exceptional effort exerted by the remnants of the Jewish community in Balassagyarmat in 1975 to establish a memorial in the Jewish cemetery. Their commitment to remembrance persisted, involving collaborative research with the Yad Vashem database and the comprehensive identification of Holocaust victims not only from Balassagyarmat but also from its encompassing areas. This regional contrast sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics of state engagement in Holocaust commemoration across urban and rural contexts.³⁹⁶



*Figure 8 "Martyr Memorial at Balassagyarmat" inaugurated in 1975.
Photo by Ágnes Kende. 2023.10.20.*

Another example of the local Jewish community outside of Budapest acting independently from state initiatives, which primarily focused on commemorating the Soviet liberation, is Vác. Here as well, the Jewish community organized its own individual commemorative event, highlighting specific aspects of remembrance that were distinct

³⁹⁶ Majdán, Béla. Report on the mitzvae of Balassagyarmat and the historic Jewish cemetery... p.90.

from the state's emphasis on the Soviet liberation. The commemoration of the 30th anniversary of liberation in Vác included the participation of numerous members from both the Budapest and local Jewish communities. The unveiling of the memorial commemorating 1,800 martyrs from Vác took place on July 7 in the central cemetery, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the deportations. Numerous family members of deportees who had returned attended the event, alongside relatives of the martyrs. Rezső Papp, the editor of *Váci Napló* (Vác Diary), represented the District Committee of the Patriotic People's Front, while a diverse assembly of individuals from the city came together to honor their deceased neighbors, friends, and acquaintances. Dr. Lajos Kéri assumed the role of representative for both the MIOK and the Budapest Municipality. József Sámuel, the president of the Jewish congregation, extended his greetings to the attendees, followed by Rabbi Jenő Groszberg, who emphasized the significance of the day and revisited the atrocities of the year 1944. Dr. Lajos Kéri, the municipal president, offered a retrospective of the life of the devastated Jewish communities in Vác, enumerating the thriving institutions within the communities, including the distinguished yeshiva and various Hebrew and Hungarian schools.

During his speech, Dr. Lajos Kéri made a symbolic acknowledgment of the Soviet liberators: "We, present here today, emerged from the brink of death as the advancing Soviet forces dismantled the German war apparatus, destroyed the gas chambers, and liberated the captives of the death camps", but he also highlighted the significance of the memorial column as a cautionary tale for those who did not directly experience the

atrocities. He emphasized that it serves as a constant reminder for future generations that the darkest and most disgraceful chapters in history must never be allowed to recur.³⁹⁷

To conclude, the limited attention given to rural commemorations of the Holocaust and liberation events can be attributed to the predominant focus on Soviet narratives promoted by the Socialist state. The emphasis on Soviet liberation and the heroic role of the Red Army in official discourse overshadowed other aspects of commemoration, such as local or community-based remembrances. This neglect reflects a broader shift in collective memory surrounding Communism, wherein official narratives prioritized certain historical events and downplayed others to fit the ideological agenda of the state. Consequently, rural commemorations were overshadowed by the dominant discourse perpetuated by the Socialist regime, leading to their marginalization in both written records and national remembrance efforts.

³⁹⁷ Új Élet, 1974 (29. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1974-08-01 / 15. Szám p.88.

Chapter IV.IV Blending Victim Groups

Building upon the conclusions drawn in the preceding chapter, it becomes evident that political manipulation in memorialization processes has the potential to overshadow other dimensions of remembrance, thereby shaping the dominant narrative. The discourse surrounding the necessity of a comprehensive collective remembrance emerged in the 1980s, encompassing both Jewish and non-Jewish victims of World War II, has raised concerns among Jewish representatives. They argue that by prioritizing certain aspects of remembrance over others, the state may be evading accountability and distorting the portrayal of the suffering endured by Hungarian Jews and non-Jews alike. The deliberate blending of various victim groups under the umbrella of shared wartime suffering became a notable trend not only in Hungary but also in West Germany, subsequently serving as a political tool for state-initiated memorials.³⁹⁸ While the notion of adequately acknowledging the sufferings experienced by millions of Germans or Hungarians during the tumultuous events of World War II may seem conducive to fostering a more inclusive and shared remembrance, the manipulation of such ideas for political ends lead to the rhetoric of victimization of one nation while silencing their responsibility in contributing to racial tensions and ethnic cleansing, which were significant factors of World War II.

Between 1945 and 1949, memorialization largely focused on honoring the memory of Jews who were deported and killed during World War II. Memorials and plaques were often erected in Jewish cemeteries and synagogues, with inscriptions using broader terms like "martyrs" or "brethren" rather than explicitly mentioning Jewish victims. However, the

³⁹⁸ Moeller, Robert G. "Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on a Post—Cold War History of World War II's Legacies." *History and Memory* 17, no. 1–2 (2005): 145–94. <https://doi.org/10.2979/his.2005.17.1-2.145>. p.150.

affiliation with Jewish communities and the placement in sacred places such as cemeteries or synagogues made it evident that the commemorated group was Jewish. After the consolidation of Communist power in Hungary after 1949, state involvement in memorialization shifted toward erecting numerous monuments dedicated to Soviet heroes and the liberation across Hungary, thereby diverting attention away from any remembrance of World War II victims, regardless of their Jewish or non-Jewish identity.

However, a notable shift occurred from the 1980s, where there emerged a more frequent trend of extending commemoration to encompass all victims of World War II. Yet, as this generalization and collectivization of diverse victim groups into a singular category gained popularity, its problematic nature became increasingly evident. This concern was articulated in the pages of *Új Élet* by Chief Rabbi Péter Kardos, who had been part of the editorial staff since 1973.³⁹⁹ According to critics from Jewish communities, this strategic approach allowed the state to avoid explicitly specifying the targeted demographics during World War II, thereby sidestepping a direct acknowledgment of its nation's complicity in antisemitic actions.

By broadening the scope to include a more generic victim narrative, these state-initiated memorials inadvertently fostered a sense of ambiguity and ambiguity surrounding the historical context. This intentional vagueness enabled the evasion of national responsibility for their explicit antisemitic actions undertaken during the wartime period. The consequence was a memorialization framework that leaned toward a victim mentality,

³⁹⁹ Bemutatjuk a rabbijainkat: Kardos Péter. Published on Mazsihisz, a Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége hivatalos honlapja. <https://mazsihisz.hu/kozossegeink/rabbijaink/bemutatjuk-a-rabbijainkat-kardos-peter> 2017. február 25. / 19:44

eluding the critical examination of the specific atrocities committed and the acknowledgment of historical accountability.

The memorials listed in this chapter, erected in small towns or villages of Bekecs, Martonvásár, and Zalalövő in Hungary during the 1980s, initially demonstrated a sense of collective shared remembrance. The inauguration ceremonies were attended by various representatives of churches, including Jewish, Catholic, and Reformed, with a deliberate effort to highlight the Jewish victims among the collective victims these memorials aimed to commemorate. However, reasonable suspicion or criticism among the Jewish community emerged as in various regions of the country, a social movement emerged to perpetuate the memory of the victims of the Second World War.⁴⁰⁰ These initial concerns expressed by the Hungarian Jewish community eventually foreshadowed the political manipulation of memorialization, which later manifested in state-initiated monuments for World War II victims erected in Budapest and beyond after the 1990s.

Chief Rabbi Péter Kardos from Budapest provided his perspective on the prevailing and notable trend in a 1989 issue of *Új Élet*, which was used as a pretext for the creation of new memorials.

Upon receiving an invitation to attend a monument inauguration in a rural town...It revolved around the communal recognition of all those who perished in the local town during the war or were associated with it... Isn't that right? Despite my experiences, I have never been in opposition to concepts such as reconciliation, compromise, and the majority, if not all, of the contemporary social movements. Encouragingly, in a recent issue, I read a letter from a Reformed pastor highlighting the absence of an official apology from any Christian denomination in the last 45 years. This assertion is somewhat questionable, as it occurred during a

⁴⁰⁰ Emlékművek a második világháború áldozatainak in Békés Megyei Népújság, 1989. július (44. évfolyam, 153-178. szám)1989-07-17 / 166. szám / Emlékművek, egyes érzelmek in Néplap, 1989. november (40. évfolyam, 260-285. szám)1989-11-28 / 283. szám / Emlékműveka másodikvilágháború áldozatainak in Népszabadság, 1989. július (47. évfolyam, 153-178. szám)1989-07-17 / 166. szám

commemorative event for the 40th anniversary of the deportations, where a notable representative of a prominent church suggested the idea of forgiveness at the Goldmark Hall...Here, I am not referring to individuals like kovácsjánosok or kiségyulák, those who were strategically deployed to the front lines, to the Don, or to endure the Russian winter in inadequate attire and who perished due to orders... but to the Arrow Cross perpetrators. Those who were rightfully sentenced to death by the court. Or those who were “accidentally” hit by a stray bullet in the streets of Budapest. And so forth. Isn’t that right? Perpetrators and victims should not share a common memorial! The concept of reconciliation cannot encompass both the perpetrator and the victim! To illustrate, if this trend continues, a peculiar scenario might haunt us in the foreseeable future. It may happen that in the heart of the city, there stands a memorial inscribed with the phrase “the victims of the Second World War.”⁴⁰¹

As Chief Rabbi Kardos pointed out, commemorating the victims of World War II through a singular memorial often entails the unintentional consequence of whitewashing perpetrators and victims together. While the intention is to create a unified narrative that emphasizes shared suffering, the amalgamation of divergent victim groups tends to dilute the specificity of historical injustices. By blending perpetrators and victims within a single commemorative framework, nuances regarding responsibility and accountability become obscured, potentially allowing for an inadvertent distortion of the historical record. This amalgamated approach, while seeking inclusivity, raises concerns about the clarity and accuracy of the collective memory conveyed through the memorialization process.

Instances of collective commemoration discussed herein were consistently instigated by non-Jewish residents within a given village or town, garnering support from local authorities, church representatives, and political officials. The initial examples of memorials revealed that there were endeavors to collaborate with Jewish organizations and the local Jewish community, thereby fostering inclusivity by incorporating the names of

⁴⁰¹ Kardos, Péter. Összemosás in Új Élet, 1989 (44. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1989-02-01 / 3. Szám p. 9.

both Jewish and non-Jewish victims of World War II. However, in the period following 1989, these collaborative efforts with the involvement of local Jewish communities began to diminish, and the objective shifted toward ensuring that all villages and towns had a memorial dedicated to the victims of World War II.⁴⁰² This shift raised concerns, echoing the fears expressed by Chief Rabbi Péter Kardos, that it could lead to the commemoration of Jewish victims alongside perpetrators within one memorial stone.

In 1988, Bekecs a village situated in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County council planned to erect a modest memorial for the victims of World War II. The local Patriotic People's Front president, a 73-year-old retired educator, suggested that the names of the deported and unrecovered Jewish residents of Bekecs be included on this memorial plaque. The proposal was endorsed by the state, party, and social organizations operating in the village, as well as by leaders of other churches. According to local research 53 Christians and 40 Jews from Bekecs were among the victims of World War II. The stone mason promised to complete the memorial by the end of August. The Roman Catholic priest intended to hold a memorial service at the site on November 1, All Saints' Day. Prior to this, the Bekecs village council planned the inauguration for September and collaborated with the Honorable Representatives of the Hungarian Israelites. They discussed every detail together and jointly prepared the program for the event. According to István Tóth, the president of the town council: "the names of the victims will peacefully reside on a marble plaque, just as they lived in peace and understanding in the community of Bekecs until their senseless deaths".⁴⁰³ The council's initiation of a collective memorial plaque set an example

⁴⁰² Ami kimaradt a történelemből in Pest Megyei Hírlap, 1989. április (33. évfolyam, 77-100. szám)1989-04-21 / 93. szám / Pályázat második világháborús emlékművekre in Magyar Hírlap, 1989. április (22. évfolyam, 77-99. szám)1989-04-13 / 85. szám

⁴⁰³ Új Élet, 1988 (43. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1988-09-01 / 17. Szám p.71.

in the small village community, that later quickly becoming a burgeoning trend across the country. On Sunday, September 18, 1988, the memorial for the 53 soldiers and 40 Jewish martyrs of the Second World War was unveiled in the village of Bekecs. .⁴⁰⁴

On another occasion, on October 30, 1988, a commemorative monument was unveiled in Martonvásár a town located in Fejér county, to honor the victims of the Second World War. The decision to create a suitable memorial for the nearly two hundred casualties from Martonvásár, including 56 individuals who were deported, was taken up by the Patriotic People's Front County committee following a proposal by the local Pensioners' Club. The solemn ceremony was attended by representatives of local social groups and various church clergy, with Rabbi Péter Kardos representing MIOK. In his opening address, Lajos Krizmus, the president of the Patriotic People's Front County Committee, highlighted the significant effort involved in identifying and acknowledging the victims' names and destinies. The findings revealed that among the village residents, 71 perished in combat, 56 were lost due to deportations, internment in camps, and in gas chambers, and 38 individuals as a result of war-related actions during the tumultuous war years. The erection of this monument served as a tribute to their memory, offering a space for reflection on the heroes' bravery, the victims' plight, and the collective actions taken. Additionally, it provided an opportunity for those who lost loved ones during the war to engage in a symbolic act of remembrance by lighting a candle. The ceremony ended as detailed in the article by placing wreaths at the monument, and students from the local elementary school honored the

⁴⁰⁴ Új Élet, 1988 (43. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1988-09-01 / 17. Szám p.71.

occasion by placing individual flowers on 17 panels arranged in a semicircle. These panels will later bear the engraved names of the victims.⁴⁰⁵



Figure 9 "Memorial for the victims of World War II in Martonvásár" was inaugurated in 1988. Photo by Dr. Pinczés Sándor. <https://www.kozterkep.hu/> 2011.11.19.

Lastly, in remembrance of the victims of the Second World War in Zalalövő a town located in the northwest of Zalah county, a substantial memorial was erected based on the suggestion of the local Catholic pastor and the municipal council. The official unveiling of the memorial occurred on August 6, 1989. Among the approximately one thousand individuals in attendance at the commemorative ceremony, a considerable contingent of fellow adherents, originally from the village, were present. The event commenced at the local Roman Catholic church, where a musical performance was presented. Part of the commemoration the names of the victims were read aloud, encompassing the names of 145 Jewish martyrs among the total of 270 victims. During the commemorative oration, Dr.

⁴⁰⁵ Kardos, Péter. Emlékmű-avatás Martonvásáron in Új Élet, 1988 (43. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1988-11-15 / 22. Szám p.92.

Ferenc Beer, the Catholic pastor, stressed the significance of not remaining silent about deportations, emphasizing that such silence amounts to complicity, and this should not be repeated. Rabbi Candidate Róbert Fröhlich was invited to deliver a speech as well. The conclusion of the ceremony within the temple involved the communal recitation of a psalm. The ceremony was a display of inclusivity, with attendees bringing flowers and wreaths to place at the memorial while also reciting the Kaddish prayer together.⁴⁰⁶



Figure 10 "Memorial for the victims of World War II in Zalalövő" inaugurated in 1989.
Photo by Cédrus from <https://www.kozterkep.hu/> 2012.

In conclusion, the collective remembrance of World War II victims serves as a crucial vehicle for fostering a shared historical consciousness and promoting empathy among diverse communities. However, it is imperative to navigate this commemorative landscape with discernment, acknowledging the potential dangers inherent in indiscriminate approaches to collective memory. The examples discussed above outside of Budapest underscore the importance of initiating collaborative between the respective

⁴⁰⁶ Új Élet, 1989 (44. évfolyam, 1-24. szám) 1989-08-15 / 16. Szám p.70.

towns and with the Jewish community in the creation of collective memorials. Such collaborations not only ensure the inclusion of the specific narratives of Jewish victims but also contribute to a more nuanced and accurate representation of the historical realities.

The criticism articulated by Chief Rabbi Péter Kardos and other members of the Budapest Jewish community regarding the blending of victims into a single collective group raises important questions about the nature of World War II memorialization and its association with the Jewish community. The concern is whether memorialization should exclusively focus on Jewish suffering and be the sole responsibility of the Jewish community. When efforts are made to depict a more inclusive, global collective memory involving a heterogeneous community in villages or towns, there is apprehension that the memory of Jewish suffering could be transferred from the Jewish community to local or state authorities. This transfer of control over memory to authorities prompts valid questions about how they will wield this power to shape and manipulate memory—a central aspect of memory politics. Therefore, striking a balance between inclusivity and historical accuracy is paramount to avoid the risk of oversimplification, distortion, and the inadvertent whitewashing of complex historical narratives.

Chapter IV.V the Sites of Memory: Memorials Moving from Cemeteries to City Centers

Building upon the argument presented in the previous chapter regarding the risks associated with blending victim groups from memory politics perspective, this chapter delves deeper into the ongoing debate surrounding the location of Holocaust memorials. At the core of this discussion is the question of whether relocating memorials and plaques dedicated to Jewish martyrs from the periphery to more central locations within towns, or even to sites of memory such as former ghettos or train stations used for deportation, signifies a shift in ownership of memory from the Jewish community to the town or state. This raises broader questions about the incorporation of these memorials into the collective memory and historical narrative of the town or region. This shift in memorial placement initially emerged in Budapest but rapidly extended to towns beyond the capital, including Miskolc, Pécs, and Pápa. Through examining these developments, this chapter seeks to illuminate the implications of these spatial and commemorative changes on memory politics and the representation of World War II history in Hungary.

In the aftermath of World War II, Holocaust memorials emerged as poignant touchstones, offering tangible spaces for commemoration to those who bore the heavy weight of loss of individuals who had seen their families torn apart and communities shattered. The profound absence of formal burial sites compelled the erection of these memorials and plaques, not just as physical structures but as sanctuaries for survivors to navigate the complex terrain of mourning and remembrance. These early memorials, carefully placed in Jewish cemeteries or adorning the walls of synagogues, took on a profound significance beyond mere commemoration. They became symbolic extensions of

the affected communities, encapsulating the shared grief and collective trauma of the survivors. Placed in these intimate settings, the memorials created a sacred space where personal loss intersected with communal memory, fostering an emotional and historical bond between the monument and the people it represented.⁴⁰⁷

As temporal distance grew, and the immediate horrors of the Holocaust became a chapter in history rather than a lived experience for subsequent generations, a transformative discourse emerged. Influences from diverse memorialization practices worldwide prompted discussions on the evolving roles these memorials could play. The discourse transcended individual grief, expanding to contemplate broader societal considerations. Discussions delved into the potential of these memorials to serve as educational tools, raising awareness about the Holocaust's historical significance for present and future generations.⁴⁰⁸ The narrative shifted from the immediate and personal to embrace a broader societal responsibility. The memorials, once anchored in the immediacy of individual mourning, were now seen as bridges connecting past atrocities to contemporary societal awareness and responsibility.

Contrastingly, this chapter sheds light on a distinct historical context—the Kádár era—wherein the discourse surrounding the meanings and locations of Holocaust memorials evolved organically and locally. The concept of establishing more centrally located memorials in urban areas, alongside those erected by the Jewish community in Jewish cemeteries, originated within the Jewish community itself. Acknowledging the

⁴⁰⁷ Marcuse, Harold. "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre." *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): p. 54. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23302761>. OR Tim Cole. *Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory*. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95. 2003. p.274.

⁴⁰⁸ Young, E. James. *The Texture of Memory*. p. 319.

necessity of increasing public awareness regarding the shared World War II history of their region, it became evident that memorials should be placed in more prominent public locations. This acknowledgment resonated with existing discussions on the multifaceted roles of memorials beyond serving solely as sites of mourning. In nearly all instances detailed in the following chapter, the creation and unveiling of these new memorials and memorial plaques were the result of collaborative efforts involving the local Jewish community, local authorities and activists.

One illustrative instance of discourses pertaining to the placement of martyr monuments transpired in 1958 with the proposal for the construction of the Monument to the Nameless Forced Laborers, a project spearheaded by the Budapest Jewish community. During this period, *Új Élet* initiated an opinion poll inviting readers to express their perspectives on the prospective location for this envisioned monument.

During the consultation between *Új Élet* and its readership on the monument's potential location, legal expert Henrik Tolcsvay proposed locating the monument along the Danube, where the forced laborers were murdered en masse, or potentially within one of the ghetto areas, where the majority perished. While the Dohány Street Synagogue courtyard was suggested by many including Chief Rabbi József Katona, Henrik believed that the monument should be situated elsewhere, as it could potentially serve as a stark reminder for those who were already deeply affected by the past, without the need for a physical structure. He contended that the monument should primarily draw the attention of those responsible for inhumane acts or those who passively tolerated them, none of whom were regular synagogue attendees. Another viewpoint, articulated by a Budapest resident

named Ivánné Szepes, also opposed the monument being placed in the Dohány Street Synagogue courtyard, instead advocating for its perpetual presence within the bustling city.

Despite a considerable number of respondents advocating for the erection of monuments at sites of direct historical significance relevant to their commemorative purpose, the Monument to the Nameless Forced Laborers was ultimately situated within the confines of the Rákoskeresztúr Jewish Cemetery (Kozma utca) in the outskirts of Budapest. Numerous considerations influenced this decision, encompassing practical factors and conveniences. These included the spatial capacity to accommodate sizable crowds, as well as the Rákoskeresztúr Jewish Cemetery's historical significance as a venue for commemorative services. The rationale behind consolidating commemorative elements within a singular space was deemed logical for the Budapest Jewish Community (BZSH). Nonetheless, the ongoing deliberations concerning the pertinence of monument locations remained a subject of contemplation among various stakeholders.⁴⁰⁹ The Unknown Forced Laborer Memorial was finally unveiled on September 27, 1959, in the Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery.⁴¹⁰

Later in the Kádár era in 1987, similar debates to those among the Jewish community of Budapest have occurred in Miskolc regarding the importance of the location of a new memorial plaque. The proposal suggests placing it more centrally within the city to contribute to Miskolc's World War II history, in addition to the existing monument located at the Jewish cemetery. On December 3, 1987, a marble plaque was unveiled in Miskolc as a commemorative gesture for Jewish residents who were deported to death

⁴⁰⁹ *Uj Kelet*, 1958. július (39. évfolyam, 3017-3043. szám) 1958-07-07 / 3022. szám

⁴¹⁰ *Új Élet* 1958 October 15. p5-6

camps from the city in 1944. This plaque was affixed to a new structure located at Arany János Street 4, formerly the site of the ghetto. In this particular instance, the memorial plaque was strategically placed at a site imbued with historical significance. However, the significance of this placement extended beyond mere commemoration, as elucidated in the speeches delivered during the unveiling ceremony.

Those who wanted the plaque to be situated within the formal ghetto area felt that it to engage passersby in a reflection on the collective shared responsibility pertaining to the events that transpired among the Jewish members of Miskolc during World War II. Its underlying objective would be to serve as an educational tool, imparting knowledge about the local history to the new generation. The plaque was not conceived solely for mourning the losses suffered by the Jewish community during the Holocaust but, rather, as a means to foster a broader understanding of historical events and shared responsibilities within the community.⁴¹¹ The purpose of the memorial plaque is evident in the choice of Jewish commemorative gatherings and events, as articulated by Rabbi Péter Ráckövesi of Miskolc. He highlights that these gatherings are held in the Jewish cemetery rather than at the central plaque in Miskolc. According to Rabbi Ráckövesi, the plaque serves political purposes, particularly during the annual commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day. However, for the Jewish community of Miskolc, the cemetery holds greater personal and intimate significance as a space for commemoration, distinct from political agenda.⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ “....mikor az ember úgy elaljasult...” Emléktáblátavattak a miskolci gettó helyén. Észak-Magyarország, 1987. december (43. évfolyam, 283-308. szám)1987-12-04 / 286. szám

⁴¹² Rabbi Péter Ráckövesi (the Head of Miskolci Chevra Kadisa) interview online by Agnes Kende, January 8th, 2024.

The commemoration commenced with a rendition of Miklós Radnóti's poem, "Fragment," recited by the actor Imre Kulcsár, followed by a speech from Gizella Homolya, the secretary of the Patriotic People's Front in Miskolc. According to the newspaper report, Homolya acknowledged the liberation of Miskolc 43 years ago today, symbolizing the end of the city's wartime struggles. She stressed the significance of the unveiling ceremony for a new memorial plaque, aimed at honoring the collective memories of the community. Reflecting on Miskolc's historical narrative, Homolya emphasized the vital role of the Jewish community, which constituted the city's third largest religious group in the 1920s. This community, totaling 11,000 members, actively engaged in commerce, education, and cultural pursuits. Homolya noted that today, nearly 50 years after the Holocaust, the ceremony serves as a tribute to the 14,000 citizens—primarily women—from Miskolc who were deported to concentration camps and forced labor during the war, tragically becoming victims of fascist atrocities.⁴¹³

Continuing, Homolya made an important point in her speech when she highlighted that the majority of the present population of Miskolc was born after the war, therefore not familiar with these tragic events solely through historical accounts. She further emphasized that remembrance of the victims of Nazism is guided by the humane principles of the community, signifying the shared grief of the Israelite congregation, who mourn the victims of the Holocaust due to their own significant family tragedies and personal losses. The recently unveiled plaque thus intended to serve as a symbol of their collective pain, as expressed by the secretary of the People's Front committee of the city.

⁴¹³ "...A jelen és a rövis elválaszthatatlan..." Emléktábla-avatás Miskolcon in Új Élet, 1987 (42. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1987-12-15 / 24. Szám p. 101.

Following the speech, representatives from the city council, the People's Front committee, and the Israelite congregation laid wreaths at the site of the memorial plaque. In addressing the attendees, Dr. Alfred Schöner, the Chief Rabbi and President of the National Rabbinical Council, articulated, "There are special, significant gifts and opportunities that may often become part of our experience. One such opportunity is to make a pilgrimage to the graves or memorials of our loved ones, to share our sorrows there, or to partake in the joys in spirit and emotion."⁴¹⁴

The rabbi also emphasized the close connection between remembrance and action, highlighting the progress made by the Hungarian Jewish community over the past 40 years toward achieving equal citizenship and rights within the nation. He underscored the importance of embracing religious and conscientious liberty, assimilating into contemporary society, and securing a place for the future. The speaker stressed the significance of acknowledging history for shaping future prospects, praising Miskolc for upholding its history and earning the privilege of a harmonious future where collaboration across diverse convictions advances both local and broader communities."⁴¹⁵



Figure 11 "Memorial plaque at the former place of the ghetto in Miskolc" inaugurated in 1987. Photo by Ágnes Kende. 2023.11.07.

⁴¹⁴ "...A jelen és a jövő elválaszthatatlan..." Emléktábla-avatás Miskolcon in Új Élet, 1987 (42. évfolyam, 1-24. szám) 1987-12-15 / 24. Szám p. 101.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*

A comparable rationale underpinned the installation of a memorial plaque on the former ghetto building on Mártírok Road, Pécs in 1988. The memorial plaque was constructed through social collaboration. The initiative began two years ago with the Pécs City Beautification and Conservation Association, which was joined by the Patriotic People's Front, a local group of activists from the Pécs City Committee, followed by the city council, the Pécs Israelite Community, the Local Group of Hungarian Resistance Fighters and Victims of Nazism Committee, and the Pécs Directorate of the Hungarian State Railways.⁴¹⁶ Rabbi István Berger led a memorial service at the Pécs temple, accompanied by Chief Cantor Károly Tímár's renditions of mourning hymns. Following this, attendees moved on to reveal the memorial plaque.⁴¹⁷ The notable Pécs Ghetto building, known as the MÁV tenement house was featured with an artistically crafted memorial plaque at its entrance. This plaque is intended to serve as a token of remembrance for the former ghetto, honoring the individuals who endured suffering there, and symbolizes reverence for the thousands who were deported from the Pécs Ghetto to meet their tragic fates.

⁴¹⁶ Új Tükör, 1988. október-december (25. évfolyam, 40-52. szám)1988-11-20 / 47. szám

⁴¹⁷ Emléktábla-avatás. Új Élet, 1988 (43. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1988-08-01 / 15. szám



Figure 12 "Memorial plaque at the site of the former ghetto" was inaugurated in 1988. Photo from Szombat.org. 2020.03.03.

As the newspapers described, the inaugural event began with a psalm performed by the MÁV Pécs Directorate Concert Wind Orchestra and the Mecsek Choir. Subsequently, Dr. József Schweitzer, the Director of the National Rabbinical Institute, who served as the chief rabbi of the Pécs congregation for over three decades, delivered an opening speech. Dr. Dezső Varga, the archivist, then provided a historical review of the tragic occurrences.⁴¹⁸

The artistic work of Sándor Dévényi, recipient of the Ybl Prize in architecture, and his spouse was introduced and dedicated to the public of Pécs by Dr. István Marton, the president of the Pécs City Improvement and City Protection Association. Representatives from the Pécs Israelite Congregation, Dr. György Vidor, and Ferenc Klein, along with representatives from the Pécs City Council, Deputy President Nándor Szabó and Lászlóné

⁴¹⁸ Dunántúli Napló, 1988. július (45. évfolyam, 181-211. szám) 1988-07-04 / 184. szám

Dr. Ambrus, placed funeral wreaths beneath the memorial plaque.⁴¹⁹ Similar to Miskolc, in Pécs, the memorial plaque is used for laying wreaths on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, as highlighted by Dr. Vargha Dezső, the chief archivist of Pécs.⁴²⁰ Additionally, during our interview, Rabbi Péter Heindl emphasized that the Jewish community of Pécs takes greater pride in the memorial erected in 1946 in the Jewish cemetery, which is more commonly used by the community for remembrance.⁴²¹

In another instance, during the inauguration of the Martyr Memorial in Kaposvár in July 1984, erected by the local Jewish community at the site where the community's synagogue once stood before its unfortunate demolition in 1980.⁴²² The Chief Rabbi György Landeszman highlighted the significance of the memorial's placement, emphasizing the deep historical and symbolic importance of commemorating the tragic events that occurred at the site where the synagogue once stood. This intersection of memory and physical space carries profound meaning:

After a period of forty years, we are now unveiling a commemorative monument at a location deeply revered by us. This site, identified by the cruel and inhumane era as the initial stop for the forced gathering of innocent individuals en route to the border, holds profound significance. As survivors who also endured the horrors of ghettoization and subsequent atrocities, we remain intimately aware of the significance of this memorial. While this physical monument stands as a tribute, we have already erected an everlasting memorial within our hearts, minds, and every aspect of our existence. However, we question whether those who refuse to remember will take notice, or whether the younger generation lacking direct memories will grasp the significance of the memorial's inscriptions and the symbolism of the shattered stone tablet. During June 29-30, 1944, a total of 5200

⁴¹⁹ Emléktábla avatás in Új Élet, 1988 (43. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1988-08-01 / 15. Szám p.63.

⁴²⁰ „ARCKÉPCSARNOK” - Dr. Vargha Dezső nyugalmazott fő-levéltáros (dokumentumfilm-sorozat, V. rész). edited by Zoltán Kovács. Dorito Médiaügynökség – Pécs. 2014.12.01.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNmToYmgv_w

⁴²¹ Rabbi Péter Heindl (lawyer, historian, cantor of Pécs Jewish community) interview by Agnes Kende, January 9th, 2024.

⁴²² Emlékműfa fasizmus somogyi áldozatainak avatóünnepség Kaposváron. Somogyi Néplap, 1984. július (40. évfolyam, 153-178. szám)1984-07-03 / 154. szám

innocent Jews from Somogy were forcibly deported from the established ghetto to meet a martyr's fate...This memorial honors them, our beloved martyrs, parents, siblings, and children who embarked from here on the boundless path of suffering, toward death. However, we will only accomplish our objective if not only we survivors gather around this keepsake annually. We also strive for all other inhabitants in this city or county to be aware, and not merely notice this memento if they chance upon it. Hence, the memorial for the ghetto should have been established outside the ghetto. This is why the synagogue should have been conserved. So that everyone could recollect. Collective remembrance helps to ensure that the terror represented by this stone does not recur... History can only avoid repetition if we shape it consciously...The forsaken synagogue would have been the genuine memento..Survivors like us do not require a cautionary memorial. For us, this place is sanctified by our history and our martyrs.⁴²³

In this instance as well, the choice of the memorial's location is accentuated by its significance, serving not only as a meaningful site for the survivors of the Jewish community but also as a vital reminder and cautionary symbol for all citizens. The selection of this particular location emphasizes the inclusive nature of collective memory, urging all citizens to engage with their shared history and recognize the lessons embedded within it. The memorial thus stands as a collective responsibility, inviting individuals to partake in the preservation of historical consciousness and the ongoing process of learning from the past. This memorial as Chief Rabbi György Landeszman stated signifies the martyrdom of 5200 innocent people from Somogy, echoing a resounding warning of "never again!"⁴²⁴

Concluding his speech the Chief Rabbi quotes famous Hungarian poet, Miklós Radnóti: "Human, beware, observe your world closely. This was the past, this untamed present - carry it in your heart, live in this troubled world of yours, and always know what you must do to change it!" According to Chief Rabbi this memorial ought to serve as a

⁴²³ Új Élet, 1984 (39. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1984-07-15 / 14. Szám p.97.

⁴²⁴ Somogyi Néplap, 1984. július (40. évfolyam, 153-178. szám)1984-07-03 / 154. szám

serene warning for the days to come and symbolize kindness and empathy, vigilance and bravery, and a commitment to preserving the memory of the martyrs for eternity. Even though this memorial inauguration was a local Jewish initiative, representatives from the Patriotic People's Front City Committee, alongside delegates from the Jewish communities of Kaposvár, Pécs, Keszthely, and Nagykanizsa attended and placed flowers at the pedestal of the memorial. Subsequently, after the dedication ceremony, the mourners congregated at the previous memorial within the cemetery to offer prayers and light candles.⁴²⁵

Additional instances of smaller commemorative events involving the erection of memorials in public spaces, rather than within Jewish cemeteries, can be observed in the town of Kőszeg and the town of Pápa. These events signify a broader trend where communities extend their efforts beyond traditional memorial sites, emphasizing the importance of fostering collective remembrance within the public sphere. The placement of memorials in such accessible locations enhances their visibility and serves as a shared acknowledgment of historical events, encouraging broader community engagement in the preservation of Holocaust memory.

In commemoration of the victims of fascism, a memorial park was inaugurated in Kőszeg on March 24, 1985, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the deportation. The ceremony marked the culmination of efforts by the local community, initiated by the town council and realized through collective labor. At the heart of the park, an inscription on a granite pillar serves as a poignant reminder of the tragic events.⁴²⁶ In 1989, the local Jewish community in Pápa planned a memorial to commemorate the victims of fascist atrocities,

⁴²⁵ Új Élet, 1984 (39. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1984-07-15 / 14. Szám p.98

⁴²⁶ Új Élet, 1985 (40. évfolyam, 1-23. szám)1985-04-15 / 8. Szám p.53.

a project initiated by a recently established committee in light of the 45th anniversary of the Holocaust. The committee announced their intention to place the memorial in a public area of Pápa. However, they emphasized that this plan could only be realized if the town demonstrates willingness to collaborate on fundraising and research efforts.⁴²⁷ The examples discussed beyond Budapest elucidated on the notion of utilizing memorials for broader purposes and integrating them into the local area's history rather than treating them as isolated memories solely for the Jewish community. This shift in location also facilitated greater collaboration between Jewish communities and local actors, reflecting a more inclusive and grassroots community-driven approach to commemoration.

In conclusion, the evolution of Holocaust memorial locations, transitioning from secluded Jewish cemeteries on the outskirts of cities to prominent sites within city centers, signifies a profound shift in their intended purpose and societal impact. At first serving as places of solace and mourning for the grieving survivor Jewish community, these memorials have transformed into cautionary symbols strategically positioned at the heart of urban landscapes. This deliberate relocation aims to transcend the boundaries of the Jewish community, becoming a poignant reminder for the broader non-Jewish population and the new generation. By placing these memorials in city centers, they cease to be exclusive spaces for personal grief and instead emerge as educational tools, urging collective reflection on the tragic local history. The grassroots initiative to relocate Jewish memory from the periphery to the center of local areas was originally driven by a desire for inclusive remembrance. However, over time, the state assumed ownership of these memorials as part of the local collective memory, exploiting them for political purposes. In

⁴²⁷ Új Élet, 1989 (44. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1989-07-01 / 13. Szám p.54.

response, local Jewish communities retreated to preserve their intimate remembrance in the periphery, resisting co-optation by the state and affirming the need to protect the authenticity and personal significance of their memorial spaces.

Chapter IV.VI Artistic Representation in the Monuments

This chapter builds upon the preceding argument concerning the evolving role of memorials within the Jewish community and beyond. It focuses specifically on the way these memorials have evolved from simply serving as symbols of mourning to becoming more complex representations of historical memory. Previously, it was asserted that relocating Jewish martyr memorials from the periphery to the center signifies the integration of Jewish remembrance into the broader historical narrative of a town or village, anchoring the memory of Holocaust victims within the collective consciousness of the local community. This chapter extends this analysis by examining the emergence of contemporary artistic and figurative representations within martyr memorials, investigating how these new forms serve as both symbols of tragedy and vehicles for conveying historical narratives to their audience. From the postwar period to contemporary times, artistic choices in monument design and execution reflect evolving societal perspectives, memory politics, and the complex interplay between commemoration and education. The increasing state control over memorialization in Budapest, with a predominant focus on commemorating Soviet heroes rather than Jewish martyrs, significantly constrained artistic experimentation with symbolism in memorials dedicated solely to Jewish victims until the late 1980s and early 1990s. In contrast, regional Jewish communities, as highlighted in the cases discussed in this chapter, enjoyed greater autonomy during the Kádár era, to incorporate symbols and aesthetics into their memorial initiatives.

Harold Marcuse finds that the initial postwar commemorative structures in Europe dedicated to the Holocaust predominantly drew from classical designs seen in monuments

like obelisks and towers or were influenced by the established conventions of war memorials.⁴²⁸ Marcuse notes that the trajectory of Holocaust memorials underwent a notable shift of artistic representation with the commencement of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial (the unveiling took place on April 19, 1948). Undoubtedly, one of the most intricate and significant Holocaust memorials designed by Nathan Rapoport to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. Rapoport envisioned an imposing monument, distinguished by its monumental scale—approximately 23 meters in height and 27 meters in width. Central to this design was an 11-meter-tall bronze depiction of Mordecai Anielewicz, the leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization (*Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, ZOB), positioned at the heart of the structure. The proposal garnered swift approval from the committee, and a year later, it received the endorsement of the Warsaw Arts Committee. The condition for completion was set, requiring the monument to be finished in time for dedication on April 19, 1948, coinciding with the fifth anniversary of the uprising and demanding completion within less than a year.

In juxtaposition with Hungary, it is evident that the unveiling of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial garnered considerable attention and coverage from Hungarian Jewish communities. However, one cannot assert with certainty that this occurrence immediately influenced the memorialization process. Moreover, the socialist realist style adopted from the USSR in 1949/1950 largely overlooked martyr memorials. Instead, monuments created in this artistic vein predominantly depicted Soviet soldiers, statues of Stalin, workers,

⁴²⁸ Marcuse, Harold. "Holocaust Memorials: The Emergence of a Genre." *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): p. 55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23302761>. p.56.

peasants, and youth.⁴²⁹ This artistic preference reflected the priorities of the Rákosi era, as discussed in the preceding chapter, which emphasized the commemoration of Soviet heroes while marginalizing the remembrance of Jewish victims. Nevertheless, when these victims were commemorated by local Jewish communities in the countryside, the aesthetic considerations of these memorials tended to align more closely with the simplicity observed in early memorials.

Another reason for the reliance on simpler forms of memorialization within the Jewish community could be attributed to the financial constraints imposed during the Rákosi period.⁴³⁰ The limited budget allocated for religious institutions likely hindered the ability of Jewish communities to commission elaborate works of art for memorials. This is evidenced by the necessity to collect funds from survivors and members of the Jewish community in order to create even simple memorial plaques.

Lastly, the impetus for this simplicity can be also traced back to religious factors, as explained by Viktória Bányai and Szonja Ráhel Komoróczy: the practice of erecting memorials raises suspicions of idolatry, foreign to Judaism. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the Jewish community opted for simplistic forms of memorialization, avoiding figurative representations, partly in order to avoid suspicion of idolatry.⁴³¹ Furthermore, these memorials were initially intended not to serve symbolic purposes or convey narratives of the past, but rather to provide the community with a space for grieving.

⁴²⁹ Rieder, Gábor. *Szocreál kritika, 1950-1953. Valóság*, 2005 (48. évfolyam, 1-12. szám) / 5. szám / MŰHELY. 2005.05.01. and János. Pótó. *Emlékművek, politika, közgondolkodás*, MTA Történettudományi Intézet, Budapest: 1989. pp.7-9.

⁴³⁰ Komoróczy. p.995.

⁴³¹ Bányai, Viktória – Komoróczy Szonja Ráhel *A vészidő zsidó áldozataira való emlékezés: a korai emlékművek héber terminológiája, 1945–1949* p. 1.

Notwithstanding the prevailing trends, noteworthy exceptions had already emerged during the postwar period. By May 1947, in accordance with the designs conceived by Győr architect, Manó Adler, the construction of the Martyrs' Memorial had reached completion within the enclosed precincts of the Jewish cemetery on Győr Island. This pyramid-shaped edifice, towering at a height of 6 meters and encompassing an area of one hundred square meters, was raised through the autonomous endeavors of the Jewish community.⁴³² The ceremonial unveiling transpired on June 15, 1947, with the esteemed presence of President Zoltán Tildy.⁴³³

While one could argue that the memorial in Győr deviates in its artistic representation from both preceding and subsequent plaque or obelisk-style memorials, it nonetheless aligns with the tradition of symbolic gravestones designed to provide a communal space for grieving. Notably, early commemorations frequently employed unveiling ceremonies as symbolic burials, interring torn pieces of Torah, RIF soaps, and occasionally ashes from Auschwitz, symbolizing the profound horrors of genocide.⁴³⁴ In the initial postwar years, the emphasis was placed on listing names on memorials, with the commemoration of martyrs intricately linked to specific dates, primarily the deportation date. Given the uncertainty surrounding the exact dates of their relatives' deaths, survivors found it crucial to designate a collective date for remembrance during the tragic years of World War II. However, in preceding years, plaques or monuments became increasingly simplified, often eschewing specific martyr names and collectively referring to them as victims or martyrs of deportation and forced labor camps.

⁴³² Munkácsi, Ernő: A győri mártírok mauzóleuma. Új Élet, 1947. május 29. 9–10

⁴³³ A mártírok emlékműve. <https://regigyor.hu/ujvaros-sziget/a-martirok-emlekmuve/>

⁴³⁴ Bányai–Komoróczy. p.11.

During the Kádár era, marked by a softening of the dictatorship compared to the repressive policies of Rákosi, Kádár adopted a cautious approach toward issues involving the Jewish community to prevent potential unrest. It is noteworthy that during Kádár's regime, the Holocaust and broader Jewish concerns were not considered pertinent issues. Instead of directly engaging with Jewish communities, Kádár delegated this responsibility to the State Office for Church Affairs, which represented all religious denominations and congregations.⁴³⁵

Under Kádár's rule, local and national Jewish leaders posed no political threat to the regime. While Budapest remained emblematic of the state's dominant narrative, local Jewish communities outside the capital sought to transform their approach to memorialization. This involved relocating memorials or altering their traditional, classic aesthetics. The ability of these local Jewish communities to undertake such initiatives in collaboration with grassroots actors and local authorities was seen as further evidence of the regime's perceived "openness."⁴³⁶

One case that symbolizes this artistic, symbolic representation pertains to the revelation of the Debrecen monument in the summer of 1959, the artistic memorial made of marble dedicated to the martyrs of Ruskicai.⁴³⁷ In June of 1959, the erected memorial structure is situated within the Jewish burial grounds of Debrecen, its surface made out of white marble and adorned with gilded inscriptions invoking the solemn directive, "Never

⁴³⁵ Bódi, Lóránt. "A kibeszélhetetlen számbavétele – társadalmi diskurzusok a holokausztról a II. világháborút követően (1945-1948)." Candidate of science diss. in history: ELTE, 2022. p.29.

⁴³⁶ Novak, Attila. Pilgrimage and State-Security: Visiting the Tombs of Tzadikim in the Socialist Hungary— Before 1989. Contemporary Jewry. Received: 5 February 2023 / Accepted: 11 February 2024. p.10 and 15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-024-09546-w>

⁴³⁷ Uj Élet, 1960 (16. évfolyam, 1-23. szám)1960-02-15 / 4. Szám p. 23 (Felszabadult ország— felszabadult zsidóság, II Debrecen)

Forget, O Heavens, Tremble, Shudder, Tremble!” This proclamation aimed to serve as an eternal tribute to the six thousand members of the Debrecen community who met their untimely fate through forced labor and deportation.

The sculpture symbolically binds the two marble blocks together through the integration of barbed wire fencing. Shielded by these very barriers, a significant number of Debrecen Jews, along with a substantial portion of the Hungarian Jewish population, faced their end. Another marble block bears a roster of names and places of origin, signifying each as a distinct point of martyrdom within the context of both Hungarian history and the Debrecen Jewish community. These two marble columns stand as guardians of the intangible graves of the deceased, while the collective memory of these six thousand victims vividly exposes the inhumane atrocities perpetuated under the influence of fascism.⁴³⁸

On July 18, 1980, the Hungarian People’s Army bombed the synagogue in Kaposvár. As alluded to earlier in reference to this memorial, years later, an artistic memorial was erected on the site to commemorate both the deported Jews and the loss of the once-beautiful structure. Crowning the synagogue, a bronze tablet of approximately 2.5 meters in height stood at a height of about 12 meters. Although the synagogue was destroyed, the two stone tablets, formerly situated on the gable, crafted from bronze survived. The left tablet lay shattered, its inscriptions on human relationships fractured. In

⁴³⁸ During a discussion, Tamás Horovitz, President of the Jewish Community of Debrecen, noted that commemorative gatherings today are no longer held at the Jewish cemetery but rather at the relatively newly opened Holocaust memorial wall, established in 2015 at the courtyard of the Pásti Street Synagogue. This shift keeps the earlier 1959 memorial on the periphery of Debrecen's memory landscape. (in an Interview with Tamás Horovitz (Head of the Jewish Community in Debrecen) by Agnes, January 15, 2024.

contrast, the right tablet, bearing commandments pertaining to the divine-human relationship, remained untouched.⁴³⁹ According to the newspaper report, the inauguration of the Martyr Memorial in Kaposvár was marked by an emotionally charged event, drawing together the surviving residents of Somogy who had returned from deportations and forced labor, along with their families, on July 1, according to the report by *Somogyi Néplap* (Somogy People's Newspaper). Visitors from the capital and various regions of the country undertook a pilgrimage to the former temple courtyard, where the Kaposvár Jewish Community unveiled the artistically crafted memorial. This monument served as a tribute to the 5200 deported Jews from Somogy and aimed to preserve the memory of the demolished synagogue, coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of the deportations. Reflecting a multitude of poignant sentiments, the memorial is a testament to the artistic sensibilities and creative skills of the designers, Szigetvári György and József Dabóczi. Dr. László Török, the President of the Kaposvár Jewish Community and the organizer of the memorial construction and inauguration ceremony, extended greetings to the attendees, followed by the inauguration of the memorial by Chief Rabbi György Landeszman. "Take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground. Beneath the linden tree, stands a warning stone tablet. Its message resounds: Remember! Amen." The inscription on the memorial, situated under the linden trees, commemorates the former Kaposvár synagogue (1864-1980). Positioned in the central curved section are the remains of the dual stone tablets that had fallen from the facade of the former temple to the ground. The section on

⁴³⁹ Dr. Schőner, Alfréd. Széttört Kőtáblák. 2006.02.26. <https://www.or-zse.hu/dvar/dok/schoner-szetkotabl-2006.htm>

the right serves as a lasting tribute to the martyrs deported from the Kaposvár Ghetto in 1944.⁴⁴⁰



Figure 13 "Martyr Memorial in Kaposvár inaugurated in 1984" Photo in *Új Élet* 1984-07-03 / 154. szám.

The incorporation of physical remnants from the destroyed synagogue holds profound significance in the context of a memorial dedicated to the deported Jews from the area. In this case, the remnants not only serve as tangible artifacts of a once vibrant place of worship but also symbolize the tragic demise of the local Jewish community. The preserved elements of the synagogue, now integrated into the memorial, become poignant reminders of the historical atrocity, grounding the commemoration in the tangible reality of the community's collective loss. This fusion of architectural remnants and memorialization elevates the narrative, fostering a more visceral and enduring connection to the past, ensuring that the memory of the deported Jews endures through a tangible link to their cultural and religious heritage.

⁴⁴⁰ *Új Élet*, 1984 (39. évfolyam, 1-24. szám) 1984-07-15 / 14. Szám p.97.

The final illustration within this section pertains to the memorial wall situated in Békéscsaba a city in southeast Hungary. This case presents an intriguing subject for analysis, prompting a debate on its artistic merit due to its ostensibly unadorned demeanor. However, the memorial wall distinguishes itself in both scale and form when compared to preceding memorials, such as plaques or obelisk-like monuments. Located within the Israelite cemetery in Széchenyi Park in Békéscsaba, the designed monument comprises a memorial wall embracing a central fixture—a menorah positioned beneath two stone arches. On October 18, 1987, a considerable assembly gathered for the formal dedication of the so-called Auschwitz Memorial Wall. Mrs. Ferencné Szabó, leading the social committee responsible for the cemetery’s restoration, addressed the gathered audience, including representatives from political parties, the government, the municipal council, and various social organizations, as well as members from the Patriotic People’s Front, co-religious institutions, and denominations. She outlined the extensive three-year effort that facilitated the cemetery’s renovation and the construction of the memorial wall, honoring the memory of around three thousand Békéscsaba martyrs who perished during the traumatic period of fascism in the Second World War. The city council, in collaboration with the Hungarian Israelite National Representation, made substantial financial contributions toward the restoration and construction of the memorial wall. Besides these institutional contributions, numerous individuals, both domestically and internationally, with connections to Békéscsaba and ancestors or relatives resting in the cemetery, offered financial support, resulting in the collection of nearly half a million forints to realize the project. The design of the decorative fence and the memorial wall was orchestrated by the architect István Hudecz, with construction overseen by the Békéscsaba Funeral Company,

and landscaping managed by the City Management Company. The comprehensive coordination of the project was under the purview of the Békéscsaba City Council.

The formal dedication of the memorial wall ensued. Dr. Alfred Schöner, the leading Rabbi and President of the National Rabbinical Council, initiated his opening address with the statement: “Today marks a momentous occasion. Once again, we have an exemplar to follow. With a spirit of national unity, the city council, the Hungarian Israelite National Representation, the impromptu social committee, along with educational institutions and businesses in Békéscsaba, have enriched this historically significant city with a monument that surpasses bronze in enduring significance and holds high artistic value. Thus, the memory of about 3,000 Jews deported from the city during the harrowing events of the 1940s, enduring martyrdom, is preserved.”⁴⁴¹



Figure 14 "Martyr Memorial in Békéscsaba" inaugurated in 1987. Photo from Izraelita temetők. <http://www.izraelitatemetok.hu/index.php/bekescsaba-2/> 2024.01.21.

⁴⁴¹ Új Élet, 1987 (42. évfolyam, 1-24. szám) 1987-11-01 / 21. szám

Following the unveiling of the memorial wall, János Sasala, the President of the Békéscsaba City Council, delivered a speech. Opening with the statement, “This cemetery evokes many memories within us, citizens of Csaba, and silently serves as a reminder,” he continued, emphasizing the importance of preserving and valuing the intellectual and material legacies of the past. Concluding his address, the council president expressed gratitude on behalf of the city to all those who contributed to the restoration of the Jewish cemetery through financial and moral support, as well as labor. Stressing the importance of collaboration, he underscored the significance of the Auschwitz Memorial Wall as a reminder to never forget the past and to construct a peaceful future through inexhaustible creativity, proactive readiness, and the consolidation of collective strengths.⁴⁴²

What renders this memorial wall even more noteworthy is its profound influence on the subsequent initiative by the Békéscsaba Jewish community. In the early 2010s, inspired by the earlier memorial, the community resolved to construct a similar yet more elaborate commemorative structure, termed a memorial wall. Distinguished by the inclusion of individually engraved names on hand-carved granite, this subsequent memorial stands out as one of the most distinctive Holocaust memorial walls in the country. In 2016, at the initiative of the Jewish Community of Békéscsaba, a dignified memorial was conceived to commemorate the Jewish victims deported from Békés County in 1944, many of whom lost their lives. The construction of the memorial, with an estimated cost of around 30 million Hungarian forints, is made possible through contributions from the Association of Jewish Communities in Hungary, the Prime Minister’s Office, as well as the

⁴⁴² „Ismét egy követendő példa” Emlékfalavatás Békéscsabán in Új Élet, 1987 (42. évfolyam, 1-24. szám)1987-11-01 / 21. Szám p. 89.

local governments of Békéscsaba and other municipalities, and private individuals. The memorial, spanning a length of 90 meters and is situated in the Széchenyi Park, between the Catholic and Jewish cemeteries. Accessible through a menorah gate, the memorial wall bear the names of the victims engraved on granite slabs. A portion of the wall is built using clinker bricks, housing hand-carved granite slabs preserving the names of approximately 2950 victims. The unveiling of the memorial intentionally coincided with the arrival of the city's martyrs at Auschwitz on the last Sunday of June, marking a significant historical juncture.⁴⁴³

In the examination of Holocaust memorials and monuments spanning the late 1950s to the late 1980s, a discernible evolution in artistic representation emerges. Notably, this period witnessed a shift toward the incorporation of symbols intricately connected to Jewish identity, such as the menorah and Torah, as well as symbols reflective of the harrowing experiences in concentration camps, exemplified by the use of barbed wire. Beyond symbolic additions, a transformation in the scale of these memorials becomes evident, often paralleling their relocation to more central public spaces. This geographic shift is concomitant with advancements in design, as exemplified by the inclusion of more intricate and elaborate elements. The presented case studies elucidate how the development of one memorial in the late 1980s served as a catalyst for a subsequent, more artistically nuanced memorial in the same town, thereby showcasing the influence and continuity of design principles. In effect, the evolution of Holocaust memorials during this period not

⁴⁴³ Balázs, Anett. "Szerdán kezdődik a holokauszt-emlékmű építése Békéscsabán". 2016. március 8. 18:09 <https://behir.hu/szerdan-kezdodik-a-holokauszt-emlekmuepitesi-bekescsababan> last accessed: 2023. 12.

only reflects changing artistic approaches but also exerts a lasting impact on the design and conception of present-day memorials.

The evolution of Holocaust memorial design in Hungary, extending beyond the 1990s, has become ubiquitous, including Budapest. However, it's crucial to underscore that this transition from classical, simplistic memorials for Jewish martyrs to more intricate, symbolic designs initially took root at the regional level outside the capital. Both the decline of the mandatory Soviet model of memorialization from 1989 and the emergence of a desire to align with European standards of Holocaust remembrance led to significant changes not only in aesthetics but also in the placement and educational purpose of these memorials. This resurgence in memory culture, particularly evident in the early 2000s, reflects not only Budapest's efforts to align itself with other European capitals in memorializing the Holocaust but also the initiatives of towns across Hungary to either establish new memorials or refurbish existing ones to meet contemporary standards.

Chapter IV.VII Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter examining Holocaust monuments and memorials between 1956 and 1989 illuminates a transformative period marked by shifting political landscapes and evolving commemorative practices. The evolution of memorialization during the Kádár era represents a significant departure from the repressive policies of the Rákosi period, particularly evident in regions outside Budapest. It is paramount to stress that this shift toward greater openness and liberalization did not entail active state encouragement or support, either financially or politically, for new forms of Jewish memorialization. Rather, it signified a reduced or more symbolic state interference in the affairs of local Jewish communities, including matters of remembrance.

A striking juxtaposition emerges between the capital and other towns across Hungary: while Budapest remained entrenched in the hegemonic narrative of memorialization, heavily influenced by the Soviet model, the commemoration of Jewish suffering was sporadic, largely confined to round-number anniversaries of liberation. Conversely, beyond Budapest, the absence of state control over commemorative practices allowed local Jewish communities, in collaboration with local authorities and activists, to pioneer new approaches to memorialization. This included organizing commemorative events and reimagining the placement and aesthetics of Jewish memorials within public spaces, fostering a more inclusive and dynamic commemorative landscape.

One significant development during this period was the broadening of victim representation from a focus on Jewish martyrs to a more generic portrayal of World War II victims. While this expansion aimed to foster inclusivity, it also introduced challenges, as the specificity of Jewish suffering risked being overshadowed by a more generalized

narrative. The chapter underscores the need for nuanced approaches to memorialization that acknowledge the unique experiences of different victim groups.

A notable shift in memorial sites is evident, with monuments transitioning from the outskirts of Jewish cemeteries to prominent locations at the heart of towns or at sites of historical significance. This relocation reflects a growing societal recognition of the importance of integrating Holocaust memory into the broader historical narrative, emphasizing the universality of the lessons to be learned.

Artistic representation underwent a notable evolution during this period, progressing from simplistic forms that adhered to Jewish religious prohibitions against idolization to more visually complex monuments. These new structures aim not only to serve as symbolic tombstones but also to tell a comprehensive story of the past. This shift toward a narrative-driven approach reflects a desire to educate future generations about the local history of the Holocaust and its enduring impact on communities.

In essence, these pioneering developments in Holocaust memorialization practices, emerging outside the capital, eventually catalyzed a national approach to Holocaust memorialization following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Budapest subsequently assumed a leading role in this evolving landscape but as this chapter aimed to prove the roots of these developments were not solely planted in the capital. These regional initiatives, characterized by experimentation with memorial aesthetics and public engagement, laid the foundation for broader discussions on Holocaust remembrance across the country.

Conclusion

This dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on Holocaust memory politics by highlighting the multifaceted nature of historical remembrance and the enduring impact of political contexts on memorialization practices. This scholarly exploration has traversed the shifting landscapes of commemorative practices as erecting memorial plaques, monuments, memorials and holding commemorative events, tracing the evolution of memorialization from its nascent stages between 1945 and 1989 marked by personal tributes to Jewish martyrs, secluded in cemeteries, to its integration into the pulsating heart of public spaces. The interplay of local initiatives and state-driven commemorations has illuminated the intricate dance between memory and power, underscoring the dynamic relationship between the individual and the collective in shaping historical narratives. The nuanced interweaving of personal narratives, political frameworks, and societal engagements unfolds a narrative that transcends the temporal confines of this investigation, beckoning further inquiries into the enduring legacy of Holocaust memory in Hungary. In my dissertation, the role of the Hungarian Jewish journal *Új Élet* during the post-1945 period proved exceptionally significant. *Új Élet* functioned as the primary source of information for the Jewish communities, consistently reporting on news, regulations, and laws directly affecting Hungarian Jews. The journal maintained a steady focus on topics such as restitution, Holocaust accountability, and government conduct. Moreover, *Új Élet* extensively covered Holocaust commemorations both nationwide and internationally, offering detailed articles, debates on these events.⁴⁴⁴ Despite the tightening control of the

⁴⁴⁴ Bódi, Lóránt. "A kibeszélhetetlen számbavétele – társadalmi diskurzusok a holokausztról a II. világháborút követően (1945-1948)." Candidate of science diss. in history: ELTE, 2022. pp.157-158.

Hungarian Communist state from 1949/1950, which influenced the range of permissible topics and publication frequency of the newspaper, reports on commemorative activities did not pose threats to the communist regime. The in-depth coverage of Holocaust commemorations, particularly at the regional level, provided valuable insights into the differences in memorialization practices between a more state-controlled Budapest and other parts of the country. The study underscores the importance of understanding how shifting political landscapes influence the commemoration of historical events, especially those as profound and complex as the Holocaust.

The dissertation was guided by a quest to understand the evolution of commemorative practices and the complex interplay between personal remembrance and state-driven narratives. Through the chapters, the role of monuments emerged as a meeting point between politics and lived reality of people, transcending their static representation to become dynamic conduits of historical memory. From the intimate narratives etched in the initial memorial plaques to the grandeur of Soviet monuments, Holocaust commemoration evolved from being relegated to the peripheries of cemeteries or concealed public spaces into being potent symbols embedded in the very fabric of Hungarian towns and villages. In doing so, monuments have proven to be not only markers of historical events but a mirror that reflected both on the ways local Jewish community members, civic actors, and religious figures made it a personal mission to commemorate the dead, or on the ways the state actors responded to global geopolitics and shifting commemorative practices.

A monument serves multiple purposes, with its significance evolving over time. Initially, it may be erected to fulfill a historical role, marking a site associated with either

triumphs, such as victories in battles, or somber occasions, such as mourning the loss of soldiers or civilians.⁴⁴⁵ However, the true impact of a monument extends beyond its historical function, as it integrates into the fabric of a city or village. It becomes a focal point for local citizens and tourists, fostering interaction and dialogue. Holocaust memorials, particularly those situated at killing or grave sites, have been integral in various commemorative activities since the conclusion of World War II. These monuments serve as spaces where communities collectively construct a shared historical narrative, retelling stories that shape their collective past. In the context of Hungary's Holocaust memory politics, these insights underscore the dynamic role that monuments play in shaping and preserving historical narratives, emphasizing the interactive relationship between the physical commemoration and the community it serves.⁴⁴⁶

Memory politics is inherently compelling due to the inherent perils and opportunities entailed in its application. It serves as a vessel capable of encapsulating the collective history of a society, preserving its memory for present and future generations, and imparting valuable lessons. However, the dual nature of this construct unveils the inherent dangers associated with its misuse, as it possesses the potential to recalibrate, distort, or misleadingly represent the very history it seeks to commemorate. As noted by political scientist Maria Mälksoo, "The politics of memory is commonly associated with the way 'states, state governments, political parties, and other elite groups have sought to encourage views of the past which serve their own ends,' usually in relation to the

⁴⁴⁵ Carrier, Peter. *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany since 1989*. 1st ed. Berghahn Books, 2005. pp.15-17.

⁴⁴⁶ Irina, Rubrova. *Re-Constructing Grassroots Holocaust Memory*. p.98.

acquisition, consolidation, and extension of power."⁴⁴⁷ Therefore, when memory politics is used for political agendas, it can become a tool for manipulating historical truths and distorting the narratives of certain collectives. While scholarly discussions on memory politics predominantly gravitate towards a structural binary, emphasizing the interplay between state and society, this approach, although pivotal, renders an incomplete narrative. This dissertation contends that a more comprehensive understanding emerges when adopting a bottom-up approach to memory politics. This alternative perspective provides a nuanced view of the postwar era, extending into the communist period until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As passive bystanders or participants in memory politics, there exists a risk of inadvertently perpetuating the top-down narrative, neglecting the diverse spectrum of actors and actions integral to the memorialization process. This oversight contributes to the potential misinterpretation of the remembrance culture spanning the period from 1945 to 1989. The misinterpretation of Holocaust memorialization is evident in the contrasting approaches between Budapest and other regions of Hungary. Budapest, as the capital, has been captive to a dominant remembrance narrative closely aligned with the Soviet model, as scholars have previously analyzed. In contrast, my research outside Budapest has revealed a greater degree of autonomy among local Jewish communities, allowing for increased collaboration with other Jewish communities and local or regional actors. Therefore, a conscientious acknowledgment of the multifaceted nature of memory politics is essential to foster a more accurate and inclusive comprehension of this intricate socio-political phenomenon.

⁴⁴⁷ Mälksoo, Maria. *Handbook on the politics of memory*. Northampton, MA USA: Edward Elgar Publishing. 2023. p.2.

Within the broader spectrum of memory politics, Holocaust memory politics constitute a particularly complex and nuanced subject.⁴⁴⁸ Holocaust commemoration, notably from the 1990s onward, has evolved into an emblematic focal point within the realm of memory studies, serving as a means of confronting the tragic past of the 20th century. The significance of Holocaust memory became so pronounced that countries aspiring to join the European Union, notably in 1995 and subsequently in 2004, found themselves compelled to incorporate Holocaust memorialization into their national agendas.⁴⁴⁹ This phenomenon is not limited to Europe, as even in the United States, where direct involvement in the Holocaust atrocities was absent, each state issues its Holocaust memorial, and Holocaust museums have been established. The Holocaust, as a symbolic representation, provides a cover for confronting various tragedies, animosities, atrocities, and inhumanities that transpired in the 20th century. As the handling of Holocaust memory became more widespread, the responsibility associated with its representation intensified, raising questions about the functions actors attach to its portrayal. While it can be argued that the European Union's initiative for countries aspiring to join to grapple with their Holocaust past and construct a collective European Holocaust memory may have devolved into a mere checklist requirement, the supranational EU actors' failure to oversee and guide countries has resulted in diverse and often subjective national narratives. In Hungary's case, a victim narrative became entrenched in their collective memory of the Holocaust, perpetuated by the state's assertion, prior to the memory boom of the 2000s, that there was

⁴⁴⁸ Kansteiner, Wulf. "Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies" in *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*. edited by Tea Sindbæk Andersen ; Barbara Törnquist-Plewa. Leiden : Brill, 2017. pp. 305-343 (European Studies, Vol. 34). p.306.

⁴⁴⁹ Pakier, Małgorzata (Editor) ; Stråth, Bo (Editor). *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. Oxford : Berghahn Books, 2010. p.13.

no Holocaust memorialization in the postwar period. During the Communist takeover, the narrative was directed toward honoring Soviet heroes and liberators. However, my dissertation challenges this narrative by demonstrating that Holocaust memorialization did indeed occur during this period, albeit in diverse and multifaceted ways. By adopting a bottom-up approach, my research has revealed additional layers of Holocaust memorialization that were previously overlooked or marginalized. Presently, the political exploitation of Holocaust memory in Hungary is a subject of widespread debate and criticism from civic actors, the Hungarian Jewish community, and even other countries. It is crucial to underscore that misleading state narratives were constructed earlier, and in order to unravel and offer a more comprehensive, overarching story of Holocaust memorialization, it is imperative to scrutinize the initial processes, shedding light on the actors, voices, and discourses, stemming already from 1945, that contributed to the evolution of today's memory politics.

The manipulation of Holocaust memory in Hungary poses a significant danger, as it not only distorts historical realities but also has profound implications for societal attitudes. Like many other nations, Hungary grapples with the challenge of reconciling its historical narrative, particularly concerning the Holocaust.⁴⁵⁰ The danger lies in the deliberate distortion or selective interpretation of this dark chapter in history, as it can lead to the erosion of truth, the marginalization of victims, and the normalization of extremist ideologies. One prominent concern is the emergence of Holocaust revisionism and the tendency to whitewash Hungary's historical role, a trend that began to surface in the late

⁴⁵⁰ Kovács, Mónika. Global and Local Holocaust Remembrance. in Braham, Randolph L., and Kovács, András, eds. *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016. p.237.

1980s but gained greater momentum under the political agenda of the Fidesz government.⁴⁵¹ The current discourse surrounding the postwar historical narrative reveals a prevailing tendency toward distortion and oversimplification. The research findings underscore the emergence of a distorted representation concerning the formation of the commemorative culture in Hungary surrounding victims of World War II. This distortion is particularly evident in the delineation of how remembrance practices evolved distinctly from state-imposed commemorations. Furthermore, efforts by the right-wing government to shape the narrative of memory politics in a way that downplays or denies the complicity of Hungarian authorities in the deportation and persecution of Jewish citizens undermine the crucial acknowledgment of historical responsibility. This manipulation, particularly perpetuated by the current Fidesz government, can further foster an environment where the lessons of the Holocaust are minimized or distorted, jeopardizing the nation's ability to learn from its past.

Commencing the brief overview of dissertation's research findings, the summary sheds light on nuanced insights into the formation of collective memory. It uses textual evidence to underline the influential role played by both grassroots and state-imposed commemorations in shaping remembrance practices related to Jewish victims of World War II. In the aftermath of World War II, Hungary faced the daunting task of rebuilding and navigating the complexities of both restoration and Sovietization. Chapter 1 (1945-1947) illuminated the challenges and opportunities that characterized the immediate postwar period, offering insights into how the memory of the Holocaust began to take shape amidst

⁴⁵¹ Hanebrink, Paul. *The Memory of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary*. in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, edited by Himka. John-Paul and Michlic. Joanna Beata. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. p.268.

the broader landscape of reconstruction. This first section traces the evolution from a period of uncertainty and collective struggle to acknowledge and memorialize the Jewish martyrs of Hungary, during which the absence of physical remains posed challenges to traditional commemorative efforts. In 1946, the initiative by the Budapest Jewish community to hold commemorative events began to influence similar efforts across the country, marking an annual milestone of political and Jewish significance. Due to prevailing political disarray and uncertainties about the future of the Hungarian Jewish community during this initial phase, a few simple memorials and monuments were erected, with the pyramid-shaped memorial in Győr dedicated to the Jewish martyrs standing out as a significant exception from this period. Importantly, this chapter serves as the groundwork for the forthcoming chapters, which delve into the emergent collaborative endeavors of diverse local actors, particularly those beyond Budapest, aimed at Holocaust memorialization practices.

Advancing further into the era of Soviet influence, Chapter 2 unveils the initial phase of Holocaust memorialization in Hungary, marked by heightened activity and engagement. The year 1947 emerges as a pivotal moment, witnessing a notable surge in the erection of memorials and monuments across the country within the examined period spanning from 1945 to 1989. Noteworthy is the diverse array of actors involved in commemorative events, with political parties seizing the opportunity to advance their respective agendas. In addition, this phase underscores a more personalized approach to commemoration, evident in efforts to meticulously research and compile the names of victims from various towns and villages, subsequently inscribing them onto monuments and memorials. This practice laid the foundation for contemporary remembrance practices, aimed at restoring identity and dignity to the Holocaust victims. However, the proliferation

of martyr memorials between 1947 and 1949 also brought to light prevailing antisemitic sentiments within Hungarian society, highlighting the intricate dynamics of Holocaust memory politics. In summary, this chapter serves as a robust rebuttal to narratives of Holocaust silence, as evidenced by the lively debates, discourses, and numerous memorials erected during this period.

The narrative took a somber turn in Chapter 3, where the focus shifted to Rákosi's Hungary (1949-1956), characterized by increased censorship and restrictions on Holocaust memorialization. During this authoritarian period, public discourse faced significant restrictions, directly impacting the attention given to Holocaust memorialization by the state. An intriguing development during this time was that while the state withdrew from prominent involvement in Holocaust-related commemorative events and memorial inaugurations, it encouraged local Jewish communities outside of Budapest to strengthen connections with neighboring Jewish communities to preserve the memory of martyrs. Furthermore, the collaboration among Jewish communities nationwide was deepened by their involvement in collecting source materials for the new memorial dedicated to the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris, France. The ability to engage in correspondence and collaborate with a Western country on martyr memorials, despite the authoritarian dictatorship of Rákosi, underscores the significance of this period as a compelling case study.

The dissertation reached its culmination in Chapter 4, examining the changing landscape of Holocaust commemoration during the Kadar era (1956-1989). This chapter highlights the evolving landscape of memorialization, contrasting the dominance of the state narrative in Budapest with the collaborative efforts occurring beyond the capital.

While the state continued to prioritize Soviet heroes in Budapest, on a regional level, there was a growing collaboration among local Jewish communities, which expanded to include involvement from various local actors in new forms of Holocaust memorialization. These new forms included the transformation of memorial spaces, and the evolution of representations within memorials. It is crucial to note that this final phase of the dissertation foreshadowed some of the dangers that memory politics could pose to society, which became more pronounced realities in the post-1990s era.

Throughout this dynamic trajectory, the dissertation underscores the interplay of external influences, state interventions, and the agency of individuals and communities. The shaping of Holocaust memory in Hungary emerges as a complex and evolving process, with external factors and internal social and political dynamics interweaving to form a narrative that reflects not only historical realities but also the ongoing negotiation between state-driven narratives and the diverse voices of individuals and communities contributing to the remembrance landscape.

An overarching contribution of this dissertation lies in its identification and exploration of a significant research gap within the existing scholarly landscape. Despite the comprehensive inquiries conducted by scholars and historians, which include archival investigations and oral history interviews aimed at elucidating the Holocaust's global history, individual narratives, and memory politics, a noticeable oversight prevails regarding the rural dimensions of Holocaust memory research, especially during the Cold War era. Scholars like Irina Rebrova have been pivotal in addressing knowledge gaps and raising awareness about how a grassroots approach can unveil fresh insights into memorialization practices particularly challenging the official Russian hero-oriented

concept of remembering the Second World War. Prevailing scholarly consensus during this period tends to assert a lack of discourse on Holocaust or Jewish subjects, with predominant attention directed towards the commemoration of Soviet war heroes and liberators. Even when local historians engage with the memorials erected in rural Hungary, providing contextual elucidations of the towns' backgrounds, these analyses frequently refrain from situating the memorials within the broader political and social milieu, thereby neglecting critical examinations of their reciprocal impacts. By frequently perceive these memorials as isolated case studies of their respective towns, these scholars may neglect to acknowledge the intricate interplay of foreign influences, state impositions, and the contributions of various civic and grassroots actors that have shaped the trajectory of these memorials. It is imperative to recognize that these individual cases, when examined collectively, contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Hungary's memorialization culture of Jewish martyrs during the postwar period.

This dissertation has gone some way to rectify this oversight, shedding light on the interplay between rural Holocaust memory and the socio-political dynamics of the Cold War era, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of commemorative practices within this historical context. The stark contrast emphasizes that while Budapest remained emblematic of a state-dominated narrative of memory politics, towns and villages across the country, with decreasing state control, demonstrated more autonomy and initiative. In these regional areas, Jewish communities seized the opportunity to collaborate with each other and with other local actors and explore innovative approaches to Holocaust remembrance.

This interplay between actors significantly influenced the commemorative trajectory, particularly during the period between 1945-1989 conventionally characterized by scholars as uneventful, homogenous, and relegated to taboo within historical discourse. It is imperative to underscore that the intricate dynamics of Holocaust commemoration cannot be exclusively attributed to the interactions between the state and society, even predating democratic contexts. Instead, it constitutes a nuanced and interwoven nexus involving state power, foreign influences – emanating not only from the Soviet administration but also from diverse international perspectives such as those from Poland, France, and Israel. Furthermore, the local Jewish communities, survivors, and eyewitnesses emerge as essential contributors, collectively enhancing the diversity of actors engaged in the multifaceted realm of Holocaust memorialization.

Furthermore, the scholarly landscape appears to lack comprehensive investigations that delve into and foster discussions surrounding the diverse discourses of remembrance emanating from grassroots initiatives. In scrutinizing the prevailing discourse on Holocaust memory, the predominant emphasis on state-driven commemoration tends to overshadow the nuanced and evolving narratives emerging from local, community-driven efforts. The dearth of studies addressing this aspect leaves unexplored the intricate dynamics of grassroots initiatives that contribute significantly to the multifaceted nature of Holocaust remembrance. This multifaceted nature of grassroots activities is evident either in their frequent oversight by state-level commemoration practices or its appropriation by the dominant state narrative, particularly when aligned with political agendas. Nonetheless, grassroots activities also represent the genuine efforts of real people engaging with their communities and experiencing authentic grief. Recognizing the need to expand scholarly

horizons, it becomes imperative to explore and analyze these diverse discourses that emanate from grassroots initiatives, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between bottom-up commemorations and the overarching state-driven memory culture. Such inquiries would enrich our understanding of the complex and evolving tapestry of Holocaust remembrance, acknowledging the agency and diversity inherent in the various actors engaged in the commemorative process. Moreover, they also reveal that certain narratives remain hidden, challenging the notion perpetuated by memory studies and politics that everything of value has been uncovered.

The envisioned scope of my research initially aspired to comprehensively encapsulate the historical trajectory from 1945 to the contemporary period in Hungary, extending its reach to encompass territories that were once integral parts of Hungary but owing to post-World War II border adjustments are now situated within neighboring countries such as Serbia, Ukraine, Romania, and Slovakia. The rationale behind adopting this expansive temporal and geographical framework was rooted in the desire to provide a thorough exploration of the multifaceted landscape of Holocaust memorialization. This commemorative phenomenon, having evolved into a prominent tool wielded for political objectives, warranted an in-depth analysis within the broader context of changing borders and historical narratives and significant national tensions between kin state and minorities in these neighboring countries since the end of Communism, of which memory politics has been at the forefront.⁴⁵² As previously discussed in the dissertation, while the manipulation of Holocaust memory finds its origins in earlier periods, its pronounced proliferation gained

⁴⁵² Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. Preface in *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton University Press, 2006.

momentum notably in the 2000s, a trend that persists into the present day. The geographical expansion of the research scope would not only facilitate an investigation into the ongoing debates surrounding Holocaust memorialization but would also unravel complex inquiries concerning the memory dynamics and memory politics of borderland territories. Such an examination would seek to discern whose memory takes precedence in these areas and which narrative a country seeks to endorse. However, despite the potential advantages associated with probing the more recent period, including enhanced source availability and ease of conducting interviews, the feasibility of executing such a wide-ranging investigation within the constraints of the allotted time posed substantial challenges. Importantly, there was a recognition that an excessively expansive scope might risk diverting attention from the core argument emphasizing the paramount significance of the diverse commemoration culture of Jewish martyrs in the postwar era. This culture, integral to the broader narrative of Holocaust memory politics, emerged as a pivotal focal point demanding dedicated scholarly attention.

The procurement of sources in the field of post-war remembrance was a task filled with challenges, especially because, initially, few scholars attributed particular importance to this process. As a result, these commemorations were not adequately documented or archived. When I was consulting with state and country archives in search of documentation pertaining to memorials and monuments dedicated to Jewish victims, a notable absence of such references became apparent. This gap could be attributed to the fact that the initiatives for these memorials originated primarily from the local Jewish communities, and the associated locations were under their ownership. The examination of documents from county or state archives during those years revealed a conspicuous focus on Soviet

memorials and commemorations of liberation, reinforcing the official narrative that, from the state's perspective, there was a lack of engagement with Jewish topics and Holocaust-related commemorations. This stance was contradicted by contemporary newspapers, particularly the Jewish journal, *Új Élet*, which consistently challenged this narrative. Journalists reported extensively on numerous memorials and monuments erected during this period, highlighting the involvement of state actors in collaboration with other entities in the memorialization process. While abandoning the notion of initiating research solely from the state perspective, I turned to Jewish communities and local historians to augment my source materials. An interesting observation emerged as I displayed a keen awareness of the existence of memorial plaques and monuments, yet when I delved into primary sources, there was often a scarcity or complete absence of usable materials. Discussions with local rabbis and historians frequently veered toward a perception of these memorials as insignificant elements in their town or village history, not integral to a larger national memorialization process or concept. Consequently, the retrieval of source materials from these contexts proved to be a gradual and, at times, unwilling process, with materials either slowly unearthed or deemed nonexistent. These circumstances indeed posed significant challenges to my research.

Generally, people did not recognize the multifaceted roles that a memorial could assume and the profound power it held. Memorials evolved into instruments of historical narration, education, state narrative, and collective shaping, but the recognition and utilization of these roles only occurred later. Initially, memorials were not sufficiently valued, and the discourse surrounding them was often disregarded. The prevailing approach considered memorials merely as sites of remembrance, with subsequent content or roles

appended later. It is crucial to emphasize that although these modifications and additions emerged subsequently, this does not diminish the importance of the original act of remembrance. In this context, the initial act of remembrance continues to play a paramount role and should not fade into obscurity. The intricate and labor-intensive task of acquiring and organizing source materials spanning the entire country sheds light on the primary reason why this particular territory has not been extensively explored within the academic domain. The challenges associated with accessing and consolidating relevant materials, whether due to archival limitations, the fragmented nature of historical records, or the lack of comprehensive documentation, contribute to the underrepresentation of this territory in scholarly research. The arduous nature of this process hampers scholars' ability to comprehensively investigate and analyze the multifaceted aspects of this specific geographical area, resulting in its relative neglect within the academic field. Aggregating these materials, both within Hungary and across other nations situated behind the Iron Curtain, not only impedes the attainment of a comprehensive overview of that historical period but also accentuates the more intricate nuances inherent in the process of memorialization. This phase, often broadly characterized as a period of taboo concerning Jewish topics, would benefit from a more detailed examination of its complex contours through a broader and more diverse archival compilation.

In conclusion, as we navigate the intricate intersections of history, memory, and politics, this dissertation sought to transcend the confines of its immediate subject matter and offer broader implications for the scholarly discourse on collective remembrance. In probing the evolution of Holocaust memory politics in Hungary between 1945 and 1989, this research has not only dissected the specific nuances of Hungarian historical

consciousness but has also sought to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how societies grapple with their darkest historical chapters. By shedding light on the complex dynamics of Holocaust memorialization at play during the postwar period, from the tentative steps in reconstruction to the ideological shifts of Sovietization, and subsequently, the repressive era under Rákosi followed by a revitalization during Kádár's leadership, the dissertation underscores the profound interconnections between historical context, political ideologies, and the preservation of collective memory. It also aims to elucidate the differences and similarities experienced by Budapest and the rest of the country in terms of memorialization, as well as the actors involved in the memorialization process.

This dissertation endeavors to stimulate ongoing discussions on the responsibilities of societies to remember and reconcile with the darker chapters of their past. By elucidating the challenges, constraints, and moments of renewal in Holocaust memory politics, it prompts reflections on the ethical obligations of both individuals and institutions in preserving historical truth. It encourages societies to confront their historical legacies, acknowledging the complexities, ambiguities, and sometimes painful aspects of their past.

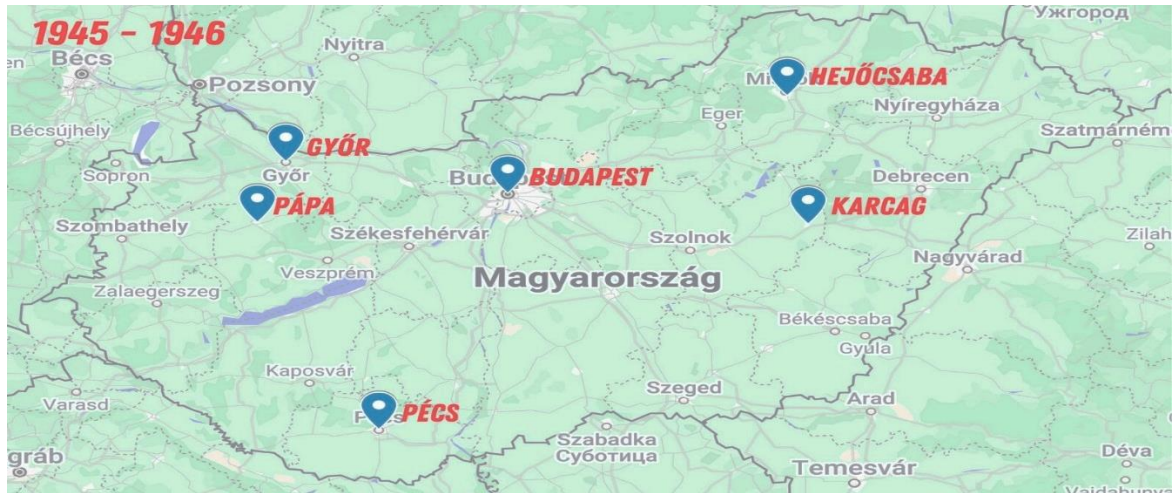
The evolution of Holocaust memory politics in Hungary, encapsulated within this dissertation, transcends its geographical and temporal boundaries. It offers valuable insights into the intricate and evolving nature of historical remembrance, not only within the Hungarian context but also within the broader tapestry of European postwar history. The examination of memorialization practices, the impact of political ideologies, and the agency of individuals in shaping the narrative of the Holocaust contributes to a more profound comprehension of the role memory plays in the construction of national identities

and the transmission of historical knowledge. It further validates the argument that to uncover forgotten histories and recognize individual efforts, a bottom-up approach must complement the official top-down, state-centric approach to memorialization culture. In essence, this research advocates for an ongoing dialogue between scholars, policymakers, and educators to engage in sustained conversations about the ethical imperatives surrounding the preservation of historical memory. By doing so, the scholarly landscape can be enriched and can create a more enlightened and conscientious approach to confronting the challenging legacies of the past.

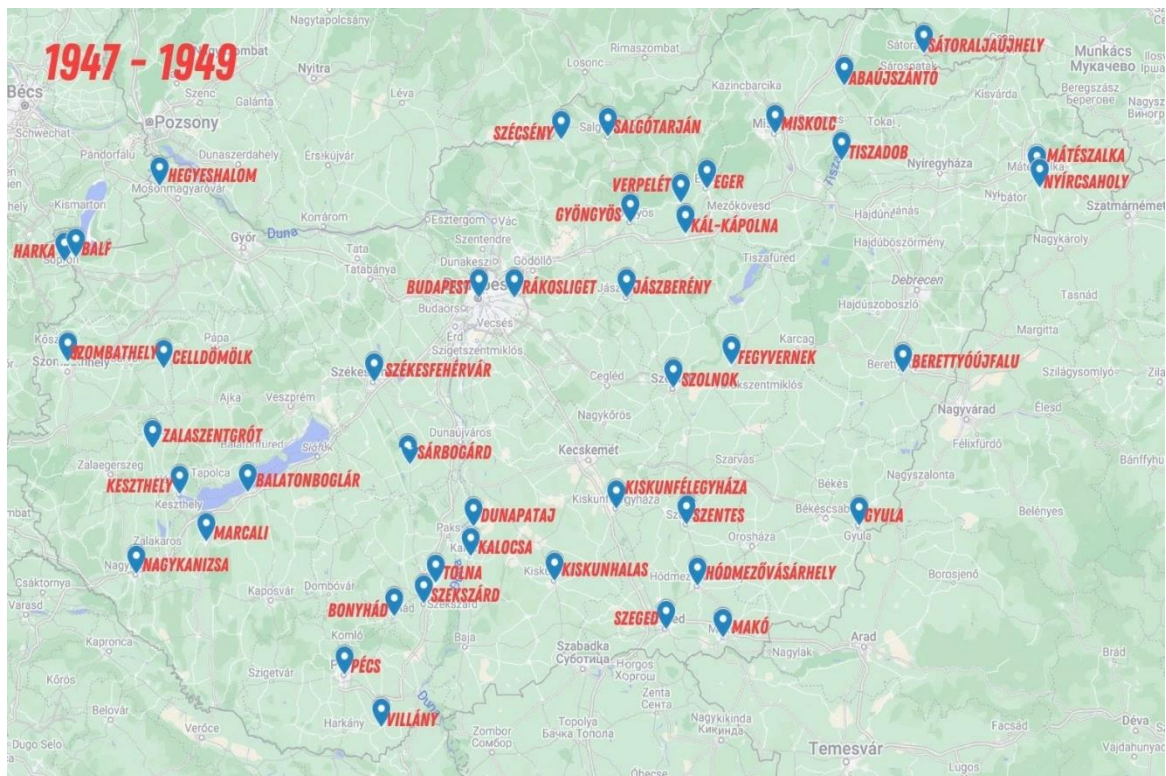
Appendix

Holocaust monuments, memorials erected in Hungary, 1945-1989⁴⁵³

1. Chapter I.



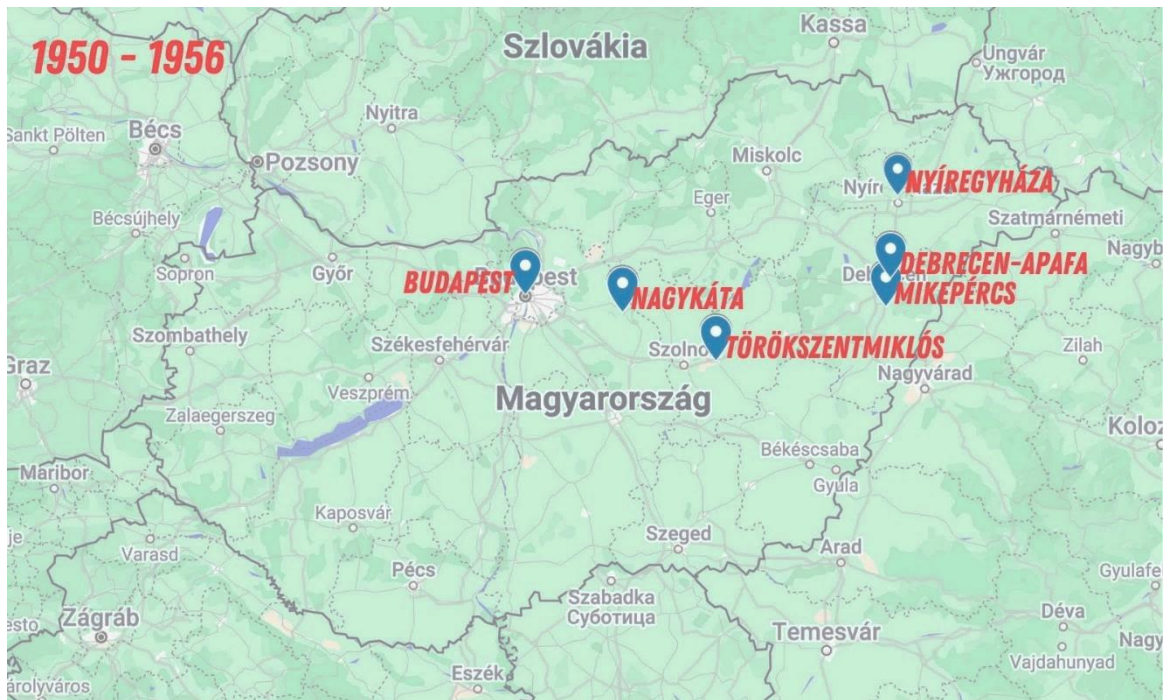
2. Chapter II.



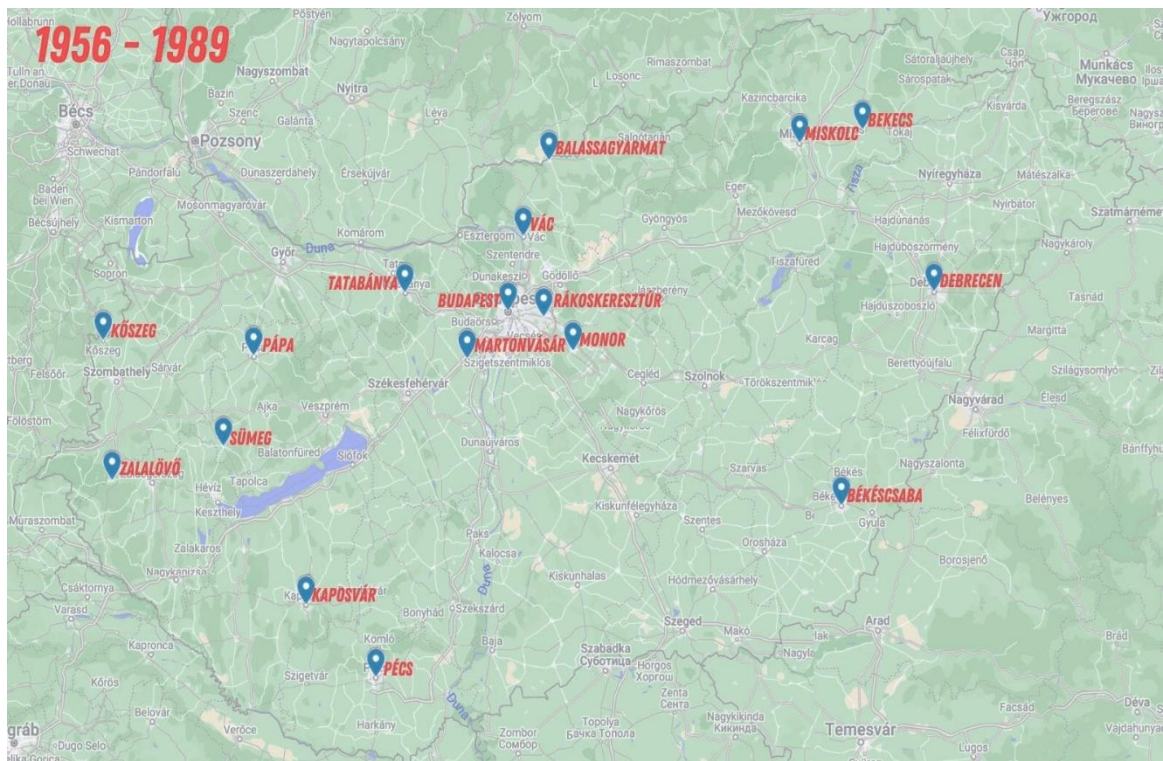
⁴⁵³ Created by Google Maps.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?hl=hu&mid=1r5prgTPAfBRTgZ4zye0XWoT4RWSG9p4&ll=47.14031898314771%2C19.503304500000002&z=7>

3. Chapter III.



4. Chapter IV.



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- *Népszava*
- *Nógrád Megyei Hírlap*
- *Pápai Független Kisgazda*
- *Somogy Megyei Hírlap*
- *Szabad Ifjúság*
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