Front cover illustration: The Weiszenberg sisters from Debrecen, Hungary, around 1932. All three were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on June 29, 1944, together with their parents and their sister Erzsébet. Klára, in the middle, starved to death in Stutthof concentration camp despite the fact that Éva, on the left, tried to save her by smuggling extra food into the camp every day. Éva survived the Holocaust and died in 1989 of cancer. Judit (later Judy Cohen), on the right, survived Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and slave labour at the Junkers Airplane factory in Aschersleben. She was liberated by American soldiers at the age of sixteen from a death march on May 5, 1945.

Courtesy of Judy Cohen.
YELLOW STARS
AND
TROUSER INSPECTIONS

Jewish Testimonies from Hungary, 1920–1945

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes narratives of individual Jewish experiences of discrimination and genocidal violence in Hungary during the period of 1920–1945. The aim is to increase our knowledge and understanding of the events through an investigation of survivor testimonies concerning anti-Jewish laws and the Holocaust. The main focus is on how survivors perceived the treatment to which they and their fellow Jews were exposed, and how they responded to the persecution they faced. Perceptions and responses are analyzed through multiple factors such as gender, age, social class, and geographical place.

The period under investigation stretches from 1920, when the law of Numerus Clausus (a quota system influencing admission to universities) was introduced, until the end of the Second World War in early 1945. Focus is placed on the war years, especially on 1944, the year of German occupation and the fascist Arrow Cross rule. Experiences from the labour service system, the Jewish houses in Budapest, and the ghettos, as well as of hiding and resistance, are some of the recurring themes which are examined here. Extensive interviews, along with eyewitness reports and memoirs, form the empirical basis of the study.

The results demonstrate the complexity of individual experiences during times of upheaval, and the importance of the above factors is evident within the testimonies. The survivors’ experiences greatly depended on gender, age, social class, geographical place, civil status, religious orientation, as well as “race”. However, the importance of the different factors changed over time. For instance, in the beginning of this period, discrimination had a direct impact on adult males, while children, women, and the elderly were indirectly affected. Furthermore, persons belonging to the upper classes could circumvent the anti-Jewish laws in various ways. Ultimately, differences in treatment decreased, according to the testimonies. Women, children, and the elderly also became victims, as did individuals from all social classes.

Keywords: Jewish history, Hungary, survivor testimonies, experiences, Holocaust, discrimination, antisemitism, anti-Jewish legislation, persecution, genocide, interwar period, Second World War, gender, age, social class, geographical location, intersectionality, oral history

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TO JUDY

AND

HER SISTERS

ERZSÉBET, KLÁRA, AND ÉVA
This dissertation deals with Jewish survivor testimonies from Hungary. My warmest thanks go to all of those who have shared their memories in interviews, reports, and memoirs during the past decades. Without your courage and will to speak about these events, this book would not have been written. It has been heartbreaking, but has also filled me with hope, to read and hear your life stories. Some of you are no longer among us, but I surely hope that the memory of you and your families will endure.

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Laura Palosuo
Uppsala, January 31, 2008
PROLOGUE

One of the Voices: Rozsa Jánosné Solymosi

Rozsa Solymosi was born in 1919 into a Jewish middle class family. Her father worked as a merchant, and her mother was a housewife. The family lived in the fifth district of Budapest, Lipotváros. Rozsa completed upper secondary school, and really wanted to study at the University of Economics, but the quota system of Numerus Clausus allowed only 6 per cent of an incoming class to be made up of Jewish students. Rozsa did not even apply, because her grades were only a bit over the average. She managed to become employed at a textile wholesaler in Budapest, and soon she married one of the company’s proprietors, Gábor Bruckner. In 1938, she became pregnant. This was the very same year that Nazi Germany annexed Austria. Rozsa was not interested in politics (“at that time, a woman of 19 – I was completely apolitical”), but she did understand how critical the political situation was. She had a strong feeling that the Anschluss of Hungary’s western neighbour was a sign of something worse to come. Based on this premonition, she wished to have an abortion. She did not want to bring a baby into an insecure world. However, her husband, as well as her mother and the family’s physician, insisted on her keeping the child. Rozsa’s reason for not having a child, that she feared a war would break out, was not good enough. Rozsa was forced to go through with the pregnancy, and in 1939, she gave birth to a baby boy.

When Hungary entered the Second World War two years later, Rozsa’s brother was drafted into the Hungarian forced labour service, and was sent to the Eastern front. Rozsa’s father was very concerned about him. The family did not hear anything from her brother after the battle at Voronhez. “The[n] came my brother’s birthday, and we hushed it up. We did not say a word to Father, hoping he would forget about it.” At her brother’s birthday, Rozsa saw her father in the bathroom, in front of the mirror, weeping over his missing son. Rozsa withdrew quickly, since she did not want to embarrass her father. Eventually they found out that Rozsa’s brother had died.

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1 Rozsa’s maiden name was Lustig, and her married name was Mrs. Jánosné Solymosi. The following life story is based on an interview with Rozsa in 1990. See Uppsala University Archives (UUA), Raoul Wallenberg Archive (RWA), volume F2C:11, file 319.

2 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 16.

3 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 19.
After the German occupation on March 19, 1944, Rozsa felt that the situation became unsafe. “Insecurity was there in the air we breathed, it was there in our dreams and in our sleepless nights. It obviously was.” Rozsa’s husband was conscripted soon after the occupation. Two of her uncles then received their call-up orders. One by one, the male members of the family disappeared. Rozsa’s father was still there, too old to be taken to the front, but he was forced to clean the city toilets. The family business was confiscated.

In April 1944, the Jews of Hungary were forced to identify themselves by wearing a six-pointed yellow star on their outer garments. Rozsa never felt ashamed of wearing the star, but the regulation was problematic. A curfew was imposed, and it was hard to obtain food and other necessities. Rozsa was the family’s “purchasing agent”, so she tried to circumvent the regulations. When she needed to do some grocery shopping, she hid the star. Nobody in the streets knew she was Jewish, and she could freely move about the city without being harassed. Food was still available, and Rozsa exchanged her husband’s shirts for groceries. “We put it in the pantry and hoped we shall live [through] the war.”

The house where Rozsa, her son, and her parents lived became one of the buildings that was protected by the Swedish legation. It was a privilege to be able to stay in their own apartment, but they had to share it with relatives. Rozsa’s uncle moved in, as well as her mother-in-law. Rozsa started to work for the legation, a job she obtained, according to her, due to her skills and her beautiful appearance. “At first, only those with Swedish relatives or business contacts were granted Schutzpasses. I hadn’t either. I received it because I worked for them, and they saw I was useful. Or else, they pitied me, a young woman with a child, because he always clang [sic] with me.” Rozsa was lucky, since she was responsible for taking care of the food deliveries that the Swedish authorities sent to the protected house. She entered the figures into the accounts, and distributed the food to the inhabitants of the house.

After the fascist Arrow Cross coup in October 1944, Jewish houses were often raided in the search for people who could be taken into the labour service, on the death marches towards the Austrian border, or executed beside the Danube. The apartment where Rozsa lived was raided several times, both before and after it was under Swedish protection. Rozsa remembers how they hid her uncle in a sofa, but they knew that if they found him they all might be shot. Rozsa also recalls that young women were taken away to work. They lied to the Arrow Cross men that Rozsa was pregnant, and she was spared from being required to do forced labour.

Another raid occurred on December 30, 1944. The Arrow Cross claimed that the Swedish authorities had fled the country, and that the building was no longer under Swedish protection. Some of the elderly women were left alone.

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4 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 27.
5 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 30.
6 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 37. Schutzpass is the term used for Swedish provisional passports.
but the majority of the people living in the house were taken to the Arrow Cross head quarters on Andrássy Street 60. The group consisted mainly of young women with children and men over the age of fifty. They were deprived of all their belongings, and Rozsa witnessed how her father was slapped in the face just because he wore a coat with sheepskin lining. They were all forced to undress, except for the youngest ones, including Rozsa’s five-year-old son.

When we got out, everyone was aware it was all up for us, but we feared becoming fully conscious of it. We were stupefied, we turned into animals. Can you see what I mean? When one reaches the limits of suffering and tension, and feel they cannot stand it anymore, they sort of stop there… Well, they drove us outside, some still had trousers on. One of us was a lawyer, a certain Dr. Farkas. They put a hand grenade in his pocket. Then they came to search him /and “found” the grenade in his pocket/. They burned his hair all over the body with a candle and then killed him before our eyes.⁷

The group of people stood in the courtyard: “We stood and stood, out in the yard. I wore a lace slip, panties and pure silk stockings – which were at least as thin as nylon stockings – on my bare feet.” Then they were taken down towards the Danube, women and men separately. Rozsa was allowed to hold her son. “The streets were deserted, a curfew had been imposed. No one walked in the streets, or even if some people did, they looked away.”⁸ Finally they stopped, close to the Parliament, and Rozsa could feel the cold wind from the Danube. The women huddled together, trying to keep warm.

They stood there, motionless. Rozsa lost track of the time. If someone tried to leave the column of people, he was hit, and had to return. Rozsa’s neighbour, Mr. Brettschneider, fainted and was severely beaten up. His son tried to resist, but this only resulted in the Arrow Cross guard shooting them both. After a while the women and children were ordered to go back to Andrássy Street, while the men were forced to walk towards the Danube. This was the last time Rozsa saw her father and her uncle.

Rozsa’s testimony does not let us know how she, her son, and her mother got away from the Arrow Cross, but it tells us about the last weeks of the war, which were characterized by a severe lack of food. Rozsa did not feel the hunger anymore. She often gave her small portions of food to her son or to her mother, to keep them strong. By the time of the liberation she worked as a nurse. After the war she decided to stay in Budapest, with the remnants of her family.

⁷ RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 57.
⁸ RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 58.
PART ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING THE TASK
CHAPTER 1
Defining the Framework of the Study

Aims, questions, limitations, and definitions

Hungarian Jewry experienced severe persecutions, mass violence, and genocide in the late 1930s and during the Second World War. Antisemitism was institutionalized through anti-Jewish laws, culminating in 1944–1945 in the murder of more than half a million Hungarian Jews. This represented approximately 65 per cent of the country’s Jewish population.¹ Some have called the murder of the Hungarian Jewry the “last chapter” of the Holocaust.² However, the Jews were affected not only as Jews: their experiences during the Holocaust varied according to gender, age, social class, geographical location, religious orientation, and other factors. This has been noted, for instance, in the fact that the Hungarian Jews from the provinces were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the early summer of 1944 and forced to go through a selection process. “Able-bodied” adult men and women without children were selected to carry out labour, while children, women with children, the elderly, and the sick were directly taken to the gas chambers.³ Rozsa Solymosi, on the contrary, was not deported since she lived in Budapest, and she describes how she was spared from being shot, probably due to the fact that she was a woman.⁴ Gender and place could thus have an impact on Jewish experiences of the Holocaust.

The general objective of this social historical study is to increase our understanding of the period between 1920 and 1945 in Hungarian Jewish history. I attempt to do this by studying individual experiences in survivor testimonies

¹ According to the World Jewish Congress, 564,507 Hungarian Jews were killed. See HJA, XVIII-A, 72.100.3: Excerpt from the Publications of the Statistical Department of the World Jewish Congress, Hungarian Section, 1947, p. 2. This number is, however, probably a bit too high. Tamás Stark estimates the number of losses to be between 450,000 and 540,000. See Tamás Stark, Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust and After the Second World War, 1939–1949: A Statistical Review (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 112. See also chapter 9 in this dissertation.
⁴ RWA, F2C:11, file 319, pp. 44, 60–61.
such as Rozsa Solymosi’s, and by analyzing multiple factors. The main categories included in the analysis are gender, age, and social class, as these categories play a fundamental role in shaping people’s identities and individual experiences. The primary sources are found in the Raoul Wallenberg archive (RWA) at Uppsala University Archives, which includes extensive interviews that have not been used for this purpose before. Together with complementary sources from the Hungarian Jewish Archives (HJA) and the Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest, the number of interviews, eyewitness reports, and memoirs totals 173.

By investigating individual eyewitness testimonies and interviews, it is possible to gain knowledge concerning the impact of catastrophes on human experiences, and by analyzing multiple factors the complexity of these experiences becomes apparent. Historian Joan W. Scott argues that in times of disorder, “[t]here are differences between women and men, Jewish and German women, different races and ethnic groups, dominant cultures and persecuted minorities.” To what extent was this valid within a group of Hungarian Jews? How did gender, age, social class, and other factors shape this group’s experiences of discrimination and genocidal violence?

The main goal of this investigation is thus to increase our knowledge of Hungarian Jewish experiences, the discrimination against this group, and the Holocaust itself through an analysis of interviews and eyewitness reports. But why the Holocaust, and why Hungary? There are after all a number of other human catastrophes and other geographical locations that could be investigated. The Holocaust is regarded as one of the major crimes in history, and this makes it a highly relevant topic. It seems like a paradox that this genocide, the murder of six million Jews, could happen in the heart of Europe, in modern civilized countries. Other groups of people were also persecuted and murdered, but none as intentionally, systematically, and in such large numbers as the Jews. Survivor accounts have been documented in interviews and in reports, and even though the Holocaust has gained vast attention during the last three or four decades, there are still many aspects to be illuminated and analyzed.

One such aspect concerns Hungarian Jewish experiences on a micro level. Hungary as an object of study is motivated, since the country was the first to

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5 Geographical place, civil status, religion, and other factors are also of interest, but are not systematically analysed.

6 The majority of the interviews and the reports (151) were given by Jewish survivors, while twenty-two interviews or reports were given by non-Jewish individuals. These interviews were included, as they also illuminate Jewish experiences in Budapest in 1944–1945.


8 Zygmunt Bauman has argued, however, that modernity was one of the prerequisites for the Holocaust. Without modern methods, it would have been impossible to murder such a high number of people. See Modernity and the Holocaust (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).
enact an anti-Jewish law already in 1920, thirteen years before the Nazi party had seized power in Germany. In the late 1930s, Hungarian authorities introduced anti-Jewish laws based on the Nuremberg model without coercion from Nazi Germany. Despite an early institutionalized antisemitism and a forced labour service for Jewish males during the Second World War, the systematic extermination of the Hungarian Jewry began very late, through the deportations of the provincial Jews after the German occupation in the spring of 1944. The Hungarian Jewish experiences on the macro level are fairly well documented, yet there is a need for a study of the individual experiences through personal narratives. Furthermore, personal narratives as such are important to include in an analysis, since they provide us with information that is not found in other types of sources.

The central question of this study is: How did a group of Jewish women and men of different ages and in different social classes experience the Hungarian anti-Jewish laws and the Holocaust? The term experience is of crucial importance. For the purpose of this study, experience can be defined in two ways – as subjective observations or perception of events, or as subjective reflections and reactions to these observations. Consequently, the analysis deals both with how the survivors perceived the events and how they reacted to them.

The question above and the definition of the term experience leads to two sets of subquestions:

1. Perception. What do the informants tell us about the events that occurred during the period of 1920–1945? How did they perceive the treatment to which they and their fellow Jews were exposed? What differences and/or similarities can be found in the way the informants perceived the events and the way they were treated? How did gender, age, social class, and/or other factors shape the ways of perception?

2. Responses. What do the informants have to say about the responses of individual Jews and the Jewish community regarding the events of the period? How did they cope with the situation and what type of survival strategies did they develop? In which ways can these responses be attributed to gender, age, social class, and/or other factors?

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9 See *Oxford English Dictionary*, http://dictionary.oed.com (15/05/2007) where experience is defined as “the actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge” or as “a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected”. For another, similar definition of the term, see Alfred Schutz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, ed. Helmut R. Wagner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 318: “Experience is defined as the “subjective, spontaneously flowing stream of experience. […] Experience becomes subjectively meaningful experience only by an act of reflection [...].”
The empirical chapters will have their starting point in these two sets of questions, and will involve an analysis of multiple factors concerning several central themes, such as anti-Jewish legislation, forced labour service, Jewish houses, ghettos, hiding, and resistance. It should be stressed that the task is not to study the experiences and the events as they essentially were, but to find out how the Jews perceived the situation and how they responded to it. At the same time, the interviews inform us about something more than just personal experiences. Although the individual narratives cannot be regarded as representations of Hungarian Jewish experiences in general, looked at alongside secondary literature, these narratives do reflect the larger context and the historical processes to a certain degree.

The period under investigation stretches from 1920 to 1945. It starts with the introduction of the Numerus Clausus law in 1920, which restricted the number of Jewish students at Hungarian universities, and ends in February 1945, when the Red Army defeated the German and Hungarian forces during the siege of Budapest. Special emphasis is placed on the period between 1938 and 1945, the anti-Jewish laws of 1938–1941, the German occupation in 1944, and the brief but violent Arrow Cross era between October 1944 and February 1945. In sum, the period concerns the years during which antisemitism was institutionalized in Hungarian legislation.

In this study, antisemitism is defined along the lines of Helen Fein’s definition, as “a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs toward Jews as a collectivity [...].”10 Fein argues that antisemitism can be found on both an individual and on a cultural level in society, and that the term should be defined as encompassing both attitudes and actions, meaning that antisemitism can be expressed in different ways. These expressions can be both conscious and unconscious. Fein’s definition also emphasizes the historical continuity of antisemitism.11 It is of course self-evident that antisemitism affects Jews as Jews, but as stressed above, Jews are also men, women, children, rich, poor,

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etc., and are thus also affected by antisemitism in different ways. This investigation focuses on these different experiences.

The Holocaust is defined as the murder of the European Jewry during the Second World War, initiated by the Nazi regime in Germany, with the intent of total annihilation. The systematic killings started after the German attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, culminated during Aktion Reinhard in the extermination camps in Poland in 1942–1943, and lasted until the spring of 1945, when Europe was liberated by the Allies. The first genocidal actions against Jews in Hungary occurred in 1941, when the Hungarian authorities initiated massacres at Kamenets-Podolsk and in Délvidék. In addition to this, a large number of Hungarian Jewish men were killed in the Ukraine, where they served in forced labour battalions in the war against the Soviet Union. The systematic murder en masse began in 1944, after the German occupation of March 19. Persecutions and deportations organized by the Nazi German occupiers, in collaboration with Hungarian authorities, resulted in the murder of more than half a million men, women, and children. The majority were killed upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau in May–July 1944, as already mentioned. The deportations were stopped before reaching the capital, but mass violence and killings continued after the Arrow Cross take-over in October 1944, and lasted until February 1945.

In Holocaust studies, the word “Jew” is normally used for all those who were defined as Jews by the perpetrators. This is also how the term is defined in this study. It is important, however, to stress that not all Hungarian Jews (as defined in the anti-Jewish laws) perceived themselves as Jews. Some of them had perhaps only one grandparent who was of Jewish origin. Many of the Budapest Jews were baptised and had never even thought of themselves as Jews. Historian Tim Cole, for instance, solves this problem by placing the term in quota-

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12 Fein can be criticized for ignoring gender, class, age etc. The antisemitic tradition contains, for instance, different images of the female and the male “Jew”, and the image of the “Jewess” has generally been less negative. See, for example, Marie Lathers, “Posing the ‘Belle Juive’. Jewish Models in 19th Century Paris”, in Woman’s Art Journal 21:1 (2000); Luce A. Klein, Portrait de la Juive dans la Littérature Française (Paris: Nizet, 1970).

13 See, for example, Michael R. Marrus, The Holocaust in History (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 1. For a discussion concerning the definition of Holocaust, see Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship, Problems & Perspectives of Interpretation (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2000), chapter 5 and Yehuda Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), chapter 1. The debate involves the time period, the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust, and whether there are more suitable terms (for example Shoah), or whether it is desirable to avoid using the term at all. On the usage of the term, see Stéphane Bruchfeld, “Ar det dags att göra sig av med ‘Förintelsen’? Reflektioner kring ett begrepp”, in En problematisk relation? Flyktingpolitik och judiska flyktingar i Sverige 1920–1950, ed. Lars M. Andersson & Karin Kvist Geverts, Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia 34 (Uppsala, 2008).

14 According to Braham, the total number of Hungarian Jews killed during the massacres at Kamenets-Podolsk was 14,000–16,000 (out of 23,600). The number of Jewish victims at Délvidék was 700 (out of 3,309, including about 2,250 Serbs). See Randolph L. Braham, “The Kamenets Podolsk and Délvidék Massacres: Prelude to the Holocaust in Hungary”, in The Final Solution Outside Germany, vol. 2, ed. Michael R. Marrus (London: Meckler Ltd., 1989), p. 541–556.
tion marks. This is one way of showing that the term “Jew” is a construct, and that you disagree with the categorization and labelling used by the Nazis. However, the quotation marks make the text less legible, and thus I prefer not to use them, even though I vehemently oppose the Nazi categorization of people into different “races”.

Geographically, the primary focus of this study is on Budapest. This choice is partly motivated by the fact that the accounts of survivors from the Hungarian countryside often focus on camp experiences, and less on Jewish pre-war life. Since developments other than deportation are the focus of the study, the accounts from Budapest are more suitable. Another reason involves the availability of the sources. The material in the Raoul Wallenberg archive in Uppsala consists of interviews with survivors from Budapest. There are references to a few other places in the Hungarian provinces, as well as comparisons between the capital and the provinces, whenever the sources allow. The information on the events in the provinces is, however, built on a relatively small number of primary and secondary sources.

This book is divided into three sections, each consisting of two or more chapters, with a total of ten chapters. The first part, “Conceptualizing the Task”, deals with the theoretical and methodological outline of the research task presented above. This introductory chapter discusses multiple factors as a tool of analysis; definitions of gender, age, and social class; and previous research. Chapter 2 presents the archival material in detail, and discusses oral history and source criticism.

Part two, “Experiences of Discrimination before 1944”, begins by presenting a historical background, followed by two empirical chapters. Chapter 3 gives a short history of Hungarian Jewry from 1867 to 1944. The focal points for this chapter are assimilation, antisemitism, and the anti-Jewish legislation. An analysis of the empirical findings begins in chapter 4, in which the Jewish informants’ perception of the anti-Jewish laws and their responses to them are examined. Chapter 5 examines the Hungarian labour service system, i.e. the forced military auxiliary system for Jewish males, introduced in 1939. The effects of the labour service system, as described by the Jewish informants, are discussed. Gender, age, social class, and in some instances geographical location, are qualitatively analyzed in chapters 4 and 5.

The third part of the study, “Experiences of Persecution and Genocide 1944–1945”, consists of four chapters dealing with the period of German occupation. Chapter 6 is based on secondary literature and gives a concise historical background of the ghettoization process and the deportations, as well as of the fascist Arrow Cross era in late 1944. Chapter 7 discusses Jewish experiences in Budapest, using an analysis of the informants’ accounts of everyday life and their perception of the circumstances in 1944–1945. Chapter 8 describes

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individual Jewish reactions to the persecutions they were facing, by investigating the survival strategies and coping skills as described by the survivors. For example, responses such as hiding and resistance are discussed. Comparisons between female and male individuals of different ages, different social classes, and various geographical locations are made in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 9 turns to an analysis of the Hungarian Jewish losses during the war. This substudy is not based on the interview material, but on demographic data, and includes both quantitative and qualitative elements. Statistics regarding gender and age are presented in tables, and differences between the provinces and the capital are analyzed. Geographical place is of great significance in this chapter, while social class is left out, due to the lack of data. Finally, chapter 10 summarizes the findings and conclusions presented in the empirical parts of the thesis.

Analyzing multiple factors

When studying anti-Jewish legislation and the Hungarian Holocaust, “race” is the most central category. The genocide of European Jewry was planned and conducted according to national socialist racist ideology; the Jews were persecuted and murdered because they were categorized as Jews. Still, the ways in which the Jewish victims were treated and how they experienced the events differed not only over time or in different parts of Europe, but also within a single country, region, or city. These differences cannot only be explained by the distinction of “race”. Political affiliation, gender, age, religious orientation, social class, civil status, place, health, education, and even appearance could be decisive factors regarding the individual’s fate.

Any analysis of individual experiences of discrimination and genocidal violence is closely connected to the individual’s identity and his/her position in society. In this study, I make the assumption that identities are shaped by many different factors, and that an individual can possess many identities. Sociologist Nechama Tec has written that “a person can be a Jew, a mother, a professional, a lover, and many other things at once. Each of these labels is referred to as a ‘status’, or a position in a system of interactions.” According to Tec, the different statuses can be ranked in importance, and she points out political affiliation as one of the most important categories after “race”. Communists were regarded as “enemies” of the Third Reich, and consequently the

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Nazis persecuted them both in Germany and in the occupied territories. For a Jew, being a communist could double his/her risks, at least in the early years of persecution. However, the source material does not provide enough information concerning political affiliation. Instead, gender, age, and social class were chosen as the main categories here. There are a number of reasons for studying multiple factors and for selecting these three as primary categories.

By choosing several categories instead of only one or two, the complexity of lived experience is emphasized. This is of central importance in this dissertation. Three main categories are systematically investigated, but the analysis is by no means restricted to them. Geographical place is often given attention, and serves as a main category in chapter 9, but is not systematically analyzed in the entire dissertation due to the character of the selected empirical material. Likewise, religious orientation, health, looks, and civil status do not serve as starting points for the investigation, but are analyzed when the sources allow.

Gender, age, and social class were selected as main categories, since they all are fundamental to human existence, and thus necessary to examine in a study of human experiences. Every individual has a gender identity, usually either male or female, just like he/she has an age and a class identity. Furthermore, it is evident that these categories were important regarding Jewish experiences during the Holocaust. This is indicated both by previous research and by the sources studied here: the informants often recount experiences related to gender, age, and social class.

Intersectionality
The choice of multiple factors as analytical tools requires a discussion concerning the concept of intersectionality. The term derives from the verb “to intersect” (“to cross” or “to cut”) and the noun “intersection” for junction or crossroad. It implies that when analyzing identity, or phenomena of power relations, more than just one or two factors should be considered. The term started to appear more frequently in the late 1990s and during the first years of the new millennium, mainly in research on gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. See, for example, Maktens (oj)iska förklädnader. Kön, klass & etnicitet i det postkoloniala Sverige, ed. Paulina de los Reyes, Irene Molina, & Diana Muliniari (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Atlas, 2003); Patricia Hill Collins, “It’s All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation”, in *Hypatia* 13:3 (1998); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins. Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, in *The Public Nature of Private Violence*, ed. Martha Albertson Fineman & Rixanne Mykitiuk (New York: Routledge, 1994). More recently, three scholarly journals have published special issues on intersectionality, indicating a growing interest. See *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13 (2006); *Kvinder, kön & forskning* [Women, Gender, and Research] 15:2–3 (2006); and *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift* [Journal of Women’s Studies] 2–3 (2005).
cept is a tool for understanding the ways in which ethnicity, gender, social class, and other forms of identity-forming factors intersect in different contexts. A study of several intersecting “axes” gives us a multi-faceted view of positions and hierarchies within society. An individual’s identity and/or position are thus dependent on the interaction of multiple factors.

Gender scholar Nina Lykke discusses the advantages and possible disadvantages of an intersectional analysis. One of the advantages is that this approach can help us to understand the variability and the dynamics within the interactions between different categories. With regard to the aims of this study, it can be argued that an intersectional approach helps us to investigate and analyze individual experiences in different situations, not least in a catastrophic situation such as the Holocaust. It contributes to new perspectives on the complexity of lived experiences. Uncovering different identity-forming factors helps us to clarify the reasons as to why an individual experienced events in a specific way. Lykke states that this leads to a deeper understanding of how an individual is “subjectified” and positioned as an effect of these interactions. In this study, I seek to locate intersections between gender, age, and social class in the narratives of Hungarian Jewish survivors. For instance, a Jewish female may have found herself not only in “double jeopardy” during the periods of persecution and systematic murder, but in “multiple jeopardy”, since her position was also defined by other factors such as age, social class, civil status, appearance, health, and geographical origin.

However, an analysis of multiple factors must not necessarily involve intersectionality. Multiple factors may be studied, but sometimes the intersections between them remain unclear. One of the problems with the concept, especially with regard to historical source material, is to actually grasp these intersections. The informants do not always recount details that can be related to several factors at the same time. The empirical sources used in this study were recorded fifteen or even forty years ago, and it is not possible to go back in time and clarify unclear or missing aspects. Sometimes the interviews and the reports

23 According to Leslie McCall, there are three different intersectional approaches: anti-categorical, intra-categorical, and inter-categorical. See Leslie McCall, “Intersektionalitetens komplexitet” in Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift 2–3 (2005). The intra-categorical approach would be suitable for studying the complexity of lived experience. According to Ann Phoenix, the “intra-categorical approach focuses on a limited number of intersections in selected social positions in order to analyze the complexity of lived experiences within social groups at points of intersections that have often been neglected.” See “Interrogating Intersectionality. Productive Ways of Theorising Multiple Positioning”, in Kvinder, køn och forskning 15:2–3 (2006), p. 27.
25 “Double jeopardy” refers to the title of Judith Tydor Baumel’s book Double Jeopardy, Gender and the Holocaust (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1998), meaning that Jewish women were objected to discrimination both as Jews and as women.
contain information concerning gender and age, but not concerning social class. Other times there is information regarding all of the factors, but these factors do not clearly intersect. Therefore, the analysis in this study is not necessarily always intersectional, but it does aim at indicating both the complexity and the importance of studying multiple factors. In the following sections, the three main identity-forming factors included in this study are defined and discussed.

**Gender**

I define gender, following Joan W. Scott, as socially constructed conceptions of women and men. Scott writes that gender means “knowledge about sexual difference.” She uses knowledge “to mean the understanding produced by cultures and societies of human relationships, in this case of those between men and women. [...] It follows then that gender is the social organization of sexual difference.”

Gender order is defined as the structures and the ways in which society is organized around these differences. Historian Yvonne Hirdman also discusses gender as socially constructed concepts of “men” and “women”. She claims that gender order (or the gender system, as Hirdman labels it), is characterized by two important principles: the separation of the sexes and the hierarchy between them. Gender order appears in different “contracts” in different periods. The dominating gender contract in the middle of the twentieth century was, according to Hirdman, the “housewife contract”. This contract implies a male breadwinner system. According to historian Angélique Janssens, the term refers to “a particular model of household organization in which the husband is the sole agent operating within the market sector, deploying his labour in order to secure the funds necessary to support a dependent wife and children.” The husband is thus the main provider, whereas the wife, Janssens continues, is responsible for “the unpaid labour required for the everyday reproduction of...


28 The separation of the sexes is mainly visible in the division of labour and in the dichotomization of the male and the female. The hierarchy between the sexes is demonstrated, according to Hirdman, by the fact that the male is regarded as “the norm”, whereas the female is regarded as “the other”. The male superior and the female subordinate positions are upheld through the separation of the sexes. See Yvonne Hirdman, “Genussystemet. Reflektioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning”, in Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift 3 (1988), p. 51–52.

her husband’s market work, such as cooking, cleaning, and laundering. In addition, she provides for the intergenerational reproduction of labour: the bearing and bringing up of children.”

The male breadwinner ideal also existed in Budapest in the interwar period. Holocaust survivor Tivadar Soros commented on the outbreak of the Second World War by stating that life went on: “Men kept working, enjoying themselves; women kept going to beauty parlors, gossiping with their friends, giving birth.” Soros clearly simplified, yet aptly described, the breadwinner system of the Jewish middle or upper middle class in Budapest. Times were changing, evidently, as Hungarian women had been admitted to the universities already in the late nineteenth century, and received the right to vote in 1919. Sociologist and gender researcher Éva Fodor writes that before the Second World War, most Hungarian women worked for a few years before getting married and then “withdrew to manage the household.”

Yet the Hungarian middle class (including Budapest Jewry) lived to a certain extent according to the male breadwinner ideal during the interwar period.

The 1930s gender order was also characterized by other significant elements, such as the idea of the male protector. Iris Marion Young defines this idea as a “patriarchal logic”, where “the role of the masculine protector puts those protected, paradigmatically women and children, in a subordinate position of dependence and obedience.” Young has studied this phenomenon in today’s


31 Susan Zimmermann has shown that the Hungarian social policy concerning assistance to poor people after 1905 was based on the male breadwinner model. Poor or sick married women seldom received financial assistance, as they had husbands who were supposed to support them. Men received social assistance more easily. See Susan Zimmermann, Prächtige Armut. Fürsorge, Kinderschutz und Sozialreform in Budapest (Mainz: Jan Thorbecke Verlag Sigmaringen, 1997), p. 123. See also Paula E. Hyman, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History. The Roles and Representation of Women (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1995), passim.

32 Tivadar Soros, Maskerado. Dancing Around Death in Nazi Hungary (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2000. 1st ed. 1965), p. 1. The memoir was written after the Soros family had fled Hungary after the uprising in 1956. Tivadar Soros was the father of the well-known philanthropist and investor George Soros.


society, but the “masculine protector” fits into the ideal image of man of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century as well. This image showed characteristics such as self-control, willpower, and strength, according to George L. Mosse. Paula E. Hyman has shown that after emancipation, when the Jewish cultural transmission from generation to generation shifted from being a male task to a female one, the Jewish man felt the need of emphasizing the dichotomy between the sexes. Women were characterized by “bodily weakness and spiritual sensitivity” and needed to be placed under male protection.

The issues discussed above are closely connected to the part of the main question that deals with gender: how did Jewish individual women and men experience anti-Jewish legislation and the Holocaust? To address this question, it is necessary to illuminate to what extent the ideals of male breadwinner and the masculine protector were valid in Budapest’s Jewish families, and how the informants perceived the effects of institutionalized antisemitism and the Holocaust on these ideals within everyday life. The division of labour and the division of power in the families, regarded as essential parts of the gender order, will be discussed. The background of the gender order will be given in chapter 3, while the effects will be analyzed in the subsequent empirical chapters.

Age

Studying age is not uncomplicated, even though it is relatively easy to objectively determine the informants’ actual age during the period of investigation. Almost every informant gives information about his/her year of birth. For practical reasons, the age groups used in this dissertation are the same as the ones used in the sources. The statistics in the Hungarian Jewish Archives divide the Jewish population into five age groups; 0–10, 10–20, 20–40, 40–60, and those older than 60. Sometimes the age groups 0–10 and 10–20 are put together. I have chosen to use these age groups in the tables in chapters 3 and 9; they function as broad outlines for an analysis of age related issues. The problem is that I cannot know for a fact into which age group the persons who were ten, twenty, forty, and sixty were placed, since they could be placed in two categories (0–10 and 10–20, for example) according to the statistics. I assume in this study, however, that the categories should be 0–9, 10–19, 20–39, 40–59, and those over 60.

Tim Cole has chosen to work with shorter age spans and thus a larger number of groups in his study of Jewish experiences in the Hungarian ghettos.
This may have been preferable in my case as well, but the sources used here limit the ways in which the studied individuals can be divided. Cole also studies a larger number of individuals than I do. If I had constructed groups with shorter age spans, there would have been very few individuals in each group.

The terms child, youth, adult, and the elderly must also be defined more precisely. Children in this dissertation are persons up to the age of sixteen. Débórah Dwork, who has studied children and youth in Nazi Europe, has used this age limit. Youth are those who were between seventeen and twenty years old during the period of investigation. The line between youth and adults is drawn at twenty, due to the age group divisions presented above. Another reason for drawing the line at the age of twenty is that Jewish men were drafted in the labour service system at that age. They were thus regarded as adults by the Hungarian authorities. The category of adult is broad. Here, all those between the age of twenty and the age of fifty-nine are included. The elderly are persons over the age of sixty.

Social class

In this dissertation social class is used to describe the division of people in a society according to occupation, income, housing, networks, reputation, and class identity. In other words, social class is closely linked to the individual’s position in society, including one’s social, cultural, and political background, as well as economic relations and social networks.

However, a study of social and economic background is always a complicated task, since social structures are often more multifaceted and complex than the models scholars have created. Nevertheless, this does not prevent an examination of social stratification and experiences connected to social class. Max Weber’s model of social stratification takes several aspects into consideration, such as economic wealth or opportunities in the market, prestige or honour, and political power. “Class” is defined in terms of economic relations, while

(Columbia University Press, 2006). The age groups are 0–9, 10–17, 18–29, 30–42, 43–49, 50–59, 60–69, 70–79, and 80+.


40 The *Wartime System of Labor Service in Hungary: Varieties of Experiences*, ed. Randolph L. Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. v. This was before 1944; after the German occupation the age limit was lowered first to 18 and later to 16. Women from the age of 16 were also drafted in October 1944. Another place to draw the line could be at the voting age or the marital age, but that would not be entirely practical, as this age differed between men and women. The marital age was eighteen for men, and sixteen for women, while the voting age was twenty-four for males, thirty for females. On voting age, see Mária M. Kovács, “Hungary”, in *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919–45*, ed. Kevin Passmore (Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 86.
“status” is defined in terms of “cultural attributes” or “styles of life”, holding a different status in the hierarchy of prestige.41

Status and class are not mutually exclusive; most often they overlap. Both wealth and prestige determine one’s position or status in society, but economic means and/or a high income does not necessarily result in a higher social status, or vice versa.42 For example, due to the anti-Jewish legislation of the 1930s, the middle class Jews in Budapest were deprived of their income and later their apartments, but they still regarded themselves as middle class. Their upbringing and education seem to have been more important for their class-consciousness than property and income. Moreover, prestige, reputation, and networks are also important when determining social class.43 Consequently, both “class” and “status” are included when defining social class.

Weber divided society into four social classes: working class, petite bourgeoisie, middle class (intelligentsia and specialists), and a “privileged” class.44 Budapest Jewry was predominantly middle class, and to obtain a more precise classification I have chosen to add one extra category, namely the upper middle class. Therefore, there are five social classes included in this study: lower or working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class.45

The main indicators for determining the informants’ social class are the parents’ (most often the father’s) occupation and the informant’s class identity, namely which social class the individual identifies with. Almost every informant provides clear information regarding these two aspects. The classification cannot be based on property or income, since the informants seldom give any information regarding this. Networks and connections are sometimes mentioned, as well as the informants’ occupation and job status during the war. Some individuals describe their job status in detail, some mention it in a few words, while others do not mention it at all. For women, the reason for not going into this topic may have been that they were housewives. Some of the informants had several occupations or jobs during the period; they worked with handicrafts or in factories during the war, even though they had received higher education and/or worked in other branches before the war. This is due to the special circumstances that arose after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws and the outbreak of the war. The anti-Jewish laws resulted in changed patterns


42 Weber (1968), p. 306. Weber exemplifies this with the position of an officer, a civil servant and a student. Their economic positions may vary, but they still have a certain status and “create a common style of life”.


45 The lower and the lower middle classes are sometimes referred to as “lower classes” and the upper middle class and the upper class as “upper classes”.

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of social stratification, even though this may not have altered the Jews’ own class identity and class consciousness. Therefore, the informant’s occupation is less important in determining the informants’ social class than the parents’ occupation and the self-proclaimed class identity.

How are the occupations grouped into social classes? The fathers of the informants classified as belonging to the lower class had occupations such as industrial worker or tradesman. The fathers classified as lower middle class were small shop owners, bank employees, shoemakers, tailors etc.46 The middle class fathers worked as clerks, merchants, teachers, business owners, lawyers, or physicians. The upper middle class fathers were bank directors, landowners, army officers, lawyers, or physicians, while the upper class informants’ fathers were, for instance, owners of large businesses or parliament members.47 None of the mothers in the upper class worked outside the home, and it seems as if the majority of the mothers, regardless of class, were housewives – a pattern fitting the male breadwinner ideal.48

One of the problems has been, in some cases, to decide where the line between two categories should be drawn. What is, for example, the difference between lower middle class and middle class? Andrew Stevens tells us that he was born into a family that was “not too wealthy, just middle”, and that his father was an independent tailor and shop owner. Andrew himself became a teacher.49 In this case, the informant’s social affiliation is defined as middle class, not as lower middle class. Even though Andrew’s father was a small-scale shop owner, Andrew himself was a teacher and identifies the family as middle class. Another example is Marianne Slade. Her father was a prominent lawyer and her mother was a housewife. Marianne went to private school, which also indicates that the family was wealthy and had high social prestige, thus she is categorized as belonging to the upper middle class.50 It should also be noted that all of these classifications concern the family’s social class before the anti-Jewish laws were enacted.

47 Lawyers and physicians are found both in the middle and the upper middle classes, depending on whether they were employed or self-employed, and on whether they owned small or large scale firms. For the parents’ occupations, see also table 2.6 in chapter 2.
48 See table 2.3 in chapter 2, and appendix 3.a and 3.b for further details concerning the occupations of Budapest Jews.
49 RWA, F2C:22, file 555.
50 RWA, F2C:22, files 546 and 547.
Previous research

The categories of gender, age, and social class have gained considerable attention from genocide scholars in recent years. Especially gender, and the concept “gendercide” have been frequently debated.51 In this study, gendercide is not of central importance, since the primary motive for the Nazis and their collaborators was not gender related, but racial. However, previous research on “gendercidual”, as well as on “elitocidal” (assaults or killings of the societal elite of a group) acts of violence demonstrates an interest in various explanatory factors within the field of genocide studies.52

Scholars have also studied the division of labour and the changing gender relations in wartime. When men were drafted into the war, women entered the labour market. Historian Ulla Wikander, among others, has studied the gendered division of labour during and between the two world wars. She has shown that war affects the division of labour in complex ways. Women could enter male spheres of labour, but at the same time, the differences between the sexes were strengthened.53 In wartime Hungary, Jewish men were called into the forced labour service, and Jewish women, similar to their “Christian” female co-citizens, had to find ways of supporting the family in the absence of their spouses. This challenged the male breadwinner ideal. How did the changing division of labour affect the Jewish individuals studied here? This question is of general interest in relation to previous research outside the field of Jewish studies.


52 See Stuart Stein, “Geno- and other cides: a Cautionary Note on Knowledge Accumulation”, in Journal of Genocide Research 4:1 (2002) for a discussion concerning the variety of concepts. An example of a study that brings in the aspects of social class, gender, and age is that by Tomislav Dulić, Utopias of Nation. Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941–42. (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2005), see chapter XV.

But what do we know of Jewish life and Jewish individual experiences during the interwar years and the Holocaust in Hungary? The literature concerning the Holocaust in general is vast.\textsuperscript{54} Scholars have surveyed the causes and the events in detail, analyzed the destruction process both on structural and individual levels, and discussed agency during the Holocaust. The importance of gender, age, geographical location, and religious orientation for the individual experiences has been illuminated, but the works published so far seldom analyze multiple factors and the intersections between them. This becomes clear, for instance, when reading gender related literature.\textsuperscript{55} Consequently, the need for analyzing multiple factors in the Hungarian context is one of the arguments of the current study.

In the following, previous research that relates to the Hungarian Jewry and/or the Holocaust is discussed, both in general and with regard to the categories under investigation.

**Hungarian Jewish experiences in previous research**

When it comes to the Holocaust in Hungary, a considerable number of works have been published.\textsuperscript{56} Historian Randolph L. Braham gives a broad account of the destruction process and its prelude in the two volumes of *Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*.\textsuperscript{57} He intertwines chronology and the course of events

\textsuperscript{54} See, for example, Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–1942* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press & Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004) for a detailed account of the events and for a bibliography of other significant studies in the field.


with empirical evidence such as statistics and eyewitness accounts, making it one of the most extensive studies in the field. Braham brings up comparisons between the countryside and the capital when it comes to the losses of the Hungarian Jewish women and men in different age groups, and he refers to the importance of social class in some of the chapters, even though he does not discuss aspects of gender, age, and social class at length.59

Another important account is Götz Aly’s and Christian Gerlach’s study Das letzte Kapitel. Der Mord an den Ungarischen Juden. The authors give a balanced view of the multiple factors affecting the course of events during the decisive year of 1944. They emphasize the importance of Hungarian involvement in the Holocaust and claim that the murder of the Hungarian Jewry was a result of an interactive process between the Germans and the Hungarians.60

The works of Tim Cole, Mária M. Kovács, and Yehuda Don have been especially helpful with regard to the analysis of multiple factors. Cole has investigated the ratio of women and men of different ages in two Hungarian ghettos in Veszprém in May 1944. He intersects gender and age in different geographical locations and at different points of time. Cole concludes that the Jewish males aged 20–42 were the first physical victims prior to 1944, as a direct consequence of the labour service system. The deportations of women, children, and the elderly to Auschwitz-Birkenau did not start until May 1944, but the Jewish males were exposed to hard work in the labour service system during the early war years. On the other hand, in 1944 the labour service could save Jewish men aged 18–49 from deportation. In Auschwitz, “able-bodied” women without children had the largest chances of surviving the selection process determining who went to the gas chambers.61 Cole has also studied the ghettoization process in Budapest, and stresses the importance of spatial solutions during the process.62

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58 See, for example, the book reviews of William O. McCagg in Slavic Review 41 (1981) and Egon Mayer in Holocaust and Genocide Studies 10:1 (1996). However, Braham has sometimes been criticized for his uncritical use of sources, see Aly & Gerlach (2002), p. 16.


60 Aly & Gerlach (2002), passim. László Karsai has criticized Aly and Gerlach for a number of errors, partly for incorrect translations from Hungarian to German, partly for misinterpretations of the source material. He also argues that Aly and Gerlach exaggerate the Hungarian government’s role in the process, and that the property and money taken from the Jews were not used in the war economy, as the authors claim. See László Karsai, “The Last Chapter of the Holocaust”, in Yad Vashem Studies 34 (2006), pp. 293–329.

61 Cole (2006), passim. Cole is currently working on a social historical study on multiple experiences of Hungarian Jews. He examines not only gender, but also other factors such as place, age, and class. The preliminary title of his forthcoming book is The Holocaust in Hungary: A History in Fragments.

62 Tim Cole, Holocaust City (New York & London: Routledge, 2003);
Mária M. Kovács has studied liberal professions in Hungary from the Habsburg period to the end of the Second World War. She has pointed out that the anti-Jewish laws affected physicians, engineers, and lawyers in different ways, and that these professionals suffered greater losses during the Second World War than the rest of the Hungarian Jewish population. Kovács findings show that the professional “chambers” handed over their membership lists to the authorities, who – using these lists – could easily round up Jewish physicians, engineers, and lawyers, who then became part of the labour service and/or were deported. Social class, or at least one’s occupation, consequently had a significant impact on how individuals were treated.

Yehuda Don has surveyed the economic implications of the anti-Jewish laws on the Hungarian Jewry. He shows that the laws were fully implemented in the public sector, but not in the private one. This was due to fact that “economic rationality overpowered ideological zeal […].” The Jewish business elite was practically irreplaceable, and by eliminating Jewish industries and commerce the state finances would suffer significantly. Furthermore, the anti-Jewish laws lost their importance in 1944 when the “Final Solution” was implemented. Don concludes that the laws increased differences in income and in wealth within the Jewish community.

In general, research on the Holocaust in Hungary does not include many studies related to gender or age. Especially when it comes to gender, only a small number of studies concerning ghetto and camp experiences can be found. The lack of gender research is partly explained by the fact that very few Hungarian Jewish women have written memoirs. Literature scholar Katalin Pécsi states: “It is fruitless to look for Hungarian prose written by women in similar [Holocaust related] situations. Why are women not present in the Jewish literature?” The lack of information regarding female experiences and the lack of interest in gender theory have resulted in Hungarian Jewish women being

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67 Katalin Pécsi, “In Search of Lost Female Writers, Remembrance of Lost Female Writers. Meditations about the Feminine Part of the Hungarian Jewish Literature”, in *Bet Debora* 3 (2003).
neglected within the history writing. This situation is, however, changing. A few studies have already been published, and new research is in progress.68

Gender, age, and social class in Holocaust historiography

Scholarly interest in gendered approaches to the Holocaust in general emerged when Joan Ringelheim and Esther Katz organized a conference on women and the Holocaust in 1983.69 Previous research has often focused on female experiences in the Polish ghettos, in hiding, in the concentration camps, and resistance.70 Scholars have also examined women’s roles or women’s experiences in the Third Reich.71 The previous studies represent, however, more of a history


of women than a history of gender. To understand the significance of gendered experiences, it is necessary to study women parallel to men, as for example Nechama Tec has indicated. If women or men are examined in isolation from one another, the overall picture will be incomplete. Even though it is necessary to highlight women's history and female experiences, it is time to analyze not only gender but also other identity-forming factors.

The introduction to Women in the Holocaust, edited by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, is an essential contribution to the literature on gender and the Holocaust. Ofer and Weitzman suggest that four structural sources of gender differences during the Holocaust can be found. The first, the culturally defined pre-war gender roles (for example the division of labour), “exposed the two sexes to different experiences, social milieus, and social networks, and endowed them with different spheres of knowledge, expertise, and skills with which to face the Nazi onslaught.” The second source of gender differences during the Holocaust, according to Ofer and Weitzman, were the Jews’ anticipatory reactions to the persecutions, i.e. reactions to what they believed would happen. Many Jews believed that the Germans would not harm women and children, and this resulted in “gender-specific plans to protect and save the men.” Thus men were prioritized when it came to emigration and hiding. Women went out more often, since it was believed that it was less risky for them to do so.

The third source of gendered experiences during the Holocaust was the actual policy and treatment of Jewish women and men. Even though the Nazis aimed at annihilating all Jews, the two sexes were sometimes treated differently, at least in the early years of persecutions. For instance, men were almost exclusively appointed as leaders in the Jewish Councils. Men were assigned to heavy manual labour, and they were “more likely to be beaten, arrested, and imprisoned.” Pregnant women in the ghettos were regularly forced to have abortions, and in the camps, those who were pregnant or had small children were condemned to death. In addition, women were more often exposed to sexual harassment and rape.

sozialistichen Genozids, ed. Insa Eschebach, Sigrid Jacobeth, & Silke Wenk (Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 2002), which deals with representations of sex and gender in the context of the Holocaust.

Tec (2003), pp. 5–6.


Ofer & Weitzman (1998), pp. 4–6; Sara R. Horowitz, “Women in Holocaust Literature. Engendering Trauma Memory”, in Women in the Holocaust (1998), p. 375. The Jewish male was easier to identify; if he was religious he probably had earlocks, a beard, and traditional clothing. Even though he did not wear all the religious garments and did not “look Jewish”, it was easy to check as to whether he was circumcised or not.

There is one exception; Gisi Fleischman. She was a member of the Judenrat in Bratislava, and she actively worked for the Slovakian underground resistance movement. See Yehuda Bauer, “Gisi Fleischmann”, in Women in the Holocaust (1998).

The fourth source of gender differences is found, according to Ofer and Weitzman, in the Jewish responses to the atrocities. Research has shown that women and men sometimes responded differently to each Holocaust setting. For instance in the ghettos, women tried to create a home in spite of the dire circumstances, and in the camps, they tried to uphold their humanity through gendered skills, such as repairing their clothes and caring about their hygiene and looks.77

Ofer’s and Weitzman’s way of structuring the gendered differences during the Holocaust has helped me to thematically categorize the empirical evidence studied here. The informants’ perception of the treatment is investigated, as well as their responses to the experiences. However, treatment and responses are not seen as sources of gender differences. The way I understand it, there was only one ultimate source of gender differences, the pre-war gender order. This order and the gender relations can be seen as explanatory factors of the gendered differences in the other three central aspects Ofer and Weitzman bring up: female and male expectations, reactions, and the treatment of the Jews. These aspects constitute some of the main elements of Jewish experiences, not only with regard to gender, but also to other factors.

Among the scholars who have called for more theoretical studies are Elizabeth R. Baer and Myrna Goldenberg. The ambition with their anthology was, among others, to theorize gender, but only two articles of theoretical or methodological character are found in the volume.78 One of them is written by Rachel Pascale Bos, who critically questions the ways Holocaust scholars have studied gender. According to her, previous research has been too simplistic, and its focus on female survival strategies has “led in some cases to a rather generalized (and sometimes essentialized) analysis of gender difference […].”79 Bos suggests discoursive analysis as a useful tool when studying Jewish experiences. Testimonies should be seen as reconstructions or representations, instead of as exact descriptions of “as it was”. Therefore, oral sources should be studied on several levels, bringing in questions such as subjectivity, autobiographical representation, and memory.80 This supports the choice made in this dissertation of studying Jewish experiences as they were perceived, instead of claiming that this was actually what happened.

Zoë Waxman has criticized women’s studies for giving an essentialist picture of women and men. She argues that the literature reinforces preconceived stereotyped female narratives, and leaves out those that do not fit in the “gen-

79 Bos (2003), p. 27.
80 Bos (2003), pp. 25, 30. Bos’s concept and different levels of narrative will be discussed in chapter 2.
dered” picture of female behaviour or female ways of coping.\footnote{Zoë Waxman, “Unheard Testimony, Untold Stories: The Representation of Women's Holocaust Experiences”, in \textit{Women's History Review} 12:4 (2003), \textit{passim}.} I agree with Waxman and Bos; sometimes the analysis is too simplistic, occasionally even essentialist. This has become evident, for example, in the case of friendship relations in the camps. According to previous research, women used gender specific coping skills, such as “bonding”, to cope with the situation in the camps.\footnote{See for instance Myrna Goldenberg, “Memoirs of Auschwitz Survivors: The Burden of Gender”, in \textit{Women in the Holocaust} (1998), p. 335.} Tec has shown, however, that Jewish men also used bonding as a means of survival.\footnote{Tec (2003), pp. 175–204.} Bos’s and Waxman’s critique underlines the importance of comparing women and men, and of being aware of generalizations and of our own preconceived views of female and male behaviour. But it is essential to point out that not only female and male behaviour should be studied, but also differences and similarities in experiences that can be related to age, social class, place, and other factors.

Both Marion A. Kaplan and Nechama Tec have emphasized multiple factors in their analyses. Kaplan writes that “[s]ince the experiences of German Jews varied by gender, age, class, and geography – in urban or rural settings, Catholic or Protestant villages, middle- or working-class neighborhoods – there is no single story of Jewish daily life.”\footnote{Kaplan (1998a), p. 6. In her study on German Jewish women in the nineteenth century, Kaplan emphasizes the importance gender and social class: “the Jewish women were powerful agents of class formation and acculturation on the one hand, and determined upholders of tradition on the other.” See Marion A. Kaplan, \textit{The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany} (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. vii.} Kaplan brings in multiple factors regarding female and male employment, forced labour, and hiding. She clearly shows that gender contributed to differences in Jewish experiences and ways of reacting. However, she sometimes presents her empirical findings indistinctly. She uses terms such as “many” and “some” when referring to individual experiences of different phenomena. It is difficult for the reader to know whether her examples are representative or exceptional.\footnote{In this study, I will try to avoid this kind of formulations and present exact figures on how many individuals refer to specific experiences.}

Nechama Tec explores whether and how the gendered treatment of Jewish women and men led to gender-related reactions, and how gender affected the coping strategies developed by women and men. She compares gendered experiences in different Holocaust settings, such as in the ghettos, in hiding, in the camps, and resistance. Tec mainly focuses on Poland and the Eastern parts of Europe, even though she also refers to experiences in Western European countries. She has also stressed the importance of social class, age, political affiliation, religion, etc.\footnote{Tec (2003), pp. 12, 16. See also Lenore J. Weitzman, “Living on the Aryan Side in Poland. Gender, Passing, and the Nature of Resistance” and Dalia Ofer, “Gender Issues in Diaries and Testimonies of
for their analyses, paying less attention to the other factors, but for a comparison of gendered Jewish experiences in Hungary and in other parts of Europe, these two books have been valuable.

To my knowledge, age and social class have not gained as much scholarly attention in Holocaust studies in recent years as has gender. First, a few words about age-related research. Debórah Dwork has noted the lack of research on children’s experiences during the Holocaust. Her book was the first scholarly study of children and the Holocaust, and deals with the experiences of child survivors from various European countries. Only 11 per cent of the European Jewish children survived; about 1.5 million were killed. Dwork studies the children’s everyday lives chronologically, starting with pre-war experiences. She emphasizes the children’s vulnerability, and focuses on the problems the children faced at home, in hiding, in the ghettos, and in the camps.\(^87\)

The lack of research on the elderly is understandable, since very few of them survived the Holocaust, and since those few who did were likely to have passed away when scholarly interest in the Holocaust emerged a few decades later. Some child survivors are still alive today, and the interest in individual Holocaust testimonies has been greater during the last decades than during the early post-war years. This might explain the fact that children and adults have gained more attention than the elderly within Holocaust research.

The use of class as an explanatory factor in Holocaust research has been limited since the late 1970s and early 1980s.\(^88\) Nevertheless, a number of studies refer to the impact of social class and/or occupation on Jewish experiences during the Holocaust.\(^89\) For instance, it has been noted that more affluent individuals could sometimes live a more comfortable life and/or survive, at least in the early stages of persecution. Emigration, for instance, required funding. Kaplan has shown that the German Jews found themselves in a bureaucratic

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\(^{88}\) See Kershaw (2000), pp. 48–56, for a discussion of Marxist approaches to the Holocaust.

and financial crisis when they tried to get an emigration permit and that getting out of the country required resources not available to all.\footnote{Kaplan (1998a), pp. 132–133.} Hiding was also expensive. Emmanuel Ringelblum, a Jewish historian in Warsaw, wrote that “[m]oney undoubtedly plays an important role in the hiding of Jews. There are poor [Polish] families who base their subsistence on the funds paid daily by the Jews […].”\footnote{Quoted in Déborah Dwork & Robert Jan van Pelt, \textit{Holocaust – A History} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 149.} Holocaust survivor and author Primo Levi also argued that social background sometimes determined whether one would live or die. He referred to the fact that because he was a chemist, he was selected for manual labour at Auschwitz Monowitz. In the same way, persons with training such as tailors, shoe makers or brick layers were more likely to survive a selection, since their skills were needed in the camps.\footnote{Primo Levi, \textit{The Drowned and the Saved} (London: Abacus, 1989), pp. 113–116.}

Social background could also be a determining factor for individuals living in the ghettos. The social hierarchy of a ghetto was created from the beginning, when German authorities appointed mainly prominent, well-educated Jewish males to the Jewish Council [Judenrat].\footnote{Isaiah Trunk, \textit{Judenrat. The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation} (New York & London: The Macmillan Company, 1972), p. 30.} These individuals were privileged at first, but in the end, all differences between people in different positions were wiped out, and even those in prominent positions were killed.\footnote{See Dwork & van Pelt (2002), chapter 9 and p. 361 for descriptions of Polish ghettos and Ofer (1998), pp. 148–153, for Jewish women’s lives in the Warsaw ghetto, and how social class affected their experiences.} However, people belonging to the intelligentsia and higher social classes could sometimes be the first to be harassed or killed. Martin Dean has shown how the German authorities in Mir, Belarus, “carried out a typical ‘intelligentsia’ action” as one of the first killing actions against the local Jews in 1941.\footnote{Martin Dean, “Microcosm. Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust in the Mir Rayon of Belarus, 1941–1944”, in \textit{Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust. Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania}, ed. David Gaunt, Paul A. Levine, & Laura Palosuo (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 226. Other groups that became special targets of the killings in the Mir district were ex-communists, Jews in small villages, Soviet ex-prisoners of war, and Polish intelligentsia (p. 234).} In Budapest, the first individuals to be arrested after the German occupation were members of the (male) Jewish elite.\footnote{Braham (1994), vol. 1, p. 510.} This type of action has been referred to as “elitocidal” by some genocide researchers, as previously mentioned.\footnote{See Stein (2002).}

In sum, prior research has focused on Hungarian Jewish experiences at a macro level, and on Jewish experiences at a micro level, but mainly in other parts of Europe. These studies have seldom emphasized the importance of multiple factors, but instead have focused on one aspect, for instance gender. I believe that by studying multiple factors in the Hungarian Jewish experiences
during the interwar period, the Second World War, and the Holocaust, the complexity of the individual experiences will become apparent. The main categories studied in this dissertation are gender, age, and social class, but the investigation also brings up the aspect of geographical origin and other identity forming factors. These components, as well as the emphasis on individual experiences as they were perceived by the survivors and how they responded to the events, are essential not only for our understanding of the history of the Hungarian Jewry, but also for our understanding of the complexity of human experiences in times of upheaval.
CHAPTER 2
Using Interviews as Sources of Information

Memory – along with its lapses and tricks – poses questions to history in that it points to problems that are still alive or invested with emotion and value. Ideally, history critically tests memory and prepares for a more extensive attempt to work through a past that has not passed away.¹

Dominick LaCapra

As noted in chapter 1, this research project is primarily built upon oral history sources, namely interviews with Hungarian survivors. The choice of sources is mainly motivated by the research task. Interviews and reports are highly informative and important, as they can uncover answers and explanations as to how the Jewish individuals perceived the events, and how they reacted to discrimination and genocide. They thus can give us information concerning Jewish experiences that is not available in other sources. Furthermore, the perpetrators destroyed much of the written sources and evidence, which calls for innovation concerning sources. But there are also some difficulties when using this type of material. In the following chapter, the sources are introduced in detail, and oral history sources or sources based on memory are critically examined and discussed.

The Raoul Wallenberg archive

This investigation is mainly based on testimonies found in the Raoul Wallenberg archive (RWA) in Uppsala. The archive was established in 1989–1991 through a documentation project conducted by The Swedish Institute for North American Studies (SINAS) at Uppsala University. The initiative was originally taken by the Raoul Wallenberg Committee in the United States, which wished to collect testimonies about Swedish rescue activities and aid to Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. The archive consists of 170 interviews

The aim of the documentation project was to gather eyewitness testimonies concerning information about Raoul Wallenberg and Sweden’s diplomacy during the Holocaust. Some of the persons interviewed had a very close professional relation to Wallenberg, others were rescued by him and/or his colleagues, and some of them just met or saw him once or twice between July 1944 and January 1945. However, the range of information in these interviews is wider than that. The interviews contain not only events and experiences connected to Wallenberg, but also details concerning the Budapest Jewry’s pre-war lives, as well as experiences during the war and the Holocaust. Therefore, these interviews are particularly valuable here.

The interviews were conducted through a method called interventionism, which was specifically constructed for the project by historian Paul A. Levine. The interviewer was instructed to actively take part in the interview. In the beginning of each interview, the interviewer controlled the narrative through a questionnaire. Then the informant was encouraged to more freely relate his/her experiences during the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. At the end of the interview, the interviewer took a more active role again, to obtain information about Wallenberg. The aim of this approach and the questionnaire was to place the events into both a historical and an individual context, and to facilitate systematization and comparison. Another aim was to reduce the risk of stereotypes in the narrative. If the informant was “let loose”, he/she would probably tell his/her story in the same way as he/she had always told it. The questions would trigger the informant to recall details he/she had not thought of for a long time. Levine calls this awakening of recollections “chains of memory”. I argue that it is not possible to entirely avoid stereotypes, but I agree that specific questions can awake recollections that have been kept latent in the informant’s memory.

Was the method practically applied to the interview situation? The interviews in the Raoul Wallenberg archive do generally focus on chronological events and informants’ experiences. The historical context is presented in each interview’s introductory part. The informant tells about his/her family, religious and social background, and childhood years. After that, some focus is placed on the pre-war years, especially on the 1930s, experiences of antisemitism, and the intro-

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2 On this project, see Karl Molin, “The Raoul Wallenberg Archive at Uppsala University”, in *Uppsala Multiethnic Papers* 33 (1995), pp. 7–8. Molin was the director of the project. He claims that there are 210 taped interviews in the RWA (p. 8), but this number is incorrect. According to my calculations, there are 170 interviews in the archive, of which 167 are taped and 147 transcribed. See the Raoul Wallenberg archive register, table of interview materials.

3 See appendix 1 for the most frequently posed questions in the questionnaire.

duction of the Hungarian anti-Jewish laws, followed by the war and the German occupation. The final part of each interview concerns the relation between the informant and Wallenberg. In many cases, issues connected to Wallenberg get relatively limited attention, due to the fact that the informant does not have much to tell. In other cases, the background is more or less ignored, while the events during the war are in focus.

The requirement that the informant had to be in contact with Wallenberg leads us to the question as to whether these interviews might be considered biased? The majority of the informants survived due to the fact that they had protective documents and could stay in protected buildings. They can be seen, in comparison to thousands of other Jews in Budapest, as privileged and perhaps not as “typical” survivors. It should be noted that interviews with survivors who did not have any connection to the Swedish legation might have given other kind of details concerning the circumstances in 1944–1945. However, it can be asked how representative survivor testimonies are in general, since the majority of the Hungarian Jews did not survive. In her study of Jewish child survivors, Déborah Dwork mentions that the fact that they survived at all “makes them exceptions to the general rule of death”. Nevertheless, survivor testimonies still are worth of investigation, since the lives of the survivors before the Holocaust were not “atypical”.

Selection of source material and other methodological concerns

116 out of 170 interviews conducted within the Raoul Wallenberg project were included in this study. They contain 4,198 pages of transcripts, with an average length of 32 pages per interview. Three additional interviews conducted through correspondence were also included. The majority of the interviews in Hungarian have been translated to English. In some cases, the translation leaves a lot to be desired (for example, there is confusion regarding “she” and “he”, as there is only one pronoun in Hungarian). In cases where the interpretation is unclear, the details have been confirmed by using the Hungarian original.

In addition to the main sources, a number of other interviews, eyewitness reports, and memoirs were also selected. This material was used to widen the scope (for example to be able to compare Budapest to the countryside) and should be seen as a complement to the Raoul Wallenberg interviews. Three

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6 It is also worth mentioning that there are no extensive studies which use this archival material. Attila Lajos has used some of the material in his dissertation Hjälten och offren (2004). A few unpublished papers have been written by students, for example Maria Björkman, “Judiskt motstånd under Förintelsen. Några exempel från Budapest 1944” (Uppsala University: History Department, 2001).
7 Five of the interviews took place in Sweden, fifty-three in Hungary, and fifty-eight in the USA. The excluded interviews were conducted in Hebrew, which I unfortunately neither speak nor read.
video recorded interviews and five published interviews from the Shoah Foundation material were included. Additionally, eight interviews conducted by researchers at Israel’s Yad Vashem Archive, two by Columbia University’s Oral History Research Office (transcripts can be found in the RWA in Uppsala), and two interviews conducted by the author were also analyzed. It may have been desirable to study a larger number of interviews, but the availability of the material, the aspect of time, and language have all been decisive factors when selecting complementary sources.

Apart from the interview material, some other sources based on memory were examined. The Open Society Archives (OSA) in Budapest holds material from the Wiener Library Archive (WLA) in London. The part of the archive dealing with Hungary consists of newspaper articles and eyewitness reports. Seventeen eyewitness reports from the 1950s, written in English and in German, were included in the analysis. The Magyar Zsidó Levéltár (Hungarian Jewish Archives, HJA) holds memoirs, reports, letters, and diaries from the Second World War and the Holocaust. Five memoirs and one diary were relevant for this thesis; the others mainly dealt with camp experiences. The Hungarian Jewish Archives also holds demographic data concerning the losses of the Hungarian Jewry, which are analyzed from an intersectional perspective in chapter 9.

Since the end of the Second World War, a number of memoirs written by Hungarian survivors have been published. Six of them were included in this study, as well as an anthology with short memories dealing with the labour service system edited by Randolph L. Braham. These memoirs were chosen

8 The Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles contains nearly 52,000 testimonies in 32 languages and from 56 countries. Approximately 3,500 of the interviews were given by Hungarian survivors, of which 1,348 were from Budapest. See http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/vhi/ (24/08/2005). The selected sources for this dissertation are found in the OSA, The Shoah Foundation interview material, tape nos: 42664–2, 13576–3, 03012–0 and The Last Days, ed. Steven Spielberg and Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (UK: Weidenberg & Nicolson, 1999). Freie Universität in Berlin has also access to the material in its entirety.

9 One of the most extensive sources concerning the Hungarian Holocaust is the Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság (the National Relief Committee for Deportees, DEGOB) reports from 1945 and 1946. DEGOB consists of 3,523 testimonies of 4,838 returning Hungarian Jewish survivors. The information brought up in these reports deals mostly with the survivors’ camp experiences and not with their pre-war lives, and is therefore of less relevance for this study. See HJA, DEGOB, jegyzőkönyv. The material is also available online: www.degob.hu. See also Rita Horváth, “A Magyarországi Zsidók Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottsága (DEGOB) története”, in MAKOR (Magyar Zsidó Levéltári Füzetek), ed. Kinga Frojimovics & Zsuzsanna Toronyi (Budapest: Magyar Zsidó Levéltár, 1997).

due to their richness of information concerning personal experiences not related to Auschwitz or other camps. The memoirs used here deal in great detail with the survivors’ pre-war lives, the labour service system, the wartime experiences, and the situation in 1944. Two of them were written soon after the war (Ernő Szép in 1945, Tivadar Soros in the 1950s), but three others were published after 1980. Susan Varga’s book brings up her mother’s memories and experiences during the war, as she herself was only a baby, thus having no personal reminiscence of the events. She interviewed her mother on several occasions in order to write her story.11

Altogether, 139 interviews, seventeen eyewitness reports, one diary, five unpublished memoirs, and eleven published memoirs make up the empirical foundation of the dissertation. Consequently, the number of testimonies is 173. In addition, demographic data in the Hungarian Jewish Archives were used in a comparative analysis of the Hungarian Jewish losses, which is presented and discussed in chapter 9. The analysis in chapters 4, 5, 7, and 8 is based mainly on qualitative and comparative observations of Jewish experiences in 1920–1945. The comparison is made to illuminate differences and similarities in the perception and reactions of the survivors with respect to gender, age, and social class.

The interview material was organized in a database, according to the informants’ background (geographical origin, religious orientation, education, family members, etc.). A number of keywords related to the Jewish experiences were chosen to systematize the contents of the material, for example, anti-Jewish laws, ghettos, labour service, violence, hiding, and resistance. The keywords were selected according to the criteria that they dealt with the informants’ perception of the events, or with their responses.12 The dissertation follows the chronological order of the events, and whenever possible, comparisons between Budapest and the provinces are made, as well as between Hungary and other countries ruled by the Nazis (mainly Germany and Poland).

Using interview material in social historical research brings up some ethical considerations. First of all, the material and the individuals behind the text must be handled carefully and with respect.13 Second, the informants’ personal integrity should be taken into consideration. The persons interviewed by the Raoul

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12 See appendix 2 for the total list of keywords.

Wallenberg project were asked to sign a release form giving permission for their life stories to be used in future research. Only two of the informants in the archives required anonymity. For all of the others, I have chosen to use the informants’ actual, full names. In some cases I do not have the information concerning the person’s given name, and in these cases I refer only to the last name. The Shoah Foundation informants, on the other hand, are introduced with their given names and the first initial of their surnames, in accordance with the foundation’s research policy.\textsuperscript{14}

My choice to use the informants’ full names is a way of showing respect to the survivors and their families. In this way, I would like to make their stories visible and remembered by future generations. For many survivors it is important that their experiences are given attention, and that the names of their lost family members will be remembered. For example, one of the informants in this project expressed very clearly that she wanted both her maiden name and present name to be published.\textsuperscript{15} This has been significant, if not decisive, regarding my choice to use the survivors’ full names.

My spelling of the names follows the sources, even though some of the names might be incorrectly spelled.\textsuperscript{16}

The subjects of the study: survivors from Budapest

Of the 173 individuals studied here, 151 were Hungarian Jewish survivors. The other twenty-two informants were non-Jewish persons involved in rescue activities, or non-Jewish eyewitnesses to the atrocities committed in Hungary.

The gender distribution of the 151 Jewish survivors was relatively even; seventy-one or 47 per cent were women and eighty or 53 per cent were men. Most of the informants, namely 124 (82 per cent) out of 151, originated from Budapest or had moved to Budapest either in the 1930s or during the war. The experiences of these 124 survivors form the empirical core of this thesis. Twenty (13 per cent) were from the provinces, while the origin of the rest (seven informants) was unknown.

\textsuperscript{14} Scholars have used different methods when using names of the victims in research concerning the Holocaust, but most often, the full names of the informants are given. See Weitzman (1998), p. 219, footnote 8. Weitzman uses the full names of those who have given their permission or who have publicly spoken about their experiences.

\textsuperscript{15} Judy Cohen (former Weiszenberg), 2005, interview by the author, Debrecen, 13 May 2005.

\textsuperscript{16} In many cases, the misspelling concerns missing apostrophes, for example Peter Tarjan instead of Péter Tarján.
Table 2.1. Jewish informants by age groups and sex in 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: RWA, AWI, memoirs

Adults were well represented in the material, as well as the children. As we can see in table 2.1, the age group 20–39 dominates by sixty-nine informants. Thirty-seven informants were younger than twenty in 1944 (the youngest was only six, born in 1938). Only one of the informants was older than sixty in 1944. This partly reflects the demographic effects of the Holocaust: only a small ratio of the elderly survived. But more importantly, the Raoul Wallenberg project was conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and many of those who were old in the 1940s had already passed away. Consequently, the elderly are underrepresented. However, the second hand information concerning the elderly is richly detailed and will be used, even though this must be done carefully.

Another aspect that should be commented upon concerns the twenty-four cases of “unknown” age. These informants were mostly found in the Archives of the Wiener Library, where information concerning the year of birth was not frequently given. However, it is obvious that all of these informants were adults during the war, as they speak about experiences that refer to adult lives (marriage, children, work, etc.). The total number of adults is thus 113 or 75 per cent (including the group of unknown age), while the children and the youth amount to thirty-seven persons or 24 per cent of the informants.

What about the informants’ social class? Eight informants (5 per cent) declared that they belonged to the lower or working class, while five informants (3 per cent) claimed to belong to the upper class (see diagram 2.2.). Twenty-five (17 per cent) belonged to the lower middle class, fifty-four persons (36 per cent) to the middle class, and thirty-three (22 per cent) to the upper middle class. It is thus obvious that the majority (112 out of 151 or 74 per cent) of the informants belonged to the middle classes. This reflects the general social structure of Budapest Jewry.
Diagram 2.2. Social identification of the Jewish informants

To illuminate the social patterns even more, the parents’ occupation was also studied. The parents’ occupation is presented in table 2.3, which includes only the RWA informants, since such information is not given in the other sources.

The informants’ parents’ occupations confirm their identities as part of the middle class Jewry in Budapest. More than sixty per cent of the fathers were businessmen, clerks, merchants, or practiced a free profession (physician, lawyer, engineer, etc.). About twenty per cent of the mothers had some kind of occupation, while the given ratio of housewives among the Jewish survivors was approximately 35 per cent. What is interesting is the large difference between genders when it comes to parents whose occupation is not mentioned at all. 14 per cent of the informants do not give any information concerning their father’s occupation, while the figure is as high as 46 per cent for the mothers. I interpret this silence as an indicator of the fact that these women were probably not breadwinners, but housewives.

The informants’ religious orientation is also difficult to present, since the informants in describe their religious orientation in a variety of ways. I have chosen to categorize them into seven different groups; “Jewish” according to the anti-Jewish law (for example converted Jews or “half- Jews” who never regarded themselves as Jewish), secular (those who were of Jewish origin but

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17 This terminology was used by the authorities (both Hungarian and the Jewish) during that time.
Table 2.3. Occupation of the informants’ parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free professions</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/manager Trade</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of a small business</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director/manager</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of a large company/factory</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estates/land owner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RWA, in total 107 Jewish informants.

2.3.b Mothers’ occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner of a small business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seamstress</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: RWA, in total 107 Jewish informants.

who were not practicing Jews and did not consider themselves as part of the Jewish culture), secular but traditional (those who were not religious but kept some traditional Jewish customs and/or celebrated Jewish high holidays), Neolog (reform), Status Quo\(^\text{18}\), Orthodox, and Ultra Orthodox Jews. It was hard to find information concerning the religious orientation of the AWL informants, and because of this, the diagram 2.4 shows only the religious orientation of the Raoul Wallenberg project informants.

\(^{18}\) Status Quo congregations can be placed somewhere between the modern Neolog Jews and the Orthodox Jews. See chapter 3 in this dissertation.
Diagram 2.4. The informants’ religious orientation

![Diagram showing religious orientations](image)

Source: RWA, in total 107 Jewish informants.

A large part, namely forty-seven out of 107 (44 per cent) of the RWA informants declared themselves to be members of the Neolog congregation, meaning they were religiously observant but modern. The informants often mentioned the word “assimilated”, meaning that they felt they were both Hungarian and Jewish. Two of the informants belonged to Status Quo-congregations, while sixteen were Orthodox and one Ultra Orthodox. Altogether twenty-eight persons or 26 per cent were secular (19) or did not identify themselves as Jewish at all (9). The informants’ religious orientation is in accordance with the general pattern of the Budapest Jews, where the majority was Neolog, and very few belonged to Orthodox congregations.

In conclusion, the informants studied in this dissertation were fairly homogeneous regarding age, geographical origin, social class, and religious orientation. The gender distribution is also even; 47 per cent women and 53 per cent men. It may be said, consequently, that the typical informant is an adult who identified her/himself with the Budapest middle class and with the modern, but religious Neolog Jewish congregation. However, this study also includes representatives of all age groups except the very elderly, and from various social groups and different religious orientations.

Oral History

Sociologist and social historian Paul Thompson points out that oral history is the oldest form of historical narrative. Oral history existed long before any written language and was, until the early twentieth century, frequently used
parallel to handwritten records. During the second half of the twentieth century oral history regained some of its status, and since the 1960s, oral history has frequently been used in studies “from below”. Social historical studies have given attention to women, workers and ethnic minorities, and oral history has been used as both a method and a theory.

What is oral history? There is no single definition. According to Thompson, oral history is “tape-recorded historical information drawn from the speaker’s personal knowledge; the use or interpretation of this as an academic subject.” Oral history sources can also include transcriptions of oral accounts and oral tradition. Gwyn Prins, historian and anthropologist, defines oral history as “history written with evidence gathered from a living person, rather than from a written document.” Following Jan Vansina, Prins distinguishes between two types of oral evidence: oral tradition and personal reminiscence. Oral tradition involves verbal testimonies, passed from generation to generation. These narratives help us to reconstruct the past. Personal reminiscence is not necessarily transmitted from one generation to the next. It is personal source material, specific to the informant’s life and experiences, often collected as interviews. According to social anthropologist Elizabeth Tonkin, oral history is verbal representations of the past, constructed through social processes. Tonkin also maintains that all types of source material are verbal and therefore oral in one way or another. Documents are “orality recorded”.

In this study, I choose to refer to the empirical material as sources based on memory (interviews, reports and memoirs) as they were all produced some time after the historical events they describe. The interviews are, following Prins, seen as transcribed personal reminiscence.

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23 Prins (1991), pp. 120–121.

How useful are sources based on memory?

Thompson maintains that oral history, or memory based sources, do have some special qualities. The subjectivity which lies imbedded in oral history can give us a different and/or more detailed and nuanced picture of the past. This is also highlighted by Prins: “What personal reminiscence can bring is a freshness and a wealth of detail which is not otherwise to be found.” But as Thompson also points out, oral history struggles nevertheless with the same kind of problems and shortcomings as other sources. The choice of empirical material is thus not related to the question as to which sources are “the best” in an absolute sense, but to the specific questions and problems posed in the current research. Therefore, one of the advantages of sources based on memory is that when used together with other types of sources, they create a more complex and fuller picture of our past.

Rachel Pascale Bos argues, as mentioned in chapter 1, that oral sources are discursive reconstructions of reality, a way for the survivors to “create meaning” of their experiences. Because of this, oral sources (as well as memoirs) can be problematic to use in an analysis. Narratives should not be seen as the “truth”, since they never can recreate the entire complexity of the past. Lawrence L. Langer claims, however, that survivors’ memories are “real” to the highest possible degree. Even though some details in their historical narratives may sometimes be wrong, the “reality” they reveal is seldom inaccurate.

Historian Malin Thor has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of oral sources. One of the problems, according to her, is that oral sources contain “too much”. They tell us not only what happened, but also what people thought happened, how people have interpreted historical events, and perhaps even what people want other people to think happened. Thor argues that oral sources show how both individuals and social environment reconstruct the memory to become subjective ideas about the past.

Following Thor, I argue that eyewitness stories do give us details about what happened. At the same time, however, they are also subjective descriptions of historical events, as pointed out by both Thor and Bos. They deal more with how people perceived or interpreted the events than what actually happened. Therefore, the researcher must handle these historical details and facts with great care, and consider source critical aspects when using sources based on

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memory. In the following, I will discuss five critical issues, namely distance in time, intentions of the informant and interviewer, visibility (in contrast to invisibility or silence), (in)dependence, and the relative importance of the sources.

First, let us look at the aspect of time. How useful are the memories of elderly people when they have been recorded some four to five decades after the events? Critics claim that memory-based sources, especially those created long after the events, are unreliable because of the aspect of time. I do agree with these critics, but only to a certain extent. I argue that the usability of memory based sources depends on the questions formulated by the researcher.

Thompson argues that “the problem of memory power is not much more serious for interviews with old people in normal health than it is with younger adults.”31 He states, however, that when dealing with interviews that go further back in time, there is a risk of alterations in the memory of the informant. He suggests that these distortions are a consequence of changes in values and norms rather than of a decreased capacity of memory. The social historical context can thus be understood differently during different periods of life, be it conscious or unconscious. Another interesting fact is that the accuracy of recall correlates with how important the historical events and details are for the individual. Reliability of memory increases when the question interests the informant.32

How reliable are traumatic, stress-related memories? Psychologists Willem Wagenaar and Jop Groeneweg have examined memories of Jewish survivors who were incarcerated in a Nazi concentration camp in Holland in 1942–1943. The Dutch police interviewed the former prisoners in 1945 and 1948, in connection with a trial against the former kapo (camp guard and collaborator) Martinus de Rijke. The trial was not concluded in the 1940s, but resumed in 1984, when the eyewitnesses were interviewed again. Wagenaar and Groeneweg compared the interview materials with other sources to test the accuracy of the memories.

The results show that even after forty years, the survivors’ recollections of events and details were reasonably correct. Most of the former prisoners gave unanimous testimonies regarding general information about the camp and about how the prisoners were treated. They remembered De Rijke and his position as kapo. However, they had difficulties in remembering specific dates

31 Thompson (2000), p. 136. This is supported by many memory researchers and psychologists, see, for example, Sven-Åke Christiansson, Traumatiska minnen (Borås: Centraltryckeriet, 1994); Daniel L. Schachter, Sökandet efter minnet. Hjärnan, psyket och det förflutna (Falun: Scandbook, 1997).
32 Thompson (2000), pp. 128–136. Historian Yehuda Bauer claims that sometimes narratives taken down long after the events may be more reliable than those registered immediately: “In the past, the witness may have had reasons to hide or misrepresent things, reasons that have in the meantime disappeared.” Bauer also writes that the trauma suffered by the survivors might have resulted in an inability to talk about their experiences, thus “the present testimony may be more truthful than the former.” Bauer (2001), p. 24.
and detailed facts. In the interviews from the 1980s, less than half of the informants remembered the date they arrived at the camp, compared to the results from the 1940s, when most of the informants could indicate the exact date. Some of the survivors had forgotten names and specific details related to various incidents. Wagenaar and Groeneweg conclude that memories connected to traumatic events are generally correct, but that the details sometimes get blurred or distorted. Even though some of the informants mix up days, months, and even years, it is relatively easy for a researcher to verify this kind of information with literature or other sources. Furthermore, for my research, dates and names are not of as great of significance as other types of details, particularly those concerning the survivors’ personal experiences.

The second source critical issue concerns the intentions and prejudices of the informant and the interviewer. Here, it is important to note that human beings, more or less self-consciously, tend to distort the “truth”. Sometimes the informant exaggerates to make the story more interesting, or to put him/herself in a better light, and sometimes he/she is even telling actual lies. This is an obvious risk when dealing with any kind of source material. Untruthful or incorrect details will always be one of the problems that historians wrestle with.

The informant’s intentions may lead the interview in a certain direction, but there is also a risk that the interviewer leads the informant too far. As mentioned above, the Raoul Wallenberg project used a questionnaire, which may have decreased the occurrence of stereotypes. On the other hand, interventionism can also be a disadvantageous method if the interviewer asks biased or leading questions. The Raoul Wallenberg interviews show some signs of this. Sometimes the informant is interrupted in the middle of a sentence and sometimes the interviewer asks leading questions. This, however, happens mainly in the sections when Raoul Wallenberg and his activities are discussed, which is not the main focus of this investigation.

The third source critical aspect concerns the visibility or invisibility of certain facts in the sources. Occasionally, some important recollections might stay untold; there is a problem of silence. Atina Grossman, who has studied the

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34 The Raoul Wallenberg interviews contain written reports concerning the informants’ reliability, based on the interviewer’s observations. Interviews that have special comments on for example confusion or incipient dementia are of course cautiously dealt with.

35 For example, the interviewer asks questions concerning Raoul Wallenberg’s appearance and clothing: “Was he wearing a coat and a hat?” (a “yes-or-no”-question) instead of “What was he wearing?” This is a typical example of a leading question in this material.

rapes suffered by German women by Soviet occupation soldiers, touches upon this issue. Rape is a subject that has not been discussed in the aftermath of the Second World War, even though there are some sources available. However, the sources do not tell the whole story; pieces of information and details of experiences are left out. The untold exists, but is impossible to reach. Sometimes the silence is “at least as much that of the historian trying to figure out how to tell the story as about the events discussed.” Therefore, the reasons as to why rape has not been studied to a greater extent than it has include both the silence of the sources and the difficulty of the issue.

It should be noted that the Raoul Wallenberg project interviewers were men. Would the informants, especially the females, have presented other facts in the event that the interviewer had been a woman? This is naturally a question that is impossible to answer, but it is important to keep in mind that certain sensitive information – i.e. details about menstruation, sexual assault, rape – may have remained untold or would have been presented differently in a different interview situation.

I argue that the cases where gender aspects did after all rise to the surface are even more interesting, as the information actually was brought up – despite the unawareness of the interviewers. Therefore, the method of “chains of memory”, when the informant is freely associating regarding his/her recollections, has been advantageous for the purpose of this task. Some of the most relevant and interesting pieces of information were revealed as a result of memory chains. This is valid not only for issues concerning gender, but also for aspects related to age and social class.

A fourth problem is the (in)dependence of the sources. Since the Holocaust has become a popularized historical event, treated in different types of media such as film, TV, novels, and art, there is a risk that standardized narratives of the Holocaust have affected the survivors’ memories. The risk of stereotyped narratives has become stronger since interest on the Holocaust has grown during the last decades.

When it comes to the Raoul Wallenberg interviews, it could be argued that the interviews undertaken in Hungary were less affected by the increasing interest in the Holocaust than those conducted in the United States and in Israel. The awareness of the Holocaust has long been strong in these two countries, while in Sweden the interest emerged only after 1990. Hungary was cut off from Western Europe by the Iron Curtain, and the informants were not exposed to the popularized picture of the Holocaust during the Communist era. In fact, the Holocaust was not officially discussed at all. However, events during the Second World War have left deep traces in Hungarian society and in the collective memory of victims, bystanders and perpetrators.

In the United States and in Israel, the Holocaust has received some prolonged attention, which has more or less resulted in stereotypical narratives.\textsuperscript{38} Primo Levi argued that frequent re-evocation of memories keeps them “fresh and alive”, but that “a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype.”\textsuperscript{39} Literature historian Anders Ohlsson claims in his work on Holocaust literature in Scandinavia that narratives often contain similar types of frames, or genres. Memoirs and autobiographical novels are often chronologically narrated and include certain themes: the time before persecution and catastrophe, the long journey away from (and back) home, and elements of Exodus and heroes/heroines.\textsuperscript{40} This can be because of the increased interest in the Holocaust in the Western world, and because the narratives have become more and more stereotypical.

Although the interviewers of the Raoul Wallenberg project used questionnaires to avoid stereotypes, it is impossible to entirely avoid the problem. Some of the informants had never spoken about their experiences, but some of them had given several interviews or even written about their recollections. Stereotypes can manifest themselves in the stories of a happy, uncomplicated childhood. Many survivors describe their pre-war lives as glorious years, in contrast to the war period and the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{41} This is fully understandable, as the change during these years was of great significance for them – it was a question of life and death. Yet it is important to keep in mind that these positive childhood descriptions can sometimes be exaggerated.

The fifth and last aspect discussed here is the importance of the sources. Even though the source material is not representative for the entire Hungarian Jewish community, there are some details that seem to be of general significance, at least for the Jews of Budapest. Some details concern isolated events or exceptions and cannot lead to any general conclusions, but they are still of great importance for a thorough, comprehensive study. Historian Maria Ågren chooses to speak about the relative importance of the sources instead of representativeness. She argues that we need to know whether a phenomenon is central and important, or unusual and peripheral. Specific sources may be important even though they are not representative. Ågren writes that often, but not always, this importance can be estimated and backed up with qualitative arguments.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{38} Nevertheless, it has been difficult to discern differences between the Hungarian and American interviews in general, thus I have chosen to use and analyze all of the interviews.
\textsuperscript{39} Levi (1989), pp. 11–12.
\textsuperscript{40} See Anders Ohlsson, “Men ändå måste jag berätta”. Studier i skandinavisk förintelselitterature (Nora: Nya Doxa, 2002), p. 41 and chapter 2. Ohlsson argues that there is a mainstream Holocaust literature, but he also points out that there are several exceptions to this. See also Raul Hilberg, “I Was Not There”, in Writing and the Holocaust, ed. Berel Lang (New York & London: Holmes & Meier, 1988), p. 18.
\textsuperscript{41} Ohlsson (2002), p. 41 and chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{42} Ågren (2005), p. 257.
Memory and narrative

Before entering the second part of this thesis, a few words should be said about memory and narrative. Bos argues that the differences between female and male testimonies can be explained on three levels: “men and women experience, remember, and recount events differently.” Thus the differences in experiences found in the source material are highlighted by the differences in how women and men remember and/or describe their experiences and events. Bos stresses that what survivors express “reflects their version of reality, filtered in part through the changing lens of trauma (that what cannot be told), time (bringing both ageing and the possibility for reflexive distance), the psychological process of self-preservation, and the narrative conventions of that process.” Bos also argues that the choice of what is told is most often gendered, as one’s self-image is highly coloured by one’s sex. This is a result of the gender socialization of human beings. S. Lillian Kremer’s remarks on Holocaust writing support Bos’s conclusions. Kremer argues that language is not gendered in general, yet women narrate female-centred stories and men male-centred. The emphasis is on issues that are of significance for the individual, which are highly influenced by gender.

Anders Ohlsson has noted that male Holocaust authors describe themselves as active individuals in their narratives. Ohlsson claims that while men see themselves as agents able to influence the events, women describe their limited living conditions and their dependence on others. This supports the idea of gender socialization, which becomes apparent in the narratives. Gendered patterns are also discernible in the Raoul Wallenberg material. Women often relate their memories in greater detail. They also give more details about their feelings and personal, intimate experiences, while men tend to describe events chronologically, politically and with less personal detail. There are of course exceptions, but generally, men leave their feelings outside the narrative, probably as a result of gender socialization. According to the masculinity ideal of the twentieth century, it has not been acceptable for men to show their feelings. Men also more often describe themselves as active agents, just as Ohlsson has pointed out.

46 Ohlsson (2002), pp. 120–121.
47 See Mosse (1996), chapter 2.
It is significant to have this discussion in mind when studying narratives. What are the differences seen in them, and what are the reasons behind these differences? It can be argued, however, that gender is not the only possible explanatory factor. Bos’s three levels can be applied to eyewitness testimonies from people of different ages as well. Children obviously experience, remember, and recount their memories differently from adults. The same can be said of people from different social classes, too. It is most likely that social class, as well as political affiliation and religious orientation, can also affect a narrative, due to the person’s education, earlier experiences of expressing oneself, political convictions, belief, etc.

Therefore, it is not only the ways in which individuals experience events that vary: memory and ways of narration can also differ from person to person. The differences lie mainly in what types of information are best remembered. This depends for instance on differences in the social construction of gender, which also shapes one’s interests to a certain degree. People tend to remember details that they are interested in. Consequently, identity-forming multiple factors affect our personal reminiscences, and the ways in which we recount our memories.

In sum, when it comes to the Holocaust and the perspective of the victim, personal reminiscences in form of interviews, and eyewitness reports are of particular value. Other sources may be useful if one wants to know something about the perpetrators, their motives, or the organization behind the destruction process, but for the purposes of this study, sources based on memory are the most appropriate. The information in the interviews is valuable since it brings up details concerning how the Jewish individuals perceived and subjectively reacted to the events. Aspects of gender, age, and social class often appear, which is not always the case with other types of source material.

PART TWO

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION
BEFORE 1944
CHAPTER 3
A Short History of the Hungarian Jewry: From Emancipation to Antisemitism, 1867–1943

Nowhere else in Europe were Jews more actively encouraged to assimilate and to participate in modernisation. And nowhere else was the move from inclusion to exclusion faster and more dramatic.¹

Vera Ranki

In order to widen our understanding of how discrimination and the Holocaust affected the victims’ experiences, it is essential to place the events into a historical context. This chapter deals with the history of the Hungarian Jewry, concentrating on issues of assimilation and antisemitism, especially the institutionalized antisemitism manifested in the Hungarian anti-Jewish legislation.

The Holocaust was a major catastrophe for modern European society, not just for Jews living in countries ruled by the Nazis and their collaborators. In this regard, the Holocaust in Hungary was not only a Jewish catastrophe, but also a Hungarian one, and affected the entire society. Hungarian politicians took part in passing and enforcing anti-Jewish laws, and collaborated with the Nazis during the German occupation in 1944. The Hungarian Gendarmerie (military police) actively participated in the deportations, the Nyilas (the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross Party) persecuted and murdered thousands of Jews, and ordinary Hungarians stood by, watching their fellow citizens reduced to second-class citizens and finally getting deported. Certainly there were resisters, but unfortunately they were few.²

The Holocaust was a Hungarian matter also because of the fact that the Jewish presence in Hungarian society was so visible. The Jews had been living on Hungarian soil for centuries. Sources from the mid-eleventh century inform us of Jewish inhabitants in Esztergom, a city some thirty miles northwest of Budapest. It is also known that already during the Roman period Jewish

soldiers and merchants had visited, if not stayed in, the area. This Jewish presence influenced Hungarian society. In the same way, Hungarian society influenced its Jewish members. Many of them saw themselves as true Hungarian patriots. The Jews were intertwined with the rest of the Hungarian nation. They were a part of it, whether they were assimilated or not. Consequently, a sudden disappearance of half a million of the nation’s citizens must have caused tangible losses to society.

Emancipation and the Golden Era

As in most other European countries, the Hungarian Jews were generally regarded as alien, or as “the other”. The Jews did not have any rights or privileges until 1867, and antisemitic attitudes and actions were common in eighteenth and nineteenth century Habsburg society. The Ausgleich [compromise] of 1867 divided the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy into two constitutionally equal parts, meaning that Hungary acquired sovereignty and its own legislative institutions. The Hungarian Jewry was emancipated when the equality of all citizens was proclaimed in the legal Act 1867:XVII: “The Israelite inhabitants of the country are declared equally entitled to the [same] practice of all civil and political rights as the Christian inhabitants.”

Many Jews regarded this law as “the well-deserved recognition of their devotion to the Hungarian fatherland”, and as a confirmation that they were just like all other Hungarians, “differing only in religion.” These Jews continued to regard themselves as Jewish Hungarians and went on with their struggle for further inclusion into Hungarian cultural and political life. However, it is important to stress that the Hungarian Jewish minority was not homogeneous. Their national identity, “religiousness”, and social class varied. One indication of this fact was the religious schism in 1868, when the assimilationist, more secularized Jews and the Orthodox Jews could not agree on a unitary communal organization. The Hungarian Jewry was split into three factions: Neolog (reform or liberal Jews), Orthodox, and “Status Quo” (a small faction in between the Orthodox and the Neolog). In practice, the outcome of the split was that parishes were divided not only by territory, but also by these

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three different groups, each having their own synagogues and rabbis. The majority of the Neolog congregations were located in Budapest and in other regions of Trianon Hungary, whereas most of the Orthodox Jews lived in the Eastern provinces. The Neolog Jews identified themselves more often as Magyar (Hungarian) than did the traditional Orthodox Jews.

In spite of emancipation, assimilation was hard, if not impossible. Although formal segregation ended in 1867, antisemitic attitudes and actions did not disappear. Several researchers indicate the difficulties that followed the emancipation in the new Dual Monarchy. In fact, antisemitism grew as the importance of the Jewish middle class increased. Historian Tibor Frank writes that Jews who had monetary resources could now invest their capital in commerce, and they soon became a vital part of the country’s economy. The richest of these Jews either received or bought noble titles, and often sent their children to universities. Another reason behind the antisemitic currents was the increased Jewish immigration from the East, as a result of the more tolerant legislation in Hungary.

The blood libel trial in Tiszaeszlár in 1882 is one of the examples showing that antisemitism persisted in Hungarian society. Public and political agitation against the Jews became more frequent, an antisemitic party was established, and violent anti-Jewish actions were instigated in several localities. According to Raphael Patai, antisemitic attitudes culminated in 1885. The famous former politician Lajos Kossuth (living in exile in Turin) and the archbishop Haynau protested loudly against all kinds of antisemitic activities, after which the anti-Jewish attitudes and actions started to decrease. The economy improved significantly during the late 1880s, which further calmed down the hostility

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7 One of the issues the Congress was unable to agree upon was the sermon language. Reform Jews (mostly from Budapest) preferred Hungarian, while the Orthodox Jews advocated Yiddish. The number of Neolog Jews in Hungary has most often been higher than the number of Orthodox. The Status Quo Jews were always in minority, about 5 per cent of the Jewish population. See, for example, Kinga Frojimovics, “Who Were They? Characteristics of the Religious Trends of Hungarian Jewry on the Eve of Their Extermination”, in Yad Vashem Studies, 35 (2007); Ranki (1999), pp. 80–81; Braham (1994), vol. 1, pp. 86–87; Mendelsohn (1987), p. 90.
12 One of the main proponents of the anti-Jewish movement was Győző Istóczy. He published a periodical titled Tizenkét Rópirat (Twelve Pamphlets), which served as a forum for his antisemitic agitation. He also established the above-mentioned antisemitic party, but his attempts to build up a larger anti-Jewish movement failed. See Patai (1996), chapter 31; Ranki (1999), pp. 63–68.
against the Jews. The antisemitic party broke into two, and by 1892 both of these segments had disappeared from the Hungarian political scene.\textsuperscript{13}

The period between 1867 and the First World War has been labelled the “Golden Era” for the Jews in Hungary. This is true to a certain extent, since the position of the Jewish minority improved radically after 1867. Despite antisemitism, many Jews acquired better living conditions. They participated in Hungarian cultural and educational life, which was encouraged by the government. The Jews played an important part in the “magyarization” process, i.e. the creation of a homogeneous Hungarian nation state. Braham argues that emancipation was not so much a result of the Enlightenment, but primarily of the idea of Hungarian nationalism, and that many Jews realized that “complete assimilation and magyarization was the price they had to pay for their emancipation.”\textsuperscript{14}

The last step in the emancipation process was the legal equalization of the Jewish faith with other religions in 1895. In the receptió (Law 1895:XLII) the Jewish religion was declared an accepted religion, conversion to Judaism was made legal, and mixed marriages were allowed. During the two decades to come, the Hungarian Jews could lead relatively wealthy and normal lives. Hungary seemed to be a “paradise” for Jews, and large numbers of Jewish individuals integrated into Hungarian society. This was mostly the case in Budapest and bigger towns in the Western parts of Hungary, less so in the East and in the countryside where many Orthodox Jews lived.\textsuperscript{15} And as the ratio of the urban Jewry increased, so did the ratio of assimilated Jews (see table 3.1.). In other words, religious orientation and geographical location affected the assimilation process to a large extent.

\textbf{Table 3.1. Urbanization of the Hungarian Jewry in 1830–1946}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Jews in Hungary</th>
<th>Rural Jewry %</th>
<th>Urban Jewry %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>203,815</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>707,961</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>63.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>473,355</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>725,007</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>143,624</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HJA, XVIII-A, 72.100.3: Excerpt from the Publications of the Statistical Department of the World Jewish Congress, Hungarian Section, p. 6. The sudden decline in numbers in 1920 is explained by the territorial losses of the First World War. Hungary regained parts of the lost territories in the beginning of the Second World War, which explains the high numbers in 1941.

\textsuperscript{13} Patai (1996), p. 357.
\textsuperscript{14} Braham (1994), vol. 1, p. 8.
The Hungarian women’s movement emerged, as in other European countries, alongside with the urbanization and assimilation processes during the late nineteenth century. Many of the women’s associations attracted Jewish members or were totally Jewish, for instance the Pesti Izraelita Nőegylet [Israelite Women’s Organization in Pest]. This organization was active in 1866–1943, and according to Julia Richers, its aim was to deal with problems specific to women and to support Jewish women in need. Richers writes that the organization’s importance rested not only on charity work, but also on the daily meetings through which networks were created.

In 1895, the same year as freedom of religion was promulgated, women were welcomed to universities, but they only had access to the faculties of philosophy and medicine, and pharmacy studies. At the turn of the century, the percentage of women attending universities was noticeably smaller than that of men. Nevertheless, among the Jewish population, women participated to a greater extent in higher education. It seems that the historically traditional Jewish view on the value of education was now accepted even for women. Many Jewish middle class women received an education, and were highly aware of their political and social position.

Historian Andrea Pető has noted that wealthy Jewish middle class families restricted their reproduction rate in the late nineteenth century. She writes: “If only one or two children were born, and she or they turned to be accidentally girl, then the girl was educated as a boy. The same education, except [for] one important factor: without religious instruction.” This partly explains the high ratio of Jewish female students in higher education in the early twentieth century. These women “entered the very male world of professionals” and learnt how the patriarchy operated. According to Pető, the social democratic, the feminist, and later the communist movements attracted Jewish women, and “opened up social and political space for assimilation and an escape route from religious norms and duties” in modern society. But even though women gained access to higher education and the labour market, the ideal of the male breadwinner was prominent in the Hungarian middle class during the first part

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16 By the end of the nineteenth century, as many as 800 women’s organizations were registered. See Judit Acsády, “Remarks on the History of Hungarian Feminism”, in Women and Hungary (1999), p. 2. See also Ranki (1999), pp. 36–37. One of the largest women’s associations in the early twentieth century was the Nőiztiszteselők Országos Egyesülete [National Federation of Women Clerical Workers], which aimed at defending working women’s interests. The first Hungarian feminist movement, the Feministák Egyesülete [the Feminists’ Association], was founded in 1904.


of the twentieth century. Women who worked did that only for a few years before getting married. After that, they were supposed to be in charge of a well-organized household.21

Interestingly, antisemitism and feminism collided when it came to the question of female suffrage. According to Mária M. Kovács, Hungarian feminists had a breakthrough in 1917, when Vilmos Vázsonyi from the liberal party was appointed to implement an electoral reform. Vázsonyi’s proposal included female franchise, even though it was restricted to women with a middle-school education. However, Vázsonyi’s bill was contested by the Christian socialists, who had analyzed census data. According to them, “40 per cent of all women (260,000) to be enfranchised by the bill belonged to minority populations: 26 per cent of them were of the Jewish faith”. One voice in the parliament stated: “The unfortunate reality is that the higher the educational standards are set, the more disproportionate advantage we give to the Jews.” The chair person of the Keresztényszocialista Nőegyesület [the Christian Socialist Association of Women], Edith Farkas, demanded in the organization’s newspaper Keresztény Nő [The Christian Woman] that “there either be no female vote, or if it is to be introduced, our Christian women with their sober mentality be included.” Mária M. Kovács concludes that the controversy concerning female franchise became visible at the intersection of ethnicity and gender.22 The importance of social class should also be noted, since the Hungarian middle class by this time consisted predominantly of Jews.23 By setting educational restrictions on the vote, a large number of non-Jewish, low-educated women and men were excluded, while the middle class Jewry proportionally gained more votes.24

From inclusion to exclusion: the First World War as a watershed

In spite of the Hungarian Jews’ struggle and the efforts made by the Hungarian government to include them as part of society, they never became fully accepted as Hungarians. The Jewish minority remained “the other”, opposed to the “real” Hungarians. Yet the Jews were a minority among many others. The Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary stretched from Croatia in the south to

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22 All quotes are found in Kovács (2003), pp. 82–84.
24 Literate Hungarians (both women and men) who had been citizens for at least six years, over the age of twenty-four, with permanent residence in Hungary for at least six months, received suffrage in 1920. This meant that about 75 per cent of the population over the age of twenty-four was enfranchised (about 40 per cent of the population in total). See Pető (1997), p. 154; Kovács (2003), pp. 85–86. Universal suffrage was not introduced until 1945.
Slovakia in the north, and from Northern Italy in the west to Carpathia in the east, and consequently included a myriad of national minorities. Hungary was a multicultural country, but this was about to change in conjunction with the First World War.

In general, the Hungarian Jews welcomed the Great War enthusiastically, and Jewish investors partially financed the war. Approximately 300,000 Jewish men enlisted in the army, eager to show their commitment to the country. Jewish physicians served in the field hospitals and the public regarded them as heroes. However, Hungary was among the defeated in the First World War, and the Dual Monarchy was dissolved. A series of political upheavals followed, which affected the Jews to a large extent. The new moderate left wing government failed to enforce promised social reforms, and the emergence of the Communist Party caused the regime political problems.

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In March 1919, a communist republic was created under the leadership of Béla Kun. Kun and his regime introduced socialism and carried out a large number of radical changes within a few weeks. This transition went quite easily, due to the patriotic atmosphere in the country and the unity and support of the working class. However, there was a lack of raw materials and food, and the revolutionary regime lost support in the course of the events. The peasants were not given any land as they had expected, and the middle class found the expropriation of private apartments objectionable. The government took hostages and executed several hundred counter-revolutionaries during the “Red Terror”. Kun and his government also proved powerless in the peace treaty discussions. As a result of all this, the Romanian army intervened in Hungary in the summer of 1919. The Communist regime had no choice but to resign.

The counterrevolution was led by Admiral Miklós Horthy and the National Army. A period of “White Terror” followed, with numerous arrests, prosecutions, and executions. About 5,000 people were put to death and over 70,000 were arrested, many of them without trial. The new regime re-established the monarchy, but the throne remained empty. Horthy became the official regent of the country.

The White Terror hit the Hungarian Jewry particularly hard. Jews were identified as communists, partly due to the fact that Béla Kun and about half of the ministers in his government were of Jewish origin. The “Jews” were thus blamed for the socialist failure. The Jewish minority also became the scapegoat for the Hungarian defeat in the war. The Jews had “back-stabbed” their nation.

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The Jewish intelligentsia was harassed and attacked by the National Army. Approximately 3,000 of the 5,000 persons executed were of Jewish origin.\textsuperscript{29}

The peace treaty was finally signed on June 4, 1920 in Trianon, Versailles, resulting in great territorial and human losses for Hungary. The country lost 70 per cent of its territory, and 60 per cent of its total pre-war population of 20.9 million (see figure 3.1). Thus more than twelve million former Hungarian citizens remained outside the new borders, including 3.3 million ethnic Magyars and practically all of the country’s non-Magyar inhabitants. Instead of being a multicultural nation, Hungary became a homogeneous nation state with only two larger minorities, the Jews and the Germans.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure31.png}
\caption{Figure 3.1. Hungary and its Losses at Trianon 1920.}
\end{figure}


The losses were critical to the country’s Jewish minority. Almost 50 per cent (438,000 out of the pre-war Jewish population of 911,000) of the Jews no longer lived in Hungarian territory. Many of these Jews were Orthodox, and this meant that the proportion of Neolog and Orthodox Jews changed radically. In 1930, 65 per cent of the Jews were members of Neolog congregations, while only 30 per cent were Orthodox. The remaining 5 per cent belonged to the


Status Quo congregations. Now 45 per cent (215,000 out of 473,000 Jews, defined by their religious affiliation) of the Hungarian Jews lived in Budapest.\textsuperscript{31}

Consequently, those who lived in Trianon Hungary were more assimilated and secularized than the Jews who remained outside the new borders. The territorial changes altered the social structure of the Hungarian Jewry, and shifted the ratio between the Budapest Jews and the Jews in the countryside. Thus the peace treaty affected the composition of the Hungarian Jewry, when it came to social class, religiousness, and geographical origin. The Jewish minority also became more visible and vulnerable after the transition from a multicultural empire to a nation state.

Table 3.2. Hungary’s Jewish population in proportion to the total population from 1735 to 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Jews in Hungary</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1735–1738</td>
<td>11,621</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>80,775</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1805</td>
<td>126,620</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>185,075</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>203,815</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>238,848</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>339,816</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>542,279</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>624,826</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>707,961</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>826,222</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>911,227</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>473,355</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>444,567</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>725,007</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>143,624</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hungarian politics and anti-Jewish laws in the interwar years

The law of Numerus Clausus was enacted in September 1920, partly as a result of the country’s economic problems and the pressure from the dissatisfied antisemitic Christian middle class. This law stipulated that universities and other institutions of higher education could only admit Jews in proportion to their percentage of the country’s population, which at that time was nearly 6 per cent (see table 3.2). In 1914 the ratio of Jewish students in the country had been 30 per cent; hence the restrictions would bring noticeable effects. For the first time in the history of modern Hungary, antisemitism became constitutional, making the country the first in Europe to legally restrict Jewish rights since the emancipation fifty years earlier.32

The final version of the law did not mention the word “Jew”, but it was clear that the Jews were regarded as a nationality or an ethnic group.33 However, according to Mária M. Kovács, the original reason behind the bill was not to restrict the number of Jews, but the number of women in higher education. Kovács writes that “[w]omen of all ethnic and religious affiliations were to be banned from admission to make way for the male war cohorts and refugee students from the territories detached from Hungary by the peace treaty.” Awaiting the bill to be passed, the universities simply kept women from enrolling. In the meantime, the debate in the parliament was delayed. The extreme right succeeded in shifting the focus from women to the Jews, and in the end, the law restricted only the number of Jewish students. “This is how, as if by default, women became the indirect beneficiaries of the efforts of the extreme right”, Kovács concludes.34 But Jewish women were definitely not amongst the beneficiaries. As many universities already had banned women, Jewish females were excluded first as women during the First World War and then as Jews in the early 1920s. Hungarian universities were reopened for women in 1925.35

The Hungarian Jewry protested while the law was debated in the Parliament. After its ratification, they nevertheless felt that more protests would just make things worse. The League of Nations also protested, arguing that the Numerus Clausus violated international law, but Prime Minister István Bethlen referred to the burdens of the peace treaty, and claimed that the law was necessary for the country’s well-being. Jews in other parts of Europe protested in 1925, afraid of an introduction of similar laws in their countries, but the Hungarian Jews

rejected any kind of help from international organisations. They claimed that any interference from abroad would only make their situation worse. Many Jews still wanted to prove their loyalty to the Hungarian government, and any reactions against the law could be interpreted as disloyal. Eventually the League of Nations decided not to intervene, because the law was only temporary and would be abolished when the country’s economy improved. The law was in fact revised in 1927, but its significance did not change in practice.  

The Numerus Clausus thus stigmatized the Jews as an ethnic minority and kept many of them from getting the education they desired. How the law affected Jewish persons of different sexes, ages, social classes, and from different geographical locations in Hungary, is analyzed in chapter 4.

The emergence of the extreme right

Hungary’s economy eventually stabilized during the 1920s, but the great crisis of 1929 created serious new difficulties, both economic and political. Within the leading Party of Unity (the Christian Smallholders and Bourgeois Party), several subgroups began to take shape. One of them was loyal to Prime Minister Bethlen, another tried to speak for the agrarian population, while a third group gathered around the radical rightist Gyula Gömbös. This group soon became the core of the racist Party of Hungarian Independence. 

Simultaneously, other extreme right movements began to emerge. The Hungarian extreme right had been one of the most eager participants during the counterrevolution, but they had never been politically well organized. However, during the crisis of 1929–1933 they mobilized again, many of them now calling themselves national socialists. These extreme right wing movements were mainly composed of small and medium landowners and the Christian middle class, including both industrial and commercial bourgeoisie, civil servants, and army officers. Despite the differences between the extreme right groups’ policies, there were some important common features: an ambition to achieve state monopolies in order to strengthen the economy and governmental control; territorial revision of the Trianon peace treaty; antisemitism; pro-German attitude; glorification of the counterrevolution; and economic protection of the “Hungarian” middle class by reducing “Jewish” banking. All of these extreme right movements also emphasized the interests of the peasants and some kind of land reform, focusing on the confiscation of Jewish estates. It is also noteworthy that from the beginning, none of the

38 Kovács (2003), p. 86.
movements tried to include the working class in their political programmes, while this was the case in the German national socialist movement.\textsuperscript{39}

At first, these fascist and national socialist movements did not gain any substantial support. But the political situation was instable after the economic crisis and Bethlen resigned in 1931. After some political turbulence, Horthy appointed Gyula Gömbös as Prime Minister, but only after he had promised to maintain the existing governmental system and to desist from his racist and antisemitic ideas. Yet Gömbös was already known as a politician of the extreme right, and the fascist trend was strengthened by his appointment as a Prime Minister. In 1933, Hitler gained power in Germany, which also gave fuel to the Hungarian extreme right.\textsuperscript{40}

It is important to point out that there were two types of antisemitism in Hungarian interwar politics: the extreme antisemitism represented by the emerging radical right wing movement, and the more “moderate” and “civilized” antisemitism, aiming at gradual restrictions of the social and economic rights of the Jews, represented by the liberal conservatives. Many of the latter tolerated the assimilated Jews, but were opposed to so-called “Eastern”, often Orthodox, Jews.\textsuperscript{41} The “civilized” antisemitic politicians (Miklós Horthy, István Bethlen, Miklós Kállay, and Pál Teleki among others) of the 1920s were now challenged by the radical antisemitic movements.

The most well known group was gathered around the former army officer Ferenc Szálasi, who in 1935 established the Party of the National Will. In the beginning, this organization did not differ from other extreme right movements. It propagated for the restoration of the old fatherland, the abolition of the Trianon borders and the creation of a “purely Hungarian” economic system.\textsuperscript{42} Szálasi’s group of army officers developed into the largest extreme right organization in the history of Hungary.

By 1937 Szálasi had formulated his “solution of the Jewish problem” by launching the terms Hungarian and asematism. Hungarianism was a type of fascism, an idea of creating a nation of “capable” families. This nation was called “the Carpathian Danubian Great Fatherland”, and excluded all minorities. The idea of Hungarianism would be implemented through asematism, which would free Hungarian society from Jews, by forcing them out of the country. Later, in 1940, Szálasi envisioned their physical destruction in the event that national socialism became the ruling ideology in Europe.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Lackó (1969), pp. 5–11.

\textsuperscript{41} Braham (1994), vol. 1, p. 145.
Gömbös died in the autumn of 1936, and Kálmán Darányi was appointed to lead the country. The Party of National Will was prohibited and Szálási was arrested, which led to a temporary defeat for the movement. Still, the national socialist movement gained substantial support during late 1937. Efforts were made to form a coalition of the various extreme right groups, and more people from the Hungarian middle class approached the movement. By October 1937, several parties joined Szálási’s movement, now called the Hungarian National Socialist Party. Members of this party and other similar groups were popularly called Nyilas, meaning “arrow cross”. By the summer of 1938 the party had 75,000 members, and this number would soon increase to 250,000–300,000. In the 1939 elections the National Socialist Party and other fascist parties received 900,000 votes, which was approximately 25 per cent of the total suffrage.

Anti-Jewish legislation 1938–1939

One of the factors behind the rise of the Hungarian extreme right was the growing political and material support from Nazi Germany. Darányi’s government slowly turned more to the right and allowed the reorganization of the Arrow Cross movement. The political situation in Europe also affected public opinion in Hungary. The Anschluss (annexation) of Austria to Nazi Germany in March 1938 created panic in leftist, liberal, and conservative groups, while the radical right movement became more attractive for many voters.

The first explicitly anti-Jewish law was introduced a few months after the Anschluss. This law was “designed to assure more effectively the proper balance in the social and economic life” of Hungary, and reduced the proportion of Jews in free professions and civil occupations to 20 per cent. Darányi and Béla Imrédy, one of the chief architects of the law, argued that since only 5 per cent of the Hungarian population were Jews, it was acceptable to limit their participation in the country’s economic and intellectual life to 20 per cent. Liberals and Social Democrats raised their voices against this discrimination, and several well-known politicians, scientists, and artists signed a declaration of protest. However, the law was enacted, affecting 15,000 Hungarian (mainly male) Jews and their families, altogether approximately 50,000 persons. Physicians, lawyers, and engineers were some of the professions that were restricted

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47 Numerus Clausus was the first law that affected the Jews, but still, it did not mention the word “Jew” and has thus not been referred to as the first anti-Jewish law.
for the Jews, as well as professions within the press, theatres, and the movie industry.\textsuperscript{50}

Braham writes that ironically, the Jewish reaction to the enactment of the law was fairly positive. Regarding the worsening situation of the Jews in Germany and in Romania, the Jewish leaders thought that the law would please the extreme rightists and reduce the antisemitic agitation and the risk of persecution. In this way, the Jewish leaders paradoxically agreed with the antisemites. In their eyes, it was better to accept the new conditions than to fight against them, in order to keep the antisemitic attitudes as latent as possible. Consequently, from 1938 and onwards, the Hungarian Jewry was legally discriminated against on racist grounds. Twenty years of open antisemitic attitudes and actions had debilitated the ideas of “magyarization” and wiped out the Golden Era of emancipation. The radical right had gained acceptance and support in Hungarian society, and their ideology began to seep into governmental activities.\textsuperscript{51}

In addition to growing antisemitic tendencies, there were other more “pragmatic” factors motivating a new, more restrictive anti-Jewish law. One was the wish to adjust the law to the German Nuremberg laws and the second was to prevent a mass immigration of Jews from the surrounding countries.\textsuperscript{52} After the German occupation of Austria and Sudetenland, the number of Jewish refugees from these areas had increased. Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Romania had recently enacted anti-Jewish laws, which further increased the number of refugees. In addition to this, Hungary had received territories (the upper province or Felvidék) from Czechoslovakia in 1938, which had increased the number of “foreign” Jews on Hungarian territory by 78,000.\textsuperscript{53} Later, Hungary annexed a large part of Ruthenia and Transylvania in the East, as well as Bácska in the South (see figure 3.2).

The second anti-Jewish law was introduced in May 1939, under the premiership of Pál Teleki. This law restricted the participation of Jews in public and economic life to an even higher degree than the first law had done. This law, unlike the first one, provided a detailed definition of “the Jew”, explicitly on racial grounds. The Jews were stigmatized as “an alien, destructive body” within the nation. Article 1 stated that every person who belonged to a Jewish congregation was regarded as Jewish. Similarly, every person whose parents or two grandparents belonged to a congregation were Jews by law, even if he/she had converted to Christianity. Persons who had converted before the age of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Zsidótörvények (2002), pp. 23–28, \textit{1938: XV. Törvények a társadalmi és a gazdasági élet egyensúlyának hatályosabb biztosításáról} [The 1938 Law XV of More Effective Protection of the Balance in Social and Economic Life].
  \item \textsuperscript{51} Braham (1994), vol. 1, pp. 129–130.
  \item \textsuperscript{52} Mendelsohn (1987), pp. 119–124.
  \item \textsuperscript{53} Lévai (1948), pp. 13–17.
\end{itemize}
seven were exempted. Olympic champions, war heroes, university professors, and a few other categories were also exempted. These exemptions indicate that the definition was not yet entirely based on “race”, but on more or less pragmatic grounds.

The second law introduced a large number of new limitations and regulations concerning the Jews’ participation in Hungarian economy and society. The law excluded Jews from civil and municipal services and all other public institutions, and limited Jewish membership within liberal and academic professions to 6 per cent. The law also stated that Jews were not allowed to hold any controlling or influential positions in newspaper offices, theatres, or other cultural and educational institutions. Furthermore, it prohibited Jews from buying or selling land, except on terms fixed by the authorities. Jewish participation in industry, mining, banking, and insurance businesses was restricted to 12 per cent. All in all, Hungarian Jews had no security on the labour market, as they could “be dismissed at any time on short notice, and their compensation or pension depends upon the generosity of the employer.”

It should be noted that Hungary adopted laws similar to Nazi Germany, without being forced to do so. Even though Hitler and his ministers exercised influence and pressure on the country to solve “the Jewish question”, they did not dictate any of the laws enacted before 1944. Moreover, Teleki held anti-

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fascist views, but this did not prevent him from ratifying the second bill. This leads to the conclusion that antisemitism had a strong hold on Hungarian society, and that it had support not only within the extreme right movements but also in wider circles.

The anti-Jewish legislation during the Second World War

As the Second World War broke out in September 1939, Hungary declared neutrality. This neutral position lasted for a year, until November 1940, when the country joined the Axis. Hungary was gradually drawn into the war in the spring of 1941. At first, the government let Germans troops deploy on Hungarian territory and collaborate with Hungarian forces in some operations against Yugoslavia. The issue was debated not only by the military authorities, but also within several levels of society. Many politicians rejected the idea of joining the war, while some of the Hungarian military leaders demanded direct co-operation with the Germans. This debate ceased after the Soviet bombings of Kassa on June 26, 1941, and Hungary declared war on the Soviet Union. The government ordered the Hungarian forces to the borders of Romania and Yugoslavia, in order to recover former Hungarian territories lost in the Trianon peace treaty. The decision was received unenthusiastically by the masses, since the country had already given major support and resources to the war on Germany’s behalf. The memory of losses from the First World War was still there, and the Hungarian army was not strong enough to enter the war.

In 1941, the Hungarian aim was to preserve its forces as much as possible. However, the German defeat before Moscow in December 1941 forced the Hungarian military leaders to place more manpower at its ally’s disposal. In 1942, the Hungarian Second Army was subordinated to the German army and took part in operations between June 1942 and March 1943. After heavy fighting during the summer of 1942, the army reached the river Don with a line of defence of nearly 200 kilometres. In January 1943, after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, the Red Army launched major attacks on the Wehrmacht and its allies. Within a few weeks, the Hungarian Second Army had been eradicated. The losses (both killed in action and missing POWs) exceeded 100,000 of approximately 240,000 Hungarian soldiers.

Six months before the outbreak of the Second World War, the Act II of 1939 concerning national defence was ratified. Through this act, a new labour service

56 Mendelsohn (1987), p. 120.
system [munkaszolgálat] was introduced. The system was unique, as the forced labour was organized along military lines. Jewish men of military age, from 20 to 48, were called up for forced labour instead of ordinary military service. They were classified as “unreliable” and were not given the right to bear arms. Instead, they carried shovels and other tools, as they served as army engineers and workers in mine clearing operations, road constructions, and other kinds of physically heavy tasks during the war.

From the beginning, the labour servicemen were supposed to receive the same pay, clothing, and rations as the non-Jewish military servicemen, but after the outbreak of the war this changed, and the conditions became worse. Especially after Hungary had joined the war against the Soviet Union, the Jewish labourers were mistreated in different ways. They were not given any uniforms or army boots, but had to wear their own clothes. They were forced to wear a yellow armband (a white one for the converts), which made them easy targets for discrimination and abuse. Many of the commanders and guards in the labour service system became increasingly antisemitic. The brutality increased throughout the war and the draftees suffered from malnutrition, diseases, assaults, and from extreme weather conditions.60

In December 1941, there were approximately 14,500 Jewish draftees in the labour service system. In 1942, when the Second Hungarian Army was sent to the Eastern front, the number of conscriptions increased dramatically. Just the units attached to the Second Army held nearly 50,000 Jewish labour servicemen.61 Another 50,000 served within the Hungarian boarders. According to Braham, over 40,000 servicemen were killed and about 20,000 were captured by the Soviets by the end of 1943.62 According to Nathaniel Katzburg, only 6,000–7,000 of the 50,000 who were sent to the Ukraine returned, resulting in a mortality rate of over 85 per cent (including those who died as POWs in Soviet captivity).63 Despite these huge losses, many Jewish men could thank the labour service for their survival. Many of them were later saved from deportations only because they were part of this forced labour system.

When Hungary was drawn into the war it was also pressured by the Germans to take further steps towards “the solution of the Jewish question”. The third anti-Jewish law, known as the Race Protection Law, was introduced by the László Bárdossy government in August 1941 and it indicated the increasing acceptance of racial ideology. While the first two anti-Jewish laws had restricted

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61 Kramer (2000), p. 119. In June 1942, the legislation was modified to apply to all of those who were classified as Jews under the third anti-Jewish law, see p. 118 in Kramer (2000).
63 Katzburg (1981), p. 201. According to Tamás Stark, only about 25,000 Jewish labour service men were killed. The rest of the missing labourers were taken as POWs or fled abroad. See Stark 1995, p. 52; Stark (2000), p. 111.
the Jews’ economic position in society, the third one also regulated the social life of the Hungarian Jewry. It was heavily influenced by the German Nuremberg laws and prohibited “miscegenation” through mixed marriages or mixed sexual relationships.64

Mixed marriages had become fairly common during the 1920s and 1930s. The fact that the First World War had resulted in a surplus of women coincided with a change in gender patterns. More women received an education and aspired towards a modern lifestyle. Mixed marriages became socially more accepted because of the limited availability of men and the changing status of women. In 1921, 17.6 per cent of all “Jewish” marriages were mixed, and in 1937 the percentage was as high as 23.9. However, the figure dropped to 3.2 per cent in 1942, because of the third anti-Jewish bill.65

Katzburg notes that “the 1941 Race Protection Law marks the final departure from the basic concept, which had been held by successive generations ever since the first half of the nineteenth century, in favour of Jewish assimilation.”66 The third anti-Jewish law led to a further alienation and exclusion of Jews from society, making the distance from exclusion to extermination much shorter.

It is not easy to summarize the history of the Hungarian Jewry before the Holocaust in only a few paragraphs. Clearly it is a history of both assimilationist and antisemitic currents. The Jews were given economic and civil rights in 1867 and total emancipation was reached in 1895, when the Jewish religion was acknowledged as being fully accepted. The majority of the Hungarian Jews were patriotic, and worked together with the government in the late nineteenth century for the nationalist project of “magyarization” of the Hungarian Jewry and other minorities. Assimilated Jews often identified themselves as “Jewish Magyars” instead of “Magyar Jews”. The period between 1867 and the First World War is often called “the Golden Era” for the Hungarian Jewry, in spite of the existing antisemitism within Hungarian society.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Hungarian middle class had become predominantly Jewish. The emancipation had enabled a Jewish ownership of businesses and practice of professions that had previously been forbidden for the Jewish minority. This process coincided with urbanization, the emergence of the Hungarian working class, and the women’s liberation movement. The Hungarian Jewish women were active within the education system and within women’s organizations from early on.

However, the assimilationist trend of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries was interrupted by the First World War. After the revolutionary

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65 Ranki (1999), p. 117–121. See also Kaplan (1998a), chapter 3 on “mixed” families in Nazi Germany.
years 1918–1919, and the peace treaty in Trianon, the liberal, pro-Jewish period was definitely over. The Jews, the “agents of magyarization”, were suddenly a superfluous minority that did not fit into the new nation state of Hungary. As in Germany, the Jewish minority became the scapegoat, blamed for the losses in the war. Anti-Communist ideas, together with growing antisemitic attitudes, gave fuel to anti-Jewish actions during the counterrevolution. Antisemitism and extreme rightist ideas grew rapidly in the late 1920s and during the 1930s. The great losses of the First World War can partly explain this growing antisemitism. Moreover, Hitler’s success in Germany drew Hungary closer to its neighbour in the west, which also strengthened the antisemitic currents. Numerus Clausus introduced in 1920 laid the foundation for Hungarian antisemitic policy, which in the late 1930s and in the early 1940s resulted in anti-Jewish legislation with the Nuremberg laws as a model. The labour service system systematically discriminated against the Jewish males, and as a result, the Jewish families were deprived of their social, economic, and political rights. In the meantime, the war raged throughout the whole of Europe, and the German occupation of Hungary drew closer.
I was eleven when I was admitted in 1938, and I graduated in '42–'43 from the Music Academy. Then I could’ve gone on to Artist School, or Teacher Training School, but Jews weren’t allowed there, since it qualified as university. In the Music Academy the last two years qualified as university education, and there they didn’t admit Jews. […] I didn’t receive a higher degree, then I played in various Jewish bands, one of them was the Hungarian Israelite youth band.¹

This is how Edit Ernster, Holocaust survivor from Hungary, describes her chances of pursuing a higher education in the early 1940s. Her future prospects as a young Jewess were gloomy. The law of Numerus Clausus was the first legal restriction in a process which would eventually lead to the severe persecution and genocide of the Hungarian Jewry. Edit and her family survived, partly thanks to the Swedish legation in Budapest, but Edit herself, her sister, father, mother, and fiancé were all affected, albeit differently, by the anti-Jewish laws introduced by the Hungarian government.

As noted in chapters 1 and 3, earlier research has by and large focused on the political and economic effects of the anti-Jewish laws and on the reactions to these laws on a macro level.² Social class has been addressed in the literature, but questions on gender and age have received less attention, which gives relevance to the study of these categories. An analysis of multiple factors can demonstrate the complexity of the situation: the issue was not simply whether one was a Jew or not. In this chapter, the anti-Jewish laws are described and analyzed through the informants’ experiences. First, I will discuss how they perceived the laws, and second, how they reacted to them. Earlier research is also discussed parallel to the interviews, to show what findings have been previously made, and to then place these individual experiences into a larger context.

¹ RWA, F2C:1, file 004, p. 2.
² Don (1997); Don (1989); Kovács (1994).
The Numerus Clausus

How was the Numerus Clausus and its effects on Jewish females and males, from a variety of age and social backgrounds, perceived by the informants? The survivors often refer to the Numerus Clausus: 38 (or 26 per cent) out of 151 Jewish informants bring forth details concerning how they or their families were affected by the quota system. This is hardly surprising, as we know that almost 30 per cent of the total number of Hungarian students were Jewish before the First World War. In 1920, the ratio of Jewish students was restricted to 6 per cent. During the First World War and in the early 1920s, women were temporarily banned from universities to make way for male refugee students from the territories detached from Hungary. But what were the Jewish women’s possibilities of being admitted to universities after the ban was lifted? Who had the opportunity to qualify for admission under these circumstances? What do the informants tell us concerning these issues?

Naturally, admission to the universities was mainly regulated by the student’s grades from the high school [gimnázium]. But excellent results were not the only way of entering higher education. A family’s position within society and their ensuing social connections could also make a difference. György Frigyesi and Sara Gresz grew up in typical upper middle class homes. György’s father was a physician and Sara’s a bank director. Neither György nor Sara had strong enough grades to enter university based on the quota, yet both of them were admitted, through their families’ connections.

What was relevant was not being Jewish or non-Jewish, but a position on a certain social level. For instance, my father was in command of a huge amount of credit, as he was the head of the credit department. Thus, he had contacts with everyone higher or lower [than] Pál Eszterházy. What is more, good contacts. It obviously had something to do with his personality – he was on friendly terms with lots of people. The majority of his friends were Christian. [Jewishness] was irrelevant.

According to Sara’s testimony, the fathers’ and the family’s social position and networks were highly relevant in obtaining favours. This also explains the fact that Sara could continue studying at university level. Edit Ernster belonged to the middle class (her father was the director of the Orion Radio Company) but she was still not able to finish her studies. Her older sister wanted to study medicine, but failed to gain admission to a university. What is interesting is that

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4 RWA, F2C:9, file 314, p. 8; F2C:11, file 320, p. 13.
5 The Eszterházy family belonged to the nobility, and since the seventeenth century had been one of the largest landowners in Hungary.
6 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 13.
Edit’s sister was admitted to study business instead, but how she was admitted is not clear from the sources.\(^7\)

There were also exemptions. Emery Kalman’s father was sentenced to death and hanged by the Communists during the Red Terror, and because of this Emery had received documents and a medal from Horthy that proved that he was a son of a “martyr”. Emery was admitted to the University of Szeged, due to the fact that his father had died a “martyr’s death” in 1918.\(^8\)

In the context of the Numerus Clausus, the women’s situation is of great interest. Hungarian women had, as previously mentioned, been admitted to universities since 1895 and by the beginning of the new century nearly 50 per cent of all Budapest students were women. According to the historian Viktor Karády, females of Jewish origin were soon overrepresented, compared to non-Jewish women, within higher education in the country’s capital. By the time of the outbreak of the First World War, Jewish women made up 42 per cent of the female students at the University of Budapest. The ratio of Jewish males was also high at the same university, namely 35 per cent of the male students during the academic year of 1914–1915.\(^9\) This change in the circumstances of the Hungarian Jewish youth was evident, especially so for women, at least in theory. But how was this situation in practice? According to the numbers presented by Karády, 13.3 per cent of the female and 8.0 per cent of the male students at the University of Budapest were of Jewish origin in 1924–1925.\(^10\) Mária Kovács states that the total ratio of Jewish students at Hungarian universities was between 8 and 12 per cent during the entire interwar period.\(^11\) The quota of 6 per cent thus was exceeded.

T. D. Kramer writes that in 1925 the Minister of Education ordered that the quota should be “quietly ignored”, which partially explains the relatively high numbers of Jewish students.\(^12\) Another explanation is that the Jewish students were more eager to finish their studies due to the pressures and difficulties within Hungarian society. Even if the admission rate was 6 per cent, the ratio of Jewish students increased if the number of non-Jewish students who interrupted their studies was higher than the number of non-graduating students of Jewish origin.\(^13\) However, Jewish students also dropped out of their studies. Elaine Kalman Naves describes how her uncles interrupted their studies due to

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\(^7\) RWA, F2C:1, file 004, p. 3.
\(^8\) RWA, F2C:22, file 553, p. 3.
\(^12\) Kramer (2000), p. 54. The reasons for this order were that Count István Bethlen’s government was more moderate, and that the High Court discussed the legality of the law in 1925.
\(^13\) See Valdemar Langlet, *Verk och dagar i Budapest* (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1946), p. 20. Langlet was a professor at the University of Budapest in the 1930s, and was appointed Chief Delegate for the Swedish Red Cross during the Second World War.
the increasing antisemitic attitudes and actions at the university. Mrs. Miklós Váli remembers that her brother was severely beaten up at the university, but he did not give up and graduated before 1939.

Even though the system was not quite as rigid as it might seem, it is evident that the relative number of Jewish female students decreased during the interwar period because of the Numerus Clausus. It was almost impossible for any Hungarian woman to gain admission to university studies during the First World War and in the early 1920s. The universities were reopened for women in 1925.

Magda Kellner, one of the interviewees, was born in 1913. The ban on female students was already eliminated when she had finished her basic education. Although there was a tradition of higher education in her family, she did not continue on to university studies. Magda relates that her family belonged to the middle class, but because she had five siblings, the mother had to work, “supplementing” the father’s income. “My brothers, besides studying at the university, had to work, too, and among the girls I was the only one who took the final exams at the secondary school.” Thus it was the brothers who studied at a university level, while the sisters did not even finish secondary school. Why was Magda not given the chance? Were the sons prioritized when it came to education? Was this due to the breadwinner ideal?

One phenomenon that indicates that some Hungarian Jewish families prioritized their sons was that of studying abroad. Those who had neither the grades nor the connections for gaining admission to a Hungarian university had a chance of studying abroad. It became customary that Hungarian Jews sent their children to Prague, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, or other European cities to receive higher education. Nathaniel Katzburg writes that Prague accepted 1,100 Hungarian students during the academic year of 1921–1922, and Vienna about 800 in 1922–1923. Yehuda Don has shown that 1,571 Hungarian Jewish students were at universities throughout Europe in 1926. Eleven (7 per cent) out of 151 informants studied here either went on to study abroad or spoke about close relatives or friends who did so. One person was female, and in seven cases, it was male relatives or friends who studied at universities abroad. One of these persons was Edit Ernster’s fiancé. He studied medicine at the Univer-

19 RWA, F2C:1, file 001, p. 1; file 004, p. 25; F2C:14, file 333, p. 9; F2C:17, file 344, p. 8; F2C:17, file 345, p. 22; F2C:19, file 505, pp. 2–3; F2C:20, file 512, p. 3; F2C:21, file 525, p. 1; RWA, F2C:21, file 536, p. 10; F2C:22, file 547, p. 2; Weiss (2004), p. 127.
20 In three cases, the person’s sex is unknown.
sity of Sorbonne, but ironically he was not allowed to practice his profession when he finally got back to Hungary, since the anti-Jewish laws had already been introduced.  

Five of the informants recount that their brothers were given a chance to study abroad. Oli Solti, daughter of a textile merchant, tells us that her brother was given the opportunity to study in Prague, but she does not even comment on the fact that she did not receive a similar chance. Irene Abrahms had four older brothers and one sister, and all of the brothers were sent abroad to study. Irene, as the youngest daughter, had to “stay home with mother and help in the kitchen.” Irene states dejectedly that she only finished high school and that this was the “sad story” of her studies.

The possibility of studying abroad depended largely on the family’s economic circumstances, according to the informants. Even before the law of 1920, the upper and upper middle classes had a better chance of educating their sons and daughters, but it is likely that the discrepancies based on social class became more apparent after the enactment of the law. Irene Weisel recalls that even though her family was middle class and fairly well off, her father could not afford to send his three children abroad.

There are examples in the interviews of young people from families with a low income who had to choose between obtaining an education outside academia or no education at all. Edith Spiegel became a violinist and György Gabor chose to work in the wood industry. Eight other survivors account that they learnt some kind of handicraft. Stefánia Schwartz, for example, became an umbrella maker. Other women chose, for instance, to become seamstresses or milliners, while men chose an occupation such as a tailor or a locksmith. In comparison, Marion A. Kaplan has studied structural changes in occupations during the Third Reich. She shows that in Germany in the 1930s, Jewish women often studied languages, nursing, cooking, or some kind of handicraft. After the introduction of the Nuremberg laws, women found jobs as seamstresses, milliners, or domestic workers. German Jewish men were not as eager as women to find new jobs, yet many males learnt practical skills such as how to breed chickens or how to become locksmiths or tailors. Kaplan writes that German Jewish girls had only a very small chance of studying at foreign

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21 RWA, F2C:1, file 004, p. 25.
22 RWA, F2C:21, file 536, p. 10. See also testimonies from Elisabeth Vidor, Mrs. Tibor Török, and Irene Weisel in RWA, F2C:1, file 001, p. 2; F2C:14, file 333, p. 9; F2C:22, file 547, p. 2.
24 RWA, F2C:22, file 547, p. 2.
25 RWA, F2B:7, tape 541, side A; F2C:17, file 346, p. 11.
26 RWA, F2C:17, file 345, p. 12.
27 See RWA, F2C:6, file 305, p. 1; F2C:9, file 314, p. 7; F2C:19, file 501, p. 2; F2C:21, file 531, p. 3; F2C:21, file 539, p. 5; AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 94, p. 1; Fried 1992, p. 41. See also HJA: DEGOB. For example, 29 per cent of returning females from the camps were seamstresses or worked with other types of handicrafts (see appendix 3.b).
university. According to a German newspaper from 1938, “[t]he few scholarships available are only for young men.”

Another explanation as to why even Hungarian Jewish women had a smaller chance of studying abroad could be the aspect of “protecting” females. Young women were not as easily “let go” as young men. Marianne Cooper tells in an interview:

My mother was a […] leader in a feminist movement for many many years. Somebody who was, at [sic] her days, not only a graduate, a high school graduate, but somebody who had intentions of going to college and was admitted in Vienna at the university. But her father, who was also an attorney, didn’t let her go, because of her being a woman and being a Jew. That means two strikes against her. We are talking about […] 1920. It was difficult years for being both a woman and a Jew.

Marianne’s mother was a strong individual, but her father decided not to let her move to Vienna. Her comment of the difficulties of “being both a woman and a Jew” indicates that antisemitism was another reason for why she was not allowed to leave. There was perhaps a perception that young women could not protect themselves as easily as men, at least if they were abroad, far away from family and friends. When analyzing Marianne’s mother’s case in terms of multiple categories, gender combined with religion/ethnicity can be seen as the reasons as to why she did not receive the kind of education she desired. Her family would have been wealthy enough to send her to Vienna, but her father did not let her go. Perhaps her age was another factor that affected his decision. Regardless, the existing gender order seems to have created specific boundaries for young female individuals after the enactment of Numerus Clausus.

Twenty years later, antisemitism was even more present in Hungarian society. Klara Weiss, born in 1919, writes in her memoir that her father would never have let her study abroad. Klara’s family was ruined in the early 1940s due to the anti-Jewish regulations, but even if the family had had the financial possibilities, she would not have been able to move abroad, as she was a young woman from a “good family”. It is obvious that gender was of great importance in this case. But at the same time, Klara brings up another case, a young Hungarian Jewish woman from a working class family who studied at the Sorbonne, and who could actually live and study abroad because of her background. According to Klara’s description, there was a conception that it was acceptable for a young woman from the lower social classes to move abroad without a chaperon. This would have been highly questionable or even socially impossible for a young woman from a “good family”, at least when

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29 RWA, F2B:6, tape 517, side A.
regarding the situation through Klara’s father’s eyes. Social class could thus influence these young women’s possibilities in different ways. In this case, the family’s economic circumstances were not decisive, as the daughter of an upper middle class family could not go abroad, while the daughter of a working class family could. Perhaps this was the case with Marianne Cooper’s mother, too. Her family’s social position may have affected the father’s decision not to let her move to Vienna.

In addition to gender, social class, and antisemitism, religion could also be of importance regarding an individual’s experiences of the law. Irene Weisel, who could not study abroad because of the family’s financial situation, gives an example of this. She believes that another reason was because her family was “too religious”. Did this have something to do with the fact that the Neolog families were more secularized and more modern in their perceptions of society and youth? Irene perhaps had a stricter upbringing than the children of Neolog Jewish families. Klara Weiss’ father was also very religious, and although she is not referring to religion, my interpretation is that it might have been of relevance in her case, too.

A fifth category of importance was age, as has been pointed out by Mária M. Kovács. The youth, in this case the generation born around and after the turn of the century, was affected the most. The young generation of Hungarian Jews were not able to choose occupations freely, as their parents had been able to do. Finally, geographical location also mattered. It seems as if it was more difficult to get admitted through the “Jewish quota” to the universities in Budapest than to those in the provinces. This can be explained by the fact that in Budapest, the ratio of the Jewish population was far above 6 per cent. The pressure was less severe, for example, at the universities in Debrecen and Miskolc. This meant that applicants from Budapest had to be more flexible and perhaps move to another town in order to receive a higher education. Three informants in the source material mention this in their narratives.

In sum, it can be noted that the interviews and the memoirs bring up several factors which helped to shape the individual experiences of the Numerus Clausus. The informants perceived social class and the necessity of networks and money as several of the most important factors in obtaining a higher education. Gender aspects also appear in the interviews, but less obviously. In some of cases indicated here, parents preferred to educate their sons over the

31 RWA, F2C:22, file 547, p. 2.
33 In Budapest, the Jews represented approximately 20 per cent of the population, compared to an average of 6 per cent in all of Hungary. In Debrecen, about 10 per cent of the inhabitants were Jews. See The Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust, ed. Shmuel Spector and Geoffrey Wigoder (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), pp. 216, 299.
34 For example, Joseph Kovács was admitted in Miskolc instead of Budapest, which was his initial choice. See RWA, F2C:21, file 529, p. 5. See also György Bátyai and Piri Herling in RWA, F2C:13, file 328, p. 3; and F2C:21, file 532, p. 6.
daughters, in the event that the only option was costly studies abroad. This might be explained by the male breadwinner ideal during this period: it was rational to give sons a proper education since they were the future family supporters. Increasing antisemitism in the 1920s and 1930s may also have contributed to the tendency of fewer women applying for university admission, and to the fact that they were not allowed to move abroad. I argue, however, that social class and/or the level of religiousness of the young women’s families were also decisive when making such decisions.

Whatever the exact reasons were, the fact that several informants perceived the law as humiliating is obvious. Tomas Farago’s testimony illuminates this well as he states: “[M]y most painful reminder was the fact that I was not accepted into Medical School.” Tomas’s dream of becoming a physician was brutally crushed. He became a room clerk at the Hotel Royal in Budapest instead. The above discussion of the law of Numerus Clausus shows that an analysis of multiple factors is valuable when studying a process in which a minority is discriminated against because of its “race” or origin. Gender, social class, age, place, and religion could all affect individual Jewish experiences in the aftermath of the Numerus Clausus. The next step will be to look at the other anti-Jewish regulations that emerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The first and the second anti-Jewish laws

According to previous research, the discriminatory bills of 1938 and 1939 had a direct impact on many Hungarian Jewish lives. By the end of 1939, approximately 40,000 Jews were expected to lose their employment. All in all, about 250,000 persons would lose their jobs according to the second anti-Jewish law. However, according to Yehuda Don, the laws were not fully implemented.

The professions listed in the anti-Jewish regulations were white-collar workers, physicians, lawyers, engineers, and professions within the culture and media sectors. Hence persons working in these professions could be expected to lose their jobs first. Two of the informants had fathers who were quickly affected by these regulations. Valéria Nádas’s father was a journalist and lost his job in January 1939, and Magda Kellner’s father, advisor to the Hungarian

35 RWA, F2C:20, file 521, p. 3.
36 RWA, F2C:20, file 521, p. 6. See also testimonies from György Schiller, Irene Weisel, and George Sebők in RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 3; F2C:21, file 525, p. 1; F2C:21, file 531, p. 3.
37 Don (1989), p. 509. These estimates were made by two of the leading figures in the Hungarian Jewish community in 1939, Samu Stern and Sándor Eppler (president respectively secretary of the Neolog Congregation of Budapest).
government, was fired directly after the enactment of the second anti-Jewish law. But the picture is a bit more complex than it might seem at first. The regulations affected more than the listed, and some of those who should have been affected were not. Before examining the ways in which the informants perceived the anti-Jewish laws, let us start by summarizing the effects of the laws according to earlier research.

Don has concluded that the laws affected first and foremost Jewish white-collar workers in the public sector. The state authorities, including the civil service, the legal system, transportations, and the defence, acted swiftly in firing their Jewish employees. The public sector was easy to control, and thus the effect was more far-reaching and quicker here than in the private sector.

The main victims of the new regulations, besides the state employees, were the lower middle class small entrepreneurs (craftsmen, merchants), white-collar and professional employees (i.e. salaried clerks, bookkeepers, salesmen), and media employees (journalists, actors, producers etc.). Those who were not affected to the same extent as the middle and lower middle class included members of the Jewish financial and industrial nobility, large and medium producers, self-employed professionals (physicians, lawyers, engineers), and the industrial employees of the working class. Their employers were not directly connected to the public sector and the state, which made the effect of the regulations milder. However, the conditions at many work places became worse as antisemitism was legitimized by the state and grew ever stronger. Don claims that the discriminatory laws severely affected a very large segment of the Jewish community. He concludes, however, that “the rich became relatively (and often also in absolute terms) richer, while the lower middle class, the intellectuals, and the lumpenproletariat became both relatively and absolutely poorer.”

Braham comes to a similar conclusion. According to him, the lower strata were affected harshly, while those in business and industry fared better. Many businesses could survive with help from gentile co-workers or friends, who could serve as “dummies” or “straw men”, that is, as formal but not real owners. One example of this in the interviews is Klara Rosta’s husband, who could run his leather shop since the official owner was an “Aryan” friend.

Mária M. Kovács has analyzed the impact of the anti-Jewish laws on free professions. Correspondingly, she shows that the effects differed between the professions. Many lawyers of Jewish origin could continue their work until the German occupation in March 1944, while physicians found themselves in a harsher situation. These disparities were very much dependent on the role and influence of the different unions in both branches. The racist lawyer’s union,

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44 RWA, F2C:1, file 009, p. 5.
National Association of Hungarian Lawyers, did not gain much influence after 1939. Instead, a number of lawyers established and joined the National Union of Christian Lawyers, which in different ways protested and worked against the anti-Jewish legislation. A significant portion of the clients in the branch were of Jewish origin, which probably fueled these efforts.

The situation was the opposite for the physicians. The antisemitic National Association of Hungarian Doctors held a strong position, and put its efforts into getting “undesirable” Jewish colleagues drafted into labour service.45

Besides the importance of social position, earlier research has pointed out that geographical place could also shape the Hungarian Jewish experiences. The situation became especially harsh for the 242,000 Jewish inhabitants in the newly annexed territories of Southern Slovakia, Carpatho-Ruthenia, and Transylvania.46 Many of the Jews living in these areas could not verify their Hungarian citizenship, and suffered severely from antisemitism. These individuals were some of the most vulnerable victims of the discriminatory laws. For example, Jewish lawyers in these areas were forbidden to carry on their businesses after 1942, while lawyers in Trianon Hungary were spared from total exclusion thanks to the anti-racist union.47

But how did the informants perceive these laws? Thirty-one (21 per cent) of the 151 Jewish informants describe their family situation after the enactment of the anti-Jewish laws. What is obvious is that social class and occupation were decisive factors for one’s situation and future prospects, at least on a formal level. Several interviews recount the realities of unemployment and a deteriorating economy. For instance, Mrs. József Koltai worked as a textile dealer before the anti-Jewish regulations were enforced, but now she was fired. She began to sew, paid by the hour, and could earn her living this way. She also refers to her brothers, who were forced to work as unskilled workers, shop-boys or helpers.48 Margit Jarovitz’s family, of middle class origin, was also severely affected. Her father was a carpenter and owned a business in Debrecen. Margit recalls how her father was forced to close down the business and the family moved to Budapest, in order to get away from the antisemitic attitudes in their hometown. Margit started to work in a clothing factory.49 In this example, the informant perceived Budapest as a less antisemitic place than Debrecen.50

48 RWA, F2C:8, file 310, p. 4.
49 RWA, F2C:21, file 539, p. 6. Another example is Sara Gresz’s family, who moved from the provinces to Budapest because of antisemitism. She states that they were not harassed after moving to the capital. RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 9.
50 It could be argued that Jews living in the provinces felt the effects of antisemitism more than the Jews in Budapest. This can be explained by stronger antisemitic currents in the countryside, and by the fact that many Jews in Budapest belonged to the upper middle class, which was not affected as much at
Age is not referred to in the interviews at length, but should also be noted as an important factor for the Jews’ livelihood after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws. Practitioners of an occupation had to belong to the local chamber, and because of the restrictions, many young Jewish graduates did not have access to these chambers. The older, highly regarded professionals (mainly men) had a better possibility of maintaining their memberships in the chambers, and they also had well-established networks and connections. Therefore they could more easily continue their practice.

What about the children and the youth? How did they experience the anti-Jewish laws? Ten out of thirty-seven child or youth survivors recalled how the laws affected them and their families. Ivan Becker (born in 1929), remembers the changing conditions, although he cannot tell much about the family’s financial situation. Instead, his recollection is that his class was separated into two; “the Christians” and “the Jews”. Thus he experienced the antisemitic effects of the laws, but from a child’s perspective. Débórah Dwork, who has studied the experiences of Jewish children and youth, states that an exclusion from the educational system resulted in a trauma of ostracism and expulsion, and created questions of identity. Dwork demonstrates this through examples from Italy, the Netherlands, and Hungary. In the Hungarian town of Koloszvár, the Jewish children who were of school age felt segregated and stigmatized. Jewish secondary schools were organized so that the children could continue their education in a safer environment.

Anna Zafir, born in 1930, recounts that her father owned a textile factory, and that her family’s situation did not change very much. Anna’s perception is that her father could continue with his business, as the factory was of importance for the Hungarian war effort. But she also remembers that their neighbour, who owned a bakery, lost his license and had difficulties surviving. Her uncle’s wood industry business disappeared, too, but she was not able to explain why.

Éva Szilágyi, born in 1927, construes her own situation in the following words: “mankind is selfish, a child only notices things that directly affect him or her.” She remembers that her family was lucky, as her father did not lose his employment at an iron and steel factory after the enactment of the first and

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first, while Jews in the provinces more often belonged to the lower social strata. See Mendelsohn (1987), pp. 99–102 on demographics and socio-economics in Interwar Hungary.


52 Child survivors: RWA, F2C:1, file 003, p. 3; F2B:6, file 517, tape 1, side A; F2C:21, file 534, p. 12; F2C:21, file 540, p. 8; F2C:22, file 558, p. 7; Siegal (2003): Youth survivors: RWA, F2C:1, file 005, p. 15; F2C:19, file 504, p. 10; F2C:20, file 508, p. 2; F2C:11, file 320, p. 34.

53 RWA, F2C:19, file 508, p. 2. See also F2C:21, file 534, p. 12.


second anti-Jewish laws. She had the impression that there was no massive unemployment among the Jewry.56

When studying the gender related effects of these laws, it is certain that men were affected more directly than women, since men dominated the labour market. The fact that many men lost their work could in turn lead to gender related changes within the family, since parents then had to find ways of supporting their families together. In the upper stratum men could still support their families, as they sometimes could maintain their employment or business, as we have seen the above-mentioned case concerning physicians. Families in the upper social classes often had other valuable assets, such as savings and property, that they could sell. But the families in the lower and lower middle classes found themselves in trouble, and women had to take on more responsibility and find a job in order to be able to support the family.

Nechama Tec has shown that similar changes became evident in Poland, as many Jewish males got depressed and paralyzed when they lost their jobs and their role as family supporters. Kaplan has explored the same type of patterns in her study of the German Jewry.57 Do any of the Hungarian survivors refer to comparable circumstances? Only a few references can be found. Valéria Nádas’s father – the above-mentioned journalist – was fired, and after that she supported the family. She tells about her father:

I suppose he tried to find some employment, but he didn’t succeed. […] Maybe it could have been possible to succeed in some private undertaking, but my father, who otherwise was an excellent and highly educated man, was not agile enough to start such a thing.58

Bill Basch’s testimony also hints at some kind of loss of dignity, even though his father was not “paralyzed”. He remembers the period when his father had to report for forced labour. In the beginning, he was allowed to come home on leave, and he could still carry on with his business. But then the restrictions concerning trading with lumber became total. Bill’s father did not become paralyzed, but started to sell homemade wine and raised angora rabbits. This was, according to Bill, “quite a come-down for him”.59 Even though Bill does not say it explicitly, it is likely that this “come-down” must have affected his father’s dignity and self-esteem, but it did not result in being incapable of solving the problem.

56 RWA, F2C:1, file 005, p. 16. Quote from p. 15.
58 RWA, F2C:10, file 315, p. 7. See also F2C:21, file 531, p. 6, where George Sebök mentions that his father became very bitter when he was fired, and F2C:11, file 320, p. 34, where Sara Gresz speaks about her father, who had difficulties in adjusting to the new situation after he was fired.
From 1939, and especially after 1941 when Jewish men were to a greater extent called up in the labour forces, gender relations underwent certain changes. The division of responsibilities was altered by the absence of the men, and the women had to make decisions and support the household, as perceived by some of the informants. Marianne Cooper recounts that her father had a law business, which he had to give up in 1942 or 1943. A Christian friend officially took over the firm, but when Marianne’s father was conscripted, the mother had to run the business.\(^{60}\) The testimonies also reveal that the families solved these problems in different ways. Some entrusted their businesses to their non-Jewish male friends or colleagues, who took over the responsibility of supporting the family. This shows that even in the highly antisemitic Hungarian society, the anti-Jewish laws met with private resistance from some of its citizens. If help from non-Jews was impossible, the women then started to work, for example, within the war industry and in factories (see figure 4.1.). Nine out of seventy-one female informants testify to this.\(^{61}\) Margit Jarovitz recalls:

I started to work in a cloth factory. […] There was a lot of Jews there because that was all […] they could do, work in a factory or somewhere. We worked there till almost the last minute, before the occupation and before we wore the yellow star. But then we could not work anymore nowhere [sic]. So we worked at home, we had a [sewing] machine.\(^{62}\)

It is important to note that not only the occupations listed in the laws were affected. The laws resulted in increasing antisemitic attitudes, and many Jewish private companies and shops were affected. For instance, Stefánia Schwartz tells how her father’s café went bankrupt. He started to work as a croupier in a restaurant instead.\(^{63}\) Kate Wacs’s family owned a private steel business, and the business was severely affected by the growing antisemitic attitudes of the customers.\(^{64}\)

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\(^{60}\) RWA, F2B:6, tape 517, side B. See also Kaplan (1998a), p. 61 on how the deteriorating situation in Nazi Germany resulted in further “role reversals” of gender.

\(^{61}\) See RWA, F2C:6, file 306, pp. 20–22; F2C:10, file 315, p. 7; F2C:19, file 502, p. 6; file 505, p. 9; F2C:20, file 508, p. 8; F2C:21, file 525, p. 8; file 532, p. 9; Magda Szanto (1958), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 771, p. 4; Siegal (2003), pp. 17, 61–65, 119. See more of this in the sections concerning the labour service system, chapters 5 & 7.

\(^{62}\) RWA, F2C:21, file 539, pp. 6–7.

\(^{63}\) RWA; F2C:17, file 345, p. 10.

\(^{64}\) RWA, F2C:1, file 003, p. 4.
It is nevertheless important to point out that many Hungarian Jewish families could live under normal conditions even after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws. About half (sixteen out of thirty-one) of the informants who mention the anti-Jewish laws say that they were not affected by them. Eight of these sixteen persons belonged to the upper middle class, with fathers who had occupations such as bank manager, lawyer, or senior counsellor, while eight persons belonged to the middle class.  

One of the examples is Agnes Sereni’s father, who was an antiques dealer and owned several profitable stores during the war years. The family belonged to the upper middle class, and Agnes remembered that the anti-Jewish laws did not affect them until 1944. In the same way, György Schiller could keep his business, a private small shop, alive. György’s perception was that his family did not feel the impact of the anti-Jewish laws at all, apart from the feeling of uncertainty about their future.

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65 RWA, F2C:1, files 004 and 005; F2C:6, file 305; F2C:7, file 307; F2C:8, file 311; F2C:10, file 315; F2C:11, file 320; F2C:17, file 346; F2C:18, file 349; F2C:19, file 504; F2C:20, file 507; F2B:6, file 517; F2C:21, files 534 and 540; F2C:22, file 558; F2D:1:2, file 1111.
66 RWA, F2C:19, file 504, p. 10.
67 RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 8. See also RWA, F2D:1:2, file 1111, p. 3.
Ervin Forester’s parents continued to work after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws. His mother owned a piano shop, which was closed after the German occupation. Ervin’s father’s employer liked him so much that he was not discharged from his fairly high position at the National Institute for Social Insurance, not until the Arrow Cross came to power in October 1944.68 This was probably an individual exception, but it seems, again, as if the laws were not always adhered to: the fates of the Jewish employees depended very much on the decisions and the attitudes of their employers. Moreover, contacts helped, according to the testimonies.69 One group who enjoyed exemptions, irrespective of contacts, was those who were veterans of the First World War.70

A final example of families who were exempted is Marianne Kutner’s. The family belonged to the upper class, and her father owned a factory which had a contract with the Hungarian state. When the interviewer asked about her father’s business and whether it was affected by the anti-Jewish laws, Marianne replied: “No, no. Well, naturally he knew how to do it. […] He got around it.”71 So even though the first and second law affected the Jews harshly, many Jewish men, especially in the private sector, could still work and provide for their families’ wellbeing. This was very much dependent on social class and the networks the family had created. Families from the upper and upper middle classes had greater chances of continuing with their usual life style. The informants of these families reported that they could maintain their income level, and of those who could not, they still had some savings to support their families.72 The situation was thus similar to that of the Jewish population in Nazi Germany 1933–1938. Marion A. Kaplan writes: “Only wealthier Jews had the options that allowed them to maintain the illusion of normalcy.” They had the financial means to circumvent at least some of the anti-Jewish laws.73 In the Hungarian Jewish families referenced here, this “illusion of normalcy” was also retained, but as the war continued and antisemitism grew stronger, the situation gradually deteriorated for these wealthier families as well.

68 RWA, F2C:18, file 349, pp. 2–3. See also RWA, F2C:1, file 004, p. 4: Even though the Numerus Clausus affected both Edit Ernster and her sister, they did not feel the effects of the first and the second anti-Jewish laws. Edit’s father could keep his job as a director of the Orion Radio Company. The board of directors decided to employ several “Christians” to balance the quota between Jews and non-Jews, and thus avoided having to fire Jewish workers.
70 For example, Péter Nádas’s father continued to work in a bank until 1943. See RWA, F2C:6, file 305, p. 7. Claudia Koonz has shown that there were similar exemptions in Nazi Germany, where First World War veterans and their children could circumvent the different anti-Jewish regulations enacted in the 1930s. Koonz (1987), p. 360.
71 RWA, F2C:21, file 540, p. 8.
72 See F2C:19, file 503, p. 2; F2C:19, file 507, p. 6; F2C:21, file 525, p. 9; F2C:21, file 534, p. 12.
The third anti-Jewish law

The third anti-Jewish law of 1941 was heavily influenced by the German Nuremberg laws and forbade “miscegenation” through mixed marriages and mixed sexual relationships. Theoretically, it may be argued that the third anti-Jewish law, also called the Race Protection Law, affected all persons of Jewish origin, regardless of gender, age, social class, or geographical origin. However, the implementation of the third law varied just as it did with the two first laws, and the resulting practical consequences were not always in accordance with the law.

The importance of the category of age must be emphasized. Young individuals of “marrying age”, namely those born during and after the First World War, became the main targets of this law. According to the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress, there were 199,347 non-married Jewish persons in Hungary in 1930, of which 103,846 were of “marrying age”. Children and the elderly were affected the least, while single adults had their private lives being restricted by the Race Protection Law. Furthermore, those who were already in mixed marriages found themselves in a peculiar and humiliating situation, since they were suddenly forbidden to have sexual relationships with their spouses. Nathaniel Katzburg argues, however, that the law had little influence in practice, since the Hungarian Jewish communities in general disapproved of mixed marriages. “But from a moral point of view, the Law had a most humiliating effect”, Katzburg concludes.

Only two of the informants refer to this specific law at length. John Tiszavari is one of them. He was a youngster at that time, and had a relationship with a “Christian” woman while he served as a labour serviceman in the Hungarian Army. Tiszavari tells about the consequences of this “crime” in his interview:

[We were] all young and what did we care? We didn’t. So, you know, […] we met some nice young ladies and run [sic] around with them. This time after work when we were free. And then suddenly, I remember we were called in a big… that was my first experience of persecution, basically. Of course, not talking about it that I wasn’t in the army, but I was in a work camp, which already certainly was part of the persecution. But we… we were called up and we had to stay in line. And Hungarian gendarmes […] came in and said, Ah we hear that you guys are running around with Hungarian women, and that’s against the law, and we want to know who it was. So of course nobody said who it was. And they picked out then the platoon leaders [and] I was one too. […] So they took us out and then the gendarmes… We said of course we don’t know

anything and that’s not true. What else can we say? And then they started to beat us with the... the... with their guns and... that... then they left.\textsuperscript{77}

Even though their alleged crime could not be proven, Tiszavari and his comrades certainly felt the effects of the law.

Emery Kalman, a lawyer of Jewish origin, defended some of the individuals who were prosecuted according to the Race Protection Law. His perception was that the law only affected Jewish men, and not Jewish women or gentile men who were involved in mixed relations. According to him, this law was “the most immoral law Hungary ever had.” Emery once defended an acquaintance from the forced labour service, who had been denounced by his neighbour for having a relation with a gentile woman. These two had lived together for many years, and had several children, but they were not married due to the fact that one of them was divorced. Emery recounted the details of the case:

I told him, ‘We cannot deny you have three children, but you have to say, both of you, [under] oath, that since the law was enacted you are law-abiding citizens and never since [then] you were together. You even slept in the same room, but you didn’t touch each other.’ So they testified to that effect, so the prosecutor said, ‘Who is the fool who would believe that, that a man sleeps with a woman and [they] don’t touch each other?’ The judge said, ‘I am the fool. You didn’t prove anything, and these people have two testimonies here. So what are you talking about? You didn’t prove anything.’ And he acquitted him, my fellow. That was a great success of my... my defence.\textsuperscript{78}

This example shows how degrading and, at the same time, ridiculous the Racial Law was. People who were already married or lived in a marriage-like relationship could be prosecuted for having “mixed” sexual relationships. In this case, the judge was not antisemitic, and resisted the law, acquitting the prosecuted from all charges. This case also shows that it is impossible to know how far-reaching the actual impact of the law was. The effects depended greatly on one’s neighbours, the prosecutors, and the judges. Nevertheless, the humiliation was obvious, even though not all mixed relations and marriages were reported to the authorities.

Emery is perhaps right when he states that the law affected Jewish men to a greater extent than Jewish women. Marion A. Kaplan writes in her book about Jewish experiences in Nazi Germany that men were punished more severely than women, because it was believed that “in adulterous relationships men were the determining component.”\textsuperscript{79} It was thus assumed that the male was “active”, while the female was “passive” in such a relationship.

\textsuperscript{77} RWA, F2C:22, file 543, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{78} RWA, F2C:22, file 553, p. 7.

Jewish reactions to the laws: discussing emigration

The survivors were in most cases asked about how they felt or reacted to the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws. They were also often asked whether they or their families ever considered emigrating from Hungary. Thirty-seven (or 25 per cent) of the 151 informants give detailed comments on this issue. The answers vary. It seems that in general there were two types of reactions towards emigration: negative or positive. A third (twelve out of the thirty-seven) of the informants say that they did not even consider leaving Hungary. This is motivated by simple optimism in four cases; the subjects found it just unbelievable that anything could happen to the Hungarian Jewry. Three persons refer to their position and social class, as they felt they could not leave their leadership roles or the comfortable life style. Two informants refer to earlier experiences. One person had been to Denmark in her teens and was so homesick then that she decided to never leave Hungary again. Another person speaks about her aunts who had been living abroad, and who had negative experiences from that time. Three persons explain their reluctance to emigrate because of their young age, a lack of financial means, a lack of manual work experience, and a wish to remain with their family.

Another third (twelve out of thirty-seven) of the informants speak about emigration in clearly positive terms, but in spite of this they did not leave the country, for various reasons. Six of them did not want to leave family members behind, and three of them did not have the economic means. One person was forbidden to emigrate by his father, even though he had received a scholarship at a university in Canada. Two of the survivors relate that they already had received visas and were supposed to leave the country, but by then it was too late to cross the border.

The last third (thirteen of the informants) do not give their own opinions but instead describe how their parents or spouses reacted. Most often the parents could not agree on this matter, and stayed in Hungary throughout the war. Reasons given in this context were patriotism (three fathers), a lack of money (two fathers), an unwillingness to split up the family or leave relatives (one husband, one father and three mothers), language problems (one father), the fact that the family could not get a visa, or that they simply could not believe the

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80 RWA, F2C:7, file 307, p. 22; F2C:8, file 311, p. 8; F2C:13, file 325, pp. 13–14; F2C:22, file 551, p. 5.
81 RWA, F2C:12, file 324, pp. 20–21; F2C:20, file 513, p. 6; F2C:21, file 525, p. 6.
82 RWA, F2C:5, file 302, pp. 1–2; F2C:7, file 306, p. 43.
83 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, pp. 23–24; F2C:20, file 524, p. 5; F2C:22, file 547, pp. 4–5.
84 RWA, F2C:8, file 310, p. 12; F2C:10, file 315, p. 13; F2C:14, file 332, pp. 5–10; F2C:16, file 340, p. 39 F2C:17, file 346, p. 8; F2C:20, file 507, pp. 11–12
85 RWA, F2C:6, file 305, p. 23; F2C:12, file 324, p. 20; F2C:20, file 514, p. 3
87 RWA, F2C:22, file 550, pp. 4–5; F2C:22, file 553, pp. 7–8.
worst could happen (two fathers). Nevertheless, all the informants in the Raoul Wallenberg project decided to stay in Hungary before and during the war, so in the end, the optimistic point of view was stronger than the pessimistic. This seems to have been the case in general, too. According to data presented by Tamás Stark, only 8,000 Hungarian Jews left the country during the war. This section brings up some of the thoughts and opinions that were aired in the informants’ families concerning emigration.

György Schiller perceived himself as an optimist, even though he and his family feared antisemitism:

We did not know what would come next, we only saw what was happening in Germany, how Jews were being destroyed, books burned and the rest. I did not dare to believe that this would spread to us, but the clever ones left, they dared to leave. Us optimists, we stayed. The pessimist Jew was clever, he left in time.

Tomas Ungvári’s father had similar thoughts. He assumed that the anti-Jewish laws were just a formality, to keep the Germans happy. He did not take it seriously, especially since the first anti-Jewish law mainly targeted those in the public sector. When their relatives from the United States came for a visit in the late 1930s and offered to take the school-aged Tomas with them, his father refused and replied that nothing would happen to the Hungarian Jews.

Altogether, nine of the survivors speak about patriotic, optimistic, and sometimes rather stubborn reactions. Seven of these survivors were men. Stefánia Schwartz’s father married a woman who was an American citizen. This would have made emigration easier for the entire family, but Stefánia’s father did not want to leave Hungary. He stated, according to Stefánia’s recollection: “For me America is here, I won’t leave my country and that’s all.” Many Hungarian Jews were nationalistic, feeling that they were “Magyar”, as described in chapter 2.

Eugen Türkl describes similar patriotic attitudes. He tells how he and his sister were raised to become good Hungarians, and how his father-in-law declared that nothing would happen to them, as they always had been true patriots. Eugen himself remembers that he was not as optimistic as his father-in-law. He was afraid that harder times would follow. He and his wife

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88 RWA, F2C:9, file 313, pp. 10–12; F2C:11, file 320, p. 12; F2C:16, file 339, p. 26; F2C:17, file 345, p. 15; F2C:20, file 508, p. 5 and file 511, pp. 1, 6; F2B:6, file 517, tape 1, side A; F2C:21, file 536, p. 12; F2C:21, file 539, p. 2; F2C:22, file 558, pp. 7–9; F2C:22, file 560, p. 8; Bill Basch in *The Last Days* 1999, p. 111; Siegal (2003), p. 30.
89 However, some of the informants emigrated in the late 1940s or in the 1950s.
91 RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 8.
92 RWA, F2C:22, file 558, pp. 7–9.
93 RWA, F2C:17, file 345, p. 15. Stefánia’s stepmother lost her American citizenship, which she tried to regain after the war without success.
considered emigrating, as his wife had some distant relatives in Switzerland, but they never took the opportunity. There were three reasons for this. Eugen had a well-paid leading position in a company in the late 1930s, which he did not want to give up. The second reason was that his wife was offered employment as a domestic servant in Switzerland, which was “unimaginable”. The third reason was that neither he nor his wife wanted to leave their families and relatives in Hungary.94

Ivan Becker remembers that his family had the opportunity of emigrating from Hungary to the United States. They even received affidavits. However, Ivan’s father did not want to go:

And I remember that my father basically did not want to leave, for many reasons… [...] He did not want to leave, because he spoke no English, he didn’t have money, he didn’t have… He felt that he could not have started over again with a family. He could not have gotten a job. And most importantly the laws that were brought in to curb the Jewish wealth, [our] freedoms, [it] could not get worse, and that, after all, if nothing gets more difficult then [it is] just as well to stay home and live with it. And after all we are always… so we were Hungarians and there’s no reason why we should leave.95

Thus there were nationalistic (or patriotic), practical, and economic reasons for not emigrating. Marianne Cooper refers to her own situation, which was similar to that of Ivan Becker:

I had never met my [relatives from the USA], because the last time they visited Hungary was in 1937, which was the time when my mother was pregnant with me. And they were begging my parents to come to America, and my father – sorry to say, stupidly – had refused and said no, [...] nothing is never going to happen in Hungary. [...] But of course, that was one of the biggest mistakes, in my opinion, that he has ever made, because he could have left legally and he could have brought his whole family, and our life probably would have been very very different.96

Joseph Halpern tells how his mother early on began planning an emigration. In the end, only Joseph’s father and one of his two brothers had the possibility of leaving Hungary. His mother insisted that they emigrate, even though they had to leave the rest of the family behind. Joseph explains:

You know, women, they had premonition. And my mother started to work on our passage to the United States in maybe… maybe in ’36, ’35–’36, without us knowing, to get affidavits. [...] We didn’t know anything about it. So when 1939 came she had almost had everything together, for the whole family. But she

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94 RWA, F2C:12, file 324, pp. 13, 20–21.
95 RWA, F2C:19, file 508, p. 5.
96 RWA, F2B:6, file 517, side A.
insisted that whoever can go should go. So my father… she kicked them out, my father, my younger brother. She insisted, because they didn’t want to leave us there. But they left.97

Sara Gresz recalls the situation and the discussions in her family. As in Joseph Halpern’s case, it was the mother who wanted to leave the country:

I remember, I was a first year student, when one of my Jewish classmates went into exile to Brazil with her parents. We had lengthy conversations at home, and Mother desperately wanted to leave the country. Several nephews of my father already lived in America. But father could not make up his mind to leave Hungary. He said these things surely could not happen here. […] It was a stupefying blindness of the Hungarian Jewry. They were unable to believe it.98

Both Claudia Koonz and Marion A. Kaplan have suggested that Jewish women were often more eager to emigrate than men.99 On the one hand, women had less to lose, with respect to work, finances, and social class. They were also more willing to leave their homes to save their children and their families. On the other hand, as Koonz states, German Jewish men “faced the future with confidence that their world of finance and business would offer them a niche as long as they could find a loophole here or an economic necessity there”.100 Men simply had more to lose. This is partly supported by the testimonies studied here, such as Joseph Halpern’s and Sara Gresz’s. Furthermore, both Eugen Türkl and Otto Roboz were reluctant to emigrate due to their positions at their work places.101 But in contrast, other testimonies contest Koonz’s and Kaplan’s conclusions. One of them is Gyula Földes’s, in which he argues:

If you have an opportunity to save your life either with arms or without them, you don’t do it for you don’t want to leave your brother, child or any other relative behind. We did the same. My mother had a younger sister whom she didn’t want to leave behind and persuaded my father to stay. And it was a general phenomenon.102

According to Gyula, people chose to stay with their relatives instead of emigrating. In his case, it was his mother who persuaded Gyula’s father to stay. Similarly, Valéria Nádas describes how her boss tried to convince her to emigrate. She was, however, of a different opinion:

97 RWA, F2C:20, file 511, p. 6.
98 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 12.
101 RWA, F2C:12, file 324, pp. 20–21; F2C:20, file 513, p. 6.
102 RWA, F2C:9, file 313, p. 10.
I didn’t think of emigrating, as I had my whole family here. We had no relatives or friends abroad who could have helped us. And, after all, with a grandmother getting on [towards] 95 and a father above 70, I could not think of leaving the country.103

The fact that some women did not want to emigrate contradicts the conclusions drawn by previous research. I argue that both types were present. It is just as likely that women often wanted to stay in their home country in order to keep their families together as it was that they wished to escape in order to save the family.104

Five male persons reacted in a similar manner to Gyula Földes’s mother and Valéria Nádas. György Gabor had contacts in New Zealand and in Chile, which would have made emigration possible. He planned to leave the country because of growing antisemitism and the anti-Jewish laws. However, he never got to that point:

I had gotten my passport to go. But my mother didn’t want to and [because of that] I didn’t want to. My friend’s mother said the four of us should go, but my mother didn’t want to, so I stayed at home too.105

Zsuzsa Gordon’s parents were divorced and her mother had official custody of the child. Zsuzsa’s father remarried a woman who had two brothers in the United States. They received an affidavit in 1938 and were ready to emigrate. Zsuzsa recalls that they had even packed their bags. The problem was that Zsuzsa’s father did not want to leave the country without his ten-year-old daughter, but Zsuzsa’s mother opposed her leaving. Thus her father also stayed in Hungary.106

The last example I want to include is that of Oli Solti and her husband, who were on a trip to Argentina in 1939. The war broke out during their stay in Buenos Aires and their Hungarian passports were due to expire by the end of the year. They started to discuss the possibilities of settling down in Buenos Aires instead of going back to Hungary. Oli started a trainee program as a milliner and her husband found a proper job. However, they had difficulties with the Spanish language, especially her husband, and he finally decided that they should go back to Budapest. The main reason for this, according to Oli, was that he wanted to be with his family, including his mother, sisters, nephews

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103 RWA, F2C:10, file 315, p. 13. The testimony of Mrs. József Koltai reveals similar behaviour. Mrs. Koltai wanted to emigrate after the liberation, but at the same time, she did not want to leave her mother in Hungary. See RWA, F2C:8, file 310, p. 12.

104 Compare also with the case of Gisi Fleischmann, the leader of the Jewish Aid organization in Bratislava. She sent her daughters to Palestine, but did not emigrate herself. She stayed in Bratislava and continued to smuggle and assist Jewish people. At the same time, she took care of her sick mother. See Bauer (1998).

105 RWA, F2C:17, file 346, p. 8.

and nieces. Letters from them had stopped coming and the situation was uncertain.107

These examples contradict both the idea that only women wanted to emigrate and that only women tended to remain in Hungary in order to be with their parents or other relatives. It seems as if reactions were very individual and diverse. Both women and men present optimistic and pessimistic opinions and reactions to the anti-Jewish laws. However, at least when it comes to the sources used here, only men expressed any patriotic reasons for staying. The female argument for staying was most often that they did not want to leave their relatives behind. It seems that reactions depended on personality rather than on gender, but the ways of reasoning could differ according to gendered roles and relations. The dichotomy between private and public becomes visible here. Men were political subjects to a greater extent, while women both identified themselves and were regarded by others as caring subjects. For example, only males here referred to the fact that they did not want to leave a leadership position, good employment, or the comfortable life style they had in Budapest. This also brings in social class. Those who had the economic means could have difficulties in leaving due to their social position, while the lower class did not even have the option. On the other hand, the lower class did not have as much to lose.

Sara Gresz’s words describe how a Jewish middle class person could think in this matter. Her father was one of those who simply could not believe that something could happen to them, and this was partly due to his position and the connections he had in Hungarian society. Sara states: “It was typical of the Hungarian Jewish middle class. The poor Jews were said to be more scared. The Orthodox Jews were more scared. […] But the Jews who had established their financial and official status had blind faith in the Horthy regime and Pál Teleki.”108

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, the focus has been on how the Jewish informants experienced and perceived anti-Jewish legislation. How did these laws shape their experiences? And how did they react to the laws? The study shows that gender, age, and social class did play an important role regarding the Hungarian Jewish experiences of the anti-Jewish laws. Geographical place, as well as religion and nationality, could also have an impact on how severely the laws were felt by

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107 RWA, F2C:21, file 536, p. 12. See also the interview with Johnny Moser, F2C:14, file 332, pp. 5–10, where he recounts that he stayed in Budapest because his father did not show up when they were supposed to leave. Tomas Veres says that his father did not forbid him to leave, but it was obvious that it would break his heart. Tomas thus stayed. F2C:20, file 507, pp. 11–12.
108 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 12.
individual Jews. Yet the importance of the categories varies when examining each law separately.

Age was an important factor in Jewish individual experiences of the Numerus Clausus law. The quota system affected the young generations of the 1920s and 1930s, as indicated out by Mária M. Kovács and the survivors whose voices we have heard here. Young adults were struck the hardest. Middle-aged persons had already established their positions on the labour market, but newcomers could face difficulties in obtaining employment.\(^\text{109}\) The children felt the impact of a deteriorating economy and the increasing anxiety, but they were not the main targets of the laws. Likewise, the elderly who were already retired were also more indirectly affected.

The importance of gender was also visible in the interviews. The informants’ perception of the laws indicates that Jewish women’s possibilities of obtaining a higher education were perhaps reduced even more than Jewish men’s possibilities as a result of the introduction of the Numerus Clausus. Women had only a few decades earlier gained access to the universities, which made their position weaker than that of Jewish male students. Families from the upper and upper middle classes were those who felt the effects of the Numerus Clausus the least. They could occasionally use their networks and connections to circumvent the regulations, and families with funding could still send their children to universities abroad. However, several informants indicate that sons were more often prioritized than daughters regarding higher education outside of Hungary. I argue that this might be due to the structures formed by intersections between gender and social class, among other factors. First of all, it was mainly the wealthier families who could even consider sending their children abroad. Furthermore, it was “rational” that the male members of the families received the possibility of studying, if a choice had to be made. This was in accordance with the male breadwinner ideal.\(^\text{110}\) Since the males were supposed to be the breadwinners, they were prioritized when it came to education. It was also historically “normative” that Jewish males received an education, while the women were “protected”. Intersections of age, gender, and social class thus became visible in the effects of the Numerus Clausus.

The first and the second anti-Jewish laws in the late 1930s shaped individual Jewish experiences to a great extent, above all economically, but also socially and psychologically. The Jewish male was regarded as powerful and perhaps even as a threat to society, as has been suggested by Nechama Tec.\(^\text{111}\) The anti-Jewish laws affected primarily men – as employed or as employees, and as family providers. Marion A. Kaplan has shown that in Germany, a similar change became visible already between 1933 and 1938, parallel to the German anti-Jewish legislation and the Nuremberg Laws. She notes that “Jewish women

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\(^{109}\) On the importance of age within the free professions, see Kovács (1995), pp. 110, 119.


\(^{111}\) Tec (2003), p. 11.
took on new roles as breadwinners, family protectors, and defenders of businesses or practices.”\textsuperscript{112} Comparable changes were observed by Hungarian survivors from families where the male provider lost his employment.

Similar to age and gender, social class was also of considerable importance when it comes to the first and second anti-Jewish laws. Yehuda Don, as well as Braham, has demonstrated that the lower middle class was affected most. Those who worked in public service were fired, and many families lost their entire income. However, even though the first and second laws affected the Jewish males harshly, the majority of self-employed and free professionals (especially the lawyers) could still work and provide for their families.\textsuperscript{113} Consequently, families belonging to the upper and upper middle classes had a better chance of continuing on with their usual life style, and this was also referred to in the testimonies. They could maintain their income to a greater extent, and those who failed often had savings to fall back upon. The formal restrictions did not include the working class, and they could hold on to their employments, at least if they did not work in an antisemitic place of work.

An analysis of the sources based on memory, confirmed by previous research, leads us to the conclusion that age in addition to gender and social class were important factors in Jewish experiences of the first and second anti-Jewish laws. Multiple-factor analysis shows that intersections of these categories shaped experiences and the informants’ perception of them. Adult males in the lower middle class were probably affected the most. In the upper strata, fewer women worked, and fewer men lost their jobs. In the lower strata, the change in gender order was more dramatic. If the women worked they risked losing their jobs, and if not, they probably had to start to work, for example in industries, in the event that their husbands became unemployed.

The third anti-Jewish law, the Race Protection Law, was the most far-reaching of the laws, since it had a humiliating impact on all Jews, as Nathaniel Katzburg has argued.\textsuperscript{114} Concretely, the law affected mainly those who were of marital age. However, it seems as if Jewish men were more often prosecuted than Jewish women under the third anti-Jewish law. The interviews do not bring up social class in this context, but it can be argued that Orthodox Jews (who most often belonged to the lower or the lower middle class) were less affected, since intermarriage was very rare within the Orthodox community. In the end, the law had an impact on all individuals of Jewish affiliation who were of the age when one is likely to have sexual relationships or to become married. Freedom of choice was as a result strictly restricted.

Geographical location was not as decisive a factor during this period as it would become after March 19, 1944. However, the effects of the Numerus Clausus were more obvious in Budapest, where the ratio of Jews was higher

\textsuperscript{112} Kaplan (1998a), p. 59.
than in the Hungarian provinces. Jews without Hungarian citizenship were the first ones to be discriminated against in workplaces and within society.\textsuperscript{115} Furthermore, the “alien” Jews in former Czechoslovakia were badly treated, and thousands of them were deported and killed during the massacres of 1941. There seems to have been a certain hierarchy of victims, created by the Hungarian authorities, in the early 1940s. Jewish persons of Hungarian origins and citizenship were regarded as more “valuable” than Jews who had fled, for instance, from Poland or the Ukraine. These “foreign” Jews became the first physical targets when antisemitism escalated in Hungary.\textsuperscript{116} Therefore, nationality was also a factor that affected Jewish experiences.

It is important to stress that the third anti-Jewish law defined in racial terms who was “a Jew” and who was not. In the end, this would have a major impact on all Hungarian Jews who were forced to identify themselves as Jews. After the German occupation in March 1944, the Jews had to endure more than just economic and social discrimination. The final and ultimate effect of the anti-Jewish legislation was genocide. The fact that the Jews were stigmatized as “an alien, destructive part” of society made the Hungarian Jewry an easier target for the German and Hungarian authorities to destroy.

However, the importance of individual agency must be emphasized in this context. The experiences were not only formed by factors such as gender, age, and social class, but also by how the Jews were treated by their fellow Hungarian citizens. The Jewish experiences of the anti-Jewish laws depended partly on the persons involved. The Jews were often mistreated, as noted by the informants, but there were also helpers among the gentile Hungarians, for instance, those who could pretend to formally take over Jewish businesses, the “straw men”. Thus, individual networks and the level of antisemitism in each situation were essential to Hungarian Jewish experiences.

How did the informants react to the anti-Jewish laws? Discussions concerning emigration emerged in many families, but very few Hungarian Jews actually emigrated. Previous research has shown that Jewish women were in general more eager to emigrate during the persecution periods, but the analysis in this chapter does not support similar conclusions concerning the Hungarian Jewry. Both women and men talked positively and negatively about emigration, and one of the most important reasons for staying was to keep the family together. Optimistic opinions of the Hungarian authorities were often mentioned (“nothing would happen to the Jews, not in Hungary”). The interviews also

\textsuperscript{115} See, for instance, the example of lawyers without Hungarian citizenship in Kovács (1994), p. 111.

\textsuperscript{116} See Braham (1989), pp. 541–556. This was also the case in other countries. In Nazi Germany, the Jews from Eastern Europe were the first to sense the effects of antisemitism. In October 1938, the German authorities expelled 17,000 Polish Jews living in Germany. See Kershaw 2000, p. 109. In Romania, Jews without citizenship suffered from unemployment, were banned from the education system, and faced expulsion before the Romanian Jews did. In Vichy France, the antisemitic agitation against foreign Jews began immediately. The refugees were the first to be taken to internment camps, and were blamed for the French defeat by Germany. Dwork & van Pelt 2002, pp. 119, 233.
suggest that patriotic reasons for staying were more common among Jewish males than females.

In sum, Hungarian anti-Jewish legislation and how it shaped individual experiences is a major theme in the survivors’ accounts. The laws undermined the Jewish minority’s position in society, and the effects were noticeable to the majority of the Jews at that time. The analysis shows that the picture was complex indeed, and that Jewish experiences were highly differentiated with respect to age, gender, and social class. Many of the informants perceived the laws in negative terms, while others felt that they could continue with their lives as before. However, racist discourse was strengthened during this period, and as a result the difference between “a Jew” and “a Jew” eventually became smaller.
CHAPTER 5
The Labour Service System 1939 – March 1944

John Brooks remembers the introduction of the forced labour system during the early war years:

And then in, I think in 1940 or 1941 they picked out the Jewish men from the regular army and they put [them] into labour battalions and they took away the army uniforms and they just [wore] their own clothes and a yellow armband. And they were, because war was already going on with Russia, they were serving maybe a half a year and [after that] they let them go home and another group came in.1

The military labour service system, introduced in 1939, had a major effect on the Hungarian Jewish community, as briefly described in chapter 3. Jewish men of military age were called up for forced labour, and the number increased drastically as Hungary joined the war in June 1941. The Jewish males were thus the first physical victims of the Hungarian antisemitic politics, as Tim Cole already has shown.2 A similar pattern has been noticed by Marion A. Kaplan when it comes to institutionalized persecution in Nazi Germany: “In their public tirades and actions, the Nazis focused on Jewish males. Moreover, at first they spared Jewish women physical abuse.”3 Even though there was no German labour service system comparable to the Hungarian one, the Jewish men were the first to be attacked, abused, and taken to concentration camps.

In the following discussion, various examples of Jewish male experiences in the Hungarian labour service system are brought up, and the situation as it was perceived by those left behind – the women, the children and the elderly – is examined. We already know that the labour service system had a general impact on Jewish males and females. But age was also an important aspect, as well as social class.

The aspect of age becomes clearly visible in John Brooks’ testimony. He continues by stating: “So [the labour service system] didn’t [a]ffect the whole Jewish population, mostly the younger ones between, let’s say, 25 and 35.”4

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1 RWA, F2C:19, file 505, p. 16.
4 RWA, F2C:19, file 505, p. 16.
John is definitely right when he claims that the labour service system did not have an impact on the entire Jewish population, but only on “the younger ones”. To be more correct, the labour service system meant a direct impact on young male persons, but also an indirect effect on the rest of the individuals, i.e. children, teenaged males and females, women in their twenties and thirties, middle-aged women and men, and the elderly. Later, in the autumn of 1944, women were also forced to participate in the labour service system.

The survivors interviewed in the Raoul Wallenberg project often refer to the labour service system. Most of the male informants were drafted, and most of the women had brothers, fathers, husbands, and/or fiancés who were taken away to the labour forces. Ninety-three (or 62 per cent) out of 151 informants describe the labour service or tell about relatives who were conscripted. In total, fifty-two (34 per cent) of the survivors were conscripted (forty-three males and nine females) during the Second World War (see table 5.1.). Fifty informants refer to close relatives who were conscripted during the war. Mainly fathers and husbands are mentioned in these narratives.

Individual experiences of the labour service system and responses to it were diverse. The following section does not give a complete description of the system and how it was experienced by the Hungarian Jewry. Nonetheless, it focuses on some individual stories through which it is possible to study multiple factors and how these factors affected the lives of the Jewish individuals. To begin with, experiences of the labour service system are described, including how Jewish males perceived it and how they responded to it. A number of reports and interviews were selected in order to demonstrate similarities and differences in the experiences. These date from 1939 to March 1944, the period before the Germans occupied the country. After that, exemptions and other special circumstances are discussed. Furthermore, women’s experiences are brought up, and finally, some aspects of children’s and youths’ perception of the situation will be examined.

**Male experiences within the labour service**

József Friedrich’s memoir is an illuminating example of the everyday conditions in the labour service. József was 26 years old when he was drafted for the first time in July 1942. This is how he describes his life within the labour service:

The Jews in labor service companies 110/26 and 110/27, each with 214 Jews, had to work under the most cruel conditions. We had to perform various types of outdoor heavy military labor at Ojtusz and Sosmező near the Romanian border. For a while we had to get up at 3 a.m., were given some coffee at 3:30, and had to leave at 4 a.m. for our work site 12 kilometers away. At noon we ate our lunch while standing up, and then worked again to 6 p.m. We got back to

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5 See also RWA, F2C:19, file 502, p. 6.
the camp at 9 p.m., had dinner at 9:30, and went to sleep at 10:00. It was very strenuous work.\textsuperscript{6}

After a few months of hard work, József had the good fortune of becoming the cook’s assistant, which made his life easier because he had access to better food supplies. He was released in December 1942, but was summoned again in March 1943. This time he began working as a floor polisher in a military hospital, since he was recovering from a serious illness. His unit was then placed on railway construction work in Hatvan, Northeast of Budapest. His response to this was that he escaped in August 1944 and surrendered to the Soviet army. He was taken as a prisoner of war (POW) and was imprisoned in the Soviet Union until 1948.\textsuperscript{7} József Friedrich’s story shows the variety of tasks the labour servicemen could be required to perform, from cook’s assistant to physically hard work as a railway labourer. He was also fortunate enough to be allowed to have an easier task during his convalescence. Furthermore, it is interesting to see how some Jewish labourers anticipated that escaping to the Soviet Union would be better than remaining in the labour service. József was not the only one who surrendered to the Soviet forces, although this was more of an exception than a rule.\textsuperscript{8}

Ernest Bokor was conscripted two times during the war. His unit worked the night shift in a commercial textile factory under military supervision in the outskirts of Budapest. The workers lived in barracks, but were able to go outside the factory during daytime. Ernest recounts that he was exhausted by the work and that the guards mistreated them:

[You were] mistreated when you came back [from work] in the morning at 6 o’clock, when you came down they started with us... all kind of, all kind of exercises. Sleepy, hungry, and tired [after] 12 hours [work] at night. It wasn’t, it wasn’t easy life. [...] in the barracks it was hot, and the machines, you heard [them] all day, the day shift was working, so it, you know you, it was very very hard. And I... we had to produce, otherwise it... somebody who didn’t produce was sent to [...] the Russian front. And over there in Russian front they [were] picking up mines. It was no return.\textsuperscript{9}

The guards threatened to send the labour servicemen to the Eastern front if they did not behave or perform their tasks well. Eventually, Ernest also escaped from the forced labour. He was hiding and “passing” (living under a false

\textsuperscript{6} József Friedrich in \textit{Wartime System} (1995), p. 129. Before the conscription, József had worked as a furrier in Nagyvárad, a town in Northern Transylvania. At first he had been self-employed, but after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws he lost his business and became employed in a factory. He worked there until he was summoned in 1942.

\textsuperscript{7} József Friedrich in \textit{Wartime System} (1995), pp. 130–135. Friedrich also relates that his parents, Mendel and Blanka, were both killed in Auschwitz (p. 129).


\textsuperscript{9} RWA, F2C:19, file 510, p. 7.
identity) in Budapest with forged Roman Catholic papers. He joined the Arrow Cross Party in 1944, and took part in several resistance and rescue actions as an undercover fascist.10

Ernest Bokor’s and József Friedrich’s stories are similar in the sense that they were both drafted more than once and that they reacted in the same manner: they both escaped the labour service. The narratives brought up in this study often represent this group of Jewish labour servicemen: those who escaped. Obviously, if one escaped and went, for example, into hiding in Budapest, the chances of surviving were a bit better than for those who remained in the labour service system. This does not, however, represent the entire group of labour servicemen – most of them never had the chance to escape, even if they had planned to do so.

According to testimonies, many of the Jewish labourers were mistreated, and brutalities increased throughout the war. The food was often insufficient, and during the winters the men suffered from the wet and cold conditions. Tens of thousands of Jewish men died not only from malnutrition and diseases, but also from physical abuse.11 Péter Nádas recalls, however, that in his unit, the mistreatment involved psychological rather than physical terror. Beatings were rare, but the guards used different types of punishments and verbal oppression to humiliate the Jewish workers. Péter remembers that he was tied up to a tree as a punishment and left there for an entire day. He also has a recollection of verbal threats, such as “we will make soap out of you”.12

György Nagy was taken to Bor in Yugoslavia, one of the most infamous places in the history of the labour service system, in the spring of 1943, and placed on the heavy railway construction work between Bor and Hladna Voda. György describes in detail both the physical and psychological harassments performed by the guards. The physical mistreatment consisted mainly of beatings, or of torture on Sundays, which was the labourers’ day off. “Stringing up” was the most common form of punishment. Those who were punished had their hands tied behind their backs and were pulled up to the ceiling so that their feet did not touch the ground. As a result, the entire weight of the body was placed on the wrists and shoulders. György recounts that after 15 minutes the person would lose consciousness, and to revive him, a bucket of water was thrown over him. “Stringing up” would continue for about two hours, and sometimes even up to four hours. Some of the tortured men lost their ability to work with their hands, and became apathetic.13

11 On mistreatment and suffering, see the eyewitness stories in Wartime System (1995); Levelek munkaszolgálatából [Letters from Labour Service], HJA, XX-G: D6/2; Naplók [Diaries] HJA. XX-G: D6/5; Visszaemlékezések [Memoirs], HJA, XX-G: D6/6. See also RWA, F2C:19, file 501, p. 5; F2C:19, file 511, p. 6; F2C:19, file 514, p. 6; F2C:22, file 555, p. 5; F2D:1:2, file 1111, p. 4; and AWL, Series I, Section II, P.III.i: Reel 62, file 763, p. 5.
12 RWA, F2C:6, file 305, p. 27.
The Orthodox Jewish men who kept kosher found themselves in a difficult situation. Since the labour service system did not take their special diet into consideration, they either had to give up their religious conviction regarding food or suffer from hunger. György Nagy recalls that those “who were kosher suffered the most and lived entirely on stolen potatoes. They were emaciated and weak and envious of the better off. When we washed, you could see the bones sticking out through their flesh.” Religious ceremonies were not allowed, but there were some exceptions. Zoltán Singer describes in his report how he and his comrades were allowed to keep service on Yom-Kippur, thanks to a good hearted sergeant.

Zoltán experienced hardship and brutality throughout his entire time in the labour service, especially when the battalion was sent to the Ukraine in 1942. The unit was forced to walk 40–50 kilometres per day in the summer heat, and they were frequently slapped in their faces, beaten up, or even whipped by the guards. The work was hard and the food insufficient. In October, they were sent to the front, and during the winter months they suffered from cold, diseases, and food shortages. The casualties increased dramatically, and during the retreat some of the labour servicemen committed suicide. According to Zoltán, the conditions were simply unbearable. All this culminated in arson in Dorosits:

On that night [of April 30, 1943], etched into our memories, one of the outbuildings, in which some 800 people, myself included, were crammed together, burst into flames at all four corners. The fire started at four separate points, so it is certain that it was no accident. The outbuilding had been deliberately torched by the guards. We also discovered that the doors had been closed with wire from the outside. The flames spread in an instant across the dry straw and up the wooden walls. Within seconds the silence of the night was shattered by desperate shrieks and wails. The fit and the conscious broke out through the collapsing plank walls like flaming torches but the guards were waiting outside and started firing on them. This hell lasted only ten minutes but it was endless minutes. The building and most of the people in it were consumed by flames and the charred corpses were lying there in piles until the next morning. Most of those who got out were mown down by machine gun fire and many others were saved from further suffering when they died a few hours later as a result of burns and bullets wounds. Only a few of us escaped this massacre.

Judy Cohen (formerly Weiszenberg) and Renée Firestone mention the same or at least a very similar event. According to Judy, her brother Jenő was also killed in Dorosits. He and 400 other men, sick from typhoid, were burned inside a

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hospital. Renée reports that her fiancé was burned inside a barn in the Ukraine, along with other workers who also had typhoid. One of the commanders in Dorosits reported after the war that there were three similar fires. The first one occurred in July 1942:

I was ordered by my superiors to ‘reduce’ the hospital. One night I was awakened by an alarm: the hospital was burning. Everywhere soldiers were firing on the escaping patients. Not one of them survived, 400 were shot, the remainder perished inside the burning hospital. The following year Military Hospital No. 105 burned down under similar circumstances. 764 men died that day, and the same procedure was repeated in the case of another hospital.

The reports given by the Jewish survivors probably refer to the events mentioned by Commander László Gyarmathy. Barns were used as “hospitals” on the front and several Hungarian survivors have referred to these specific mass killing actions, although not many actual eyewitnesses survived them.

However, it must be emphasized that massacres were more of an exception than a rule within the Hungarian labour service system. Some of the survivors even testify that they were treated and fed reasonably well. Six out of the forty-three former labour servicemen in the archival material describe treatment that was decent or at least not bad. John Brooks was in a unit that worked hard but at least received enough food. His battalion was placed in an ammunition factory, and he describes the conditions as follows:

We were sleeping, [the] few hours when we were sleeping, on bunk beds, which weren’t beds because we never got a straw-filled sack. It was just a kind of wire frame. But we were so exhausted we were able to, even, sleep on that. We had to get up, I don’t know how early in [sic] dawn and exercise. Then to walk to the factory, work twelve hours in the factory, actually hard physical work which most of us weren’t used to that much. Then walk home to that quarter where we were staying, then another hour [of] exercise. So it was so demanding, purposely, so exhausting, we had no time to almost to think, just to see if we can, if we can eat and survive from one day to the other.

Even though the work was exhausting and strenuous, the situation was tolerable, according to John Brooks. The workers received enough food (soup and coffee), and John explains the reasonable amount of supplies by the fact

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\(^{20}\) Quoted in Lévai (1948), p. 428.

\(^{21}\) On other massacres, see Lévai (1948), pp. 425–430.

\(^{22}\) RWA, F2C:8, file 311; F2C:12, file 324; F2C:19, file 505; F2C:20, file 514; F2C:21, file 531; F2C:22, file 548. See also *Wartime System* (1995), p. vi.

\(^{23}\) RWA, F2C:19, file 505, p. 21.
that they worked in the ammunition factory. Since it was of great importance to the war, the workers had to be fed well.

György Gabor was drafted in 1940 and taken to Transylvania to load and unload trains. He also mentions that there was no lack of food in his battalion:

It was pretty good there also because our company commander, whom I met later, after [the] war too, was a lumber specialist […], and the commander’s deputy, Gárdonyi, was the head of the former Dunapart Coffee House. One of my classmates married his daughter. And this Gárdonyi too said, and Sanszter was the name of the company commander, they said, “Boys, the more you steal of this food the better we’ll eat.” So they instructed me to [steal], and really, we ate well, we had it good in Transylvania.24

However, in 1944, the situation became worse. Food supplies became meagre and the battalion was placed under another commander who was a “wicked man”, according to György.25

Another survivor who testifies to fairly decent treatment is Martin Preisler. He was drafted for the first time in 1940 and was taken to Mohács and to Pécs where they were loading and unloading goods: “We [were] not mistreated but not well treated either”, he says. They were allowed to have visitors who could bring in personal mail and some extra food. But when Martin’s company received a new commanding officer the situation “started getting rough”. Martin continues by telling about the third time he was drafted. This time he was taken to the Ukraine and according to his observations, the treatment was much worse. The men were beaten and kicked and “very mistreated”.26 The treatment could thus depend on the attitude of the individual commanders, as we can see in György Gabor’s and Martin Preisler’s testimonies. The empirical evidence studied here confirms what previous research has shown: the geographical location, as well as the time aspect and the attitude of the commanders and the guards, were all decisive factors when it came to the treatment of the labourers. The worst locations were the Eastern front and the mines in Yugoslavia; labourers within the borders of Trianon Hungary were in general treated better than those who had to serve outside the borders.27 An additional aspect that influenced the individual experiences in the labour service was the type of work that was performed. Outdoor work such as digging trenches or building railways was physically harder than, for example, working in a factory.

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24 RWA, F2C:17, file 346, p. 18.
25 RWA, F2C:17, file 346, p. 23.
26 RWA, F2C:20, file 514, p. 6.
Eugen Türkl was summoned in 1940 and taken to Transylvania to dig trenches and to transfer goods. He stayed there for three months and mentions that at this time, the “labour service was still a ‘nice trip’ and especially for those who had some money”. The food they got was inedible but those who were a bit better off could purchase food from the local peasants and merchants.\(^{28}\)

The most positive eyewitness comment regarding the labour service that I have found comes from György Schiller. He was drafted in 1943 and worked in a brewery to begin with. His unit was then sent to the Lukács baths, one of the famous thermal baths in Budapest, to pack mineral water. This is how György describes the work:

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\text{[T]hat was paradise for us labourers. At six in the morning we left our quarters. Led by a platoon-commander, eight of us, we went to the Lukács, everyone to their place of work. I was in the crate-nailing section and as it belonged to the catering industry, somehow, according to the regulations we had to wash every day. Even today I swim regularly in the Lukács, and I got to like this swimming pool then. You see, according to the regulations we went to have a bath or swim, or, if you wanted to, you could go to the Turkish Baths. This was at 11.30 and then we had lunch. After lunch we worked again and at five everyone could go home and at eight we had to be at Kőbánya. We met our platoon-commander or sergeant, or whoever escorted us at tram no 28 at half past seven. That was paradise, I’m telling you.}^{29}\]

It is rather surprising that somebody would call the labour service a “paradise”, but this is perhaps, compared to other eyewitness testimonies, a proper description of György Schiller’s situation. Packing mineral water was neither very filthy nor very hard work, and this group of labour servicemen could wash every day and remain close to their relatives. György could even do some private commercial work every night after the labour service, and earn some extra money while he was in the labour service.\(^{30}\)

Another significant fact that affected the draftees’ situation was that they were not allowed to wear uniforms, but were forced to use their own clothes. This hit the poorer servicemen particularly hard, since they did not have the economic means to buy proper boots or jackets.\(^{31}\) Those who had more money also wore better clothes, and they sometimes received food supplies from their families, or, as mentioned above, they could buy food from the local people.

\(^{28}\) RWA, F2C:12, file 324, p. 24. See also RWA, F2C:22, file 552, p. 9, where Yehuda Mandel states that he personally was not mistreated, but that he saw many others who were. Daily life was harsh, even though he was not personally affected by the mistreatment.

\(^{29}\) RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 11.

\(^{30}\) RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 11.

Figure 5.1. Jewish members of a Hungarian labour service battalion at work site, October 24, 1940. 
Source: Photo Archives of the USHMM, photograph #14801.

Figure 5.2. Jewish labour servicemen of Company 108/57 at mealtime (1941 or 1942).
Source: Photo Archives of the USHMM, photograph #17158.
Thus, on the one hand, social differences were preserved in the labour service system, even though all the labour servicemen were in the same miserable situation, which was enforced by law. On the other hand, however, a higher pre-war position in society could also have a more difficult time in the labour service. Péter Nádas, who was accustomed to physical work, says: “for those who worked earlier in offices or were spoilt at home, the physical and spiritual circumstances must have been terrible.”32 For those who were used to physical work, it was perhaps easier to endure the hardship of forced labour. This observation is of great importance, and is further emphasized by Nechama Tec’s remark: “the more an individual has benefited from his or her social position the harder that person finds it to adjust to humiliation and oppression.”33

As one can see, the variety of experiences and the range of different types of treatment observed by the informants was widespread, from extreme to “reasonable” conditions. However, the majority of the labour servicemen (37 out of 43 of the informants studied here) experienced harsh circumstances where the lack of food and indifferent or indecent treatment combined with hard work became one’s everyday life. Social class could affect the Jewish male experiences in the labour service system, as those who had money could sometimes receive better food supplies. However, they could also have difficulties in adjusting to the harsh conditions.

Exemptions and other special circumstances

Some Jewish males were exempted from the labour service. Fourteen (9 per cent) of the 151 Jewish informants refer to such cases. For example, Otto Roboz, the director of one of the Jewish boys’ orphanages, was never summoned, and he believes that this was due to his position as director.34 Similarly, Alfred Schomberger’s father was one of the leaders of the Orthodox community in Budapest. He was exempted until the Arrow Cross rule appeared in 1944.35

Marton Szendrej was born in 1919, and was thus of military age when the labour service system was introduced. He was first called up in 1940 and served a few months in a small Hungarian town. Marton was from a middle class family, as his father was a businessman and owner of a hardware store. Marton was lucky, since his father had some “good connections” and managed to arrange a certificate which exempted Marton from the labour service.36

32 RWA, F2C:6, file 305, p. 28. See also Braham (1994), vol. 1, p. 330: “Especially hard hit were those of middle and upper-middle class background who were not used to hardship.”
34 RWA, F2C:20, file 513, p. 7.
36 RWA, F2C:21, file 538, p. 11.
exemption did not help him later though, as he was drafted again in 1943. This time Marton was sent to Romania, but after the German occupation his unit was transferred to Budapest. Marton escaped: he changed his dirty clothes to clean ones, excused himself and just walked out of the train while it was standing at a railway station.37

Bribery is mentioned in György Nagy’s memoir. He recalls that as his company was about to be sent to Bor some of the company members managed to remove themselves from the list. “The orderlies of the commanders, administrative staff and doctors, and a ‘clique’ of wealthier men were also omitted from the list”, he states.38 Even though bribery is not discussed in the interviews (either because the informants did not have any information or recollection of it or because of the fact that bribery is something embarrassing), it is possible that those in economically better positions used money as a means of getting away from the labour service. György Nagy’s testimony indicates this, but is not enough to verify that bribery frequently occurred. Earlier research has shown that bribery was common, for instance, in the Polish ghettos. Barbara Engelking writes that sometimes it was essential for one’s survival to know which one of the perpetrators was “bribable”, and that bribery often occurred in connection with smuggling and employment.39

Emery Kalman had been exempted from the Numerus Clausus and the anti-Jewish laws because his father had died a “martyr’s death” during the Red Terror in 1918. He received special treatment in the labour service as well. He performed his duty in a military office in 1943, but received exemption documents after six months.40 First World War veterans and their children could also be exempted from the labour service.41

Occupation was another factor that could lead to an exemption or special arrangements, according to Peter Milch. His father was exempted because he was a physician, and had contacts with the Ministry of the Interior. As Hungary was in great need of doctors, Peter’s father was not drafted in the early war years. However, his exemption did not last forever and he was summoned in 1944.42 Jenő Lebovitz was called up in 1943 and was supposed to work in a labour unit, but was soon “discovered” by his commander. Jenő was a tailor and he became the commander’s personal assistant. He took care of the commander’s clothes and shined his shoes daily, and did not have to join the unit. Jenő also had a special permit to go out daily on his own.43

37 RWA, F2C:21, file 538, p. 18.
40 RWA, F2C:22, file 553, p. 8.
41 RWA, F2C:22, file 558, p. 8. See also RWA, F2C:22, file 560, p. 7; and F2C:21, file 534, p. 14, where Anna Zafir speaks about Imre K., who had served in the First World War and was thus exempted from the labour service.
42 RWA, F2C:20, file 518, p. 8.
43 RWA, F2C:20, file 524, p. 10.
Illness or physical impediments could also result in exemptions. Katalin Lebovitz’s father had bad eyes and was exempted. György Bodor fell ill on his way to auxiliary service in Galánta. He underwent an examination in the hospital, and was diagnosed with jaundice. György remembers: “They gave me a note saying I was unfit for military and labour service.” He was then able to return to his home in Budapest. László Antal had injured his left hand in his youth and was drafted despite this. However, he was released later due to his disability. And as we have seen, József Friedrich was allowed to perform easier tasks while he was recovering from a disease.

There were also those who were not exempted, but who in one way or another reacted against the regulation and simply did not obey the law. Some men were hiding or “passing”, i.e. living under false (real or artificial) Christian identities. Some men simply did not show up when they were called up, even though they risked reprisals. Anna Zafir tells about her father and uncle who were constantly called in but never went to the gathering place given in the order. Magda Kalman’s father was hiding at their friends’ house, and simply wasn’t at home when the summons came. Rivka Klein’s husband was not called up because he was registered under his younger brother’s name, and hence could claim that he was too young to be drafted. As a result, these men managed to avoid the labour service system. Thus it might have “simply” been a question of individual actions of ingeniousness and impudence to find ways of escaping the authorities.

Tivadar Soros’s son Paul and his friend Tom were called up after they had turned eighteen, and this was a nightmarish situation for Tivadar. He presented the alternatives to his son and asked him to think about it overnight, whether to go or not. Paul decided not to go and went into hiding instead. His friend Tom did obey the call up order – and he never returned. Nonetheless, it was very problematic to hide or pass in order to avoid labour service, which will be brought up in detail in chapter 8.

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44 RWA, F2C:20, file 523, p. 7.
45 RWA, F2C:13, file 328, p. 5.
47 RWA, F2C:21, file 534, p. 11.
48 RWA, F2:C:22, file 542, p. 11. It is unclear whether it was Magda Kalman’s father or brother who was hiding. She is talking about her father, but he was an old man and was probably not even called up. Her brother was of conscription age, and it is likely that she is confusing the two of them.
49 RWA, F2C:22, file 549, p. 9.
Female responses and responsibilities

[T]he breadwinner, the Jewish men, they were taken away to the labour camps so the women stayed home and they tried to scratch a living [for] themselves. So it was very, very difficult for them and some of them were lucky [as] the women could manage their husband[s] business, [for those] who couldn’t it was very difficult.\(^{51}\)

This is how John Brooks describes the Jewish women’s situation in 1943. Even though men suffered physically in the forced labour service, women were also victims of the system as they found themselves in a new, difficult situation. They worried about and experienced the loss of their husbands, fathers, and brothers, who were in general their economic and emotional support and security. When a large part of the male population was forced away from their homes, women’s responsibilities towards their families increased. Women not only learned new ways of living, but also had to be prepared to take decisions that men had made before. Women used their traditional crafting skills and started sewing and selling clothes in order to earn money. At least seven out of the seventy-one female informants in the Raoul Wallenberg archive did this in order to survive.\(^{52}\) According to the register in the DEGOB material at the Hungarian Jewish Archives, it is clear that many women from Budapest worked as seamstresses before 1945 (112 or 23.9 per cent out of 469).\(^{53}\) Nechama Tec has also noticed these structural changes in Polish cities, where women in the absence of male breadwinners had to learn new ways to provide for their families with food and clothing. She has also shown that the remaining – often elderly or sick – men experienced a loss of their masculine identity when gender relations changed.\(^{54}\)

This situation can be compared to the overall situation during the Second World War. Research has shown that women were welcomed in industries and in other sectors, just to fill the gap left by absent male workers who were conscripted in the army.\(^{55}\) It is interesting to note how Jewish women coped with the situation in the absence of male breadwinners in comparison to how women in general entered the labour market during the war. But for the Jewish women in the German-occupied countries such possibilities were small. They

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\(^{51}\) RWA, F2C:19, file 505, p. 9.
\(^{52}\) RWA: F2C:6, file 306, pp. 20–22; F2C:19, file 502, p. 6; file 505, p. 9; F2C:20, file 508, p. 8; F2C: 21, file 525, p. 8; file 532, p. 9; and file 539, pp. 6–7.
\(^{53}\) See also appendix 3.b.
\(^{54}\) Tec (2003), pp. 34–35, 51.
\(^{55}\) This was the case, for instance, in the United States, Sweden, and the Western European countries. See, for example, Wikander (2006), chapter 3; Colman (1995); Summerfield (1989); Behind the Lines (1987).
were discriminated according to the anti-Jewish laws, although they could find employment within the war industry and in factories. Other women created their own solutions in order to find ways of breadwinning in times of severe persecution. In the testimonies studied here, there are some examples of private entrepreneurs and family businesses that could be kept for a while even after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws and the labour service system.

Piri Herling successfully took over her husband’s fur business when he was drafted. She continued taking care of the business until 1944:

I kept the business and I really did well. I really learned a lot and I did the export business and I had good business at that time. Yeah, [everything was okay,] except that the men were taken, we stayed in our own apartment and we had our own business. And my sister had children. And we knew that the men were alive.56

Piri states that she and her sister’s family were fine, except for the physical absence of their husbands. She was lucky to be enterprising and courageous. Hugo Moss tells about his wife who took over his shop while he was in the labour service. Mrs. Moss ran the shop together with a gentile person, trusted by her husband.57

If the women left behind were unable to take over the family businesses, it meant serious damage to the family’s economy. But it must also be emphasized that members of the lower social classes had these kinds of opportunities more seldom than well-to-do middle class families. The lower middle class and the working class, often without any savings, connections, or family businesses, were probably the main victims of the labour service system, and faced severe economic problems when the male breadwinner was conscripted. Even though many women in the working class families already worked, it was difficult to manage on only one salary.

Sometimes the Jewish community took responsibility for the situation. The Romanian part of Transylvania was annexed to Hungary in 1940, and in the town of Sighet (or Sziget), a Jewish children’s day-care centre was established in 1943. Hédi Fried mentions this in her memoir:

Most Jewish men were summoned to the labour service, commanded to the front to clear mines and to prepare the road for the Hungarian troops. The women who were left behind with their children and without an income now had to look for a job outside their homes. The new Kindergarten was established in order to help these women.58

56 RWA, F2C:21, file 532, p. 9.
57 RWA, F2C:22, file 548, p. 5. See also Margit Jarovitz (RWA, F2C:21, file 539, pp. 6–7) and Marianne Cooper (RWA, F2B:6, tape 517, side B) on women who supported their families in different ways.
Hédi had a teacher’s degree and she was appointed director of the kindergarten. She felt proud of herself, to be able to support herself and her mother and younger sister, and to be able to buy the books she desired.59

Margit Jarovitz met her future husband when she was living in her childhood town of Debrecen, at the age of 16. They fell in love, but two years later, in 1941, he was conscripted. Luckily he returned, and the young couple moved to Budapest and started to work. Margit was a dressmaker and could earn an income. Later even her father was drafted. Margit remembers that it was a very hard period in her life.60

Irene Abrahms also originated from Debrecen, but moved to Budapest already in 1935. Irene belonged to the upper middle class and stayed at home as a housewife after marriage. In 1942 she gave birth to a daughter, Suzie. Two months later her husband was drafted, and Irene, the housewife who was used to walking in the park on the Margaret Island on Sundays, faced a totally new situation:

I don’t know how I survived, because in ’42 […] the banks closed… our values in gold or in diamonds, whatever we had [was lost]. […] As I said I knew how to sew. So, I started to sew for food, not for money. I don’t know. I sewed […] a blouse and I got a few eggs or little sugar or a jar of jelly or something… somehow I managed.61

Irene Abrahms’ testimony shows a day-to-day manner of survival. Trading things or clothes for food was one of the ways of surviving. But her testimony also shows that for a person who was used to having money and better living conditions, the change became even more dramatic, not least since property was confiscated later during the war. The experiences were in a way very similar, but still different depending on the person’s pre-war social position.

Many women were left alone with their children. Mrs. Pál Kanders was one of them.62 She describes how her husband was killed in the labour forces in 1943, and after that she had to take care of her three-year-old daughter on her own. Kanders received some money from her relatives in Paris, and later on in 1944, she started to support her family as a seamstress.63

trupperna. Kvinnorna som var lämnade utan försörjning med sina barn måste nu söka sig arbete utanför hemmet. Det var för att hjälpa dem som det nya daghemmet hade inrättats.” (Translated into English by the author.)

60 RWA, F2C:21, file 539, p. 5. See also F2C:22, file 542, p. 10, where Magda Kalman states how hard it was when her husband was taken away four times between 1940–1944.
61 RWA, F2C: 21, file 525, p. 8. See also F2C:8, file 310, p. 6 on women’s concerns for their relatives.
62 See also RWA, F2C:16, file 339, p. 37 on Zsuzsa Gordon’s aunt and F2C:14, file 333, p. 2 on Mrs. Török, who worried about her husband who was working in an oil refinery.
63 F2C:6, file 306, p. 11.
In Budapest it soon became hard to obtain food, especially without money, and this required a solution. Trading was an option, whenever there were food supplies available. In the provinces, the situation was easier when it came to food supplies, given that it was possible, for example, to have a garden or exchange whatever you owned for food. However, the food situation became critical in 1944.

Aranka Siegal (formerly Davidowits) describes her family’s life in Beregszász (today Beregovo in the Ukraine) when her father was drafted. A woman by the name of Mrs. Gerber also had her husband in the labour forces, and she and her two children often visited the Davidowits. Aranka’s mother inspired the children and Mrs. Gerber by cooking something out of the small stock of food she had, and she thus kept their spirits up. Mrs. Davidowits had her own garden and she even kept – against the rules – a goat for a while so that she could give milk to her children. Mrs. Davidowits was also involved in helping Jewish refugees and Aranka, who was only eleven years old in 1941, sometimes showed the refugees the way to a house where they were taken care of.64

One interesting event that Aranka refers to is when Mrs. Davidowits and Mrs. Gerber received postcards from their husbands, saying that they would pass through the town in a few days. Aranka describes how her mother and Mrs. Gerber reacted to this:

[Mrs. Gerber] and Mother pooled their rations over the next few days and bought as much flour, sugar, eggs, and butter as they could. They made us [children] pick the walnut tree clean. We peeled the outside green covering off the nuts until our hands were stained jet black. Mrs. Gerber and Mother sat on the porch, cracking the hard shells and chopping up the walnut meats, which were still moist with milk. There was no time to let them dry out.

[My oldest sister] Lilli’s hands became busier than I had ever recalled seeing them. She rolled and filled strudels with nuts and sugar and grated lemon peel from morning until dark. Mother piled the split logs into the bread oven, lit them, and after they had burned down, filled the oven with all the pastries they had prepared.65

The Davidowits and Gerber families went to the main train station of Beregszász very early in the morning on the day the labour service men were expected to pass through the town. They sat and waited with their food bundles. Aranka’s mother was impatient and tried to get some kind of information from the conductors, but without success. The train did not show up. Aranka continues her narrative:

When it grew dark, Lilli, Ibolya, Judi, and I took the children and went back to our houses while Mother and Mrs. Gerber continued their vigil, taking naps in

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64 Siegal (2003), pp. 64–65, 119.
65 Siegal (2003), p. 60.
turn and watching the bundles. We returned to the station in the morning with breakfast for them. They looked tired but refused to go home to freshen up while remained at the station. We went through the same routine for three more days until, disheartened, Mother and Mrs. Gerber were finally persuaded by the train officials to return to their homes.66

Aranka’s father’s labour company did not pass through Beregszász until a few days later. The family was awakened in the middle of the night by Mr. Davidowits. He stopped by just for a moment before going back to his labour service battalion, which was on its way to the Eastern front.67 That was the last time Aranka saw her father and the last time she saw her parents embracing each other. Aranka recalls that “[f]or once she did not pull away from him and scold, ‘Ignác, the children!’”68

In this situation, when the men had been away for a while, and the wives received the good news that they would meet each other, it is interesting to see how gender shaped the actions of the two women. They started to prepare food and they even used all their rations to make the best of it. This can be interpreted as a specific gender-related experience. Gender relations were both altered by the situation (the women had to support themselves in the absence of the men) but at the same time, gendered behaviour became stronger as it gave the women a sense of normality and security.69 They knew what to do and how to do it well: to prepare food, and to care for their husbands when they had the chance.

Love and feelings

The lives of the Hungarian Jewry went on, despite the situation caused by the anti-Jewish legislation, the labour service system, and the war. Love and marriage were still everyday issues, even though the situation was abnormal. Klara Weiss, a young woman in her twenties, was one of the inhabitants of Budapest who experienced the disappearance of the males in her age. She was preoccupied by thoughts of love and romance. In her memoirs, based on her diaries, she states that there was a lack of young Jewish men in the city. “However,” she thought, as she was watching other young people dancing on the Purim feast, “they would not be queuing to dance with me anyway. A black-haired, dark-eyed Jewish girl wasn’t interesting, exciting, or attractive. They

69 See also Alice Lok Cahana’s testimony in connection to the German occupation in The Last Days (1999), p. 62: “What amazed me was that she went to the market and bought flowers. She bought violets. She came home with the flowers and quietly arranged them in a vase. I thought that maybe it’s not so terrible. Maybe all these frightening things will not come to a horrible end. In retrospect, I see this was how she tried to strengthen us. I admire her so much, because this little gesture gave us hope.”
would prefer blond ones, German Gretchen type of girls who were unlike them."70 One of Klara’s highest hopes was to fall in love and marry the man she loved, but this was obviously difficult due to the lack of young Jewish men. And even though this problem might seem trivial in hindsight, the issue was very important to Klara.71 Later she fell in love with a young man, Sanyi, whom she adored. The feelings were mutual and they became engaged, but he was drafted in 1944. Klara was very unhappy and worried for her fiancé, and unfortunately her worries were not unfounded. Sanyi, the love of her life, was deported from labour service in Jászberenyi to Auschwitz.72

In contrast to the romantic Klara Weiss, Erzsebet Rosenberg describes her situation during the war in a different tone:

Only men could know [how the war affected the Jews]. I didn’t notice anything, I went on going to work, my husband was in [the] labour service, sometimes came to see us. […] Yes, we bore it hardly, it was a very insulting thing then. At that time there was already no entertainment, nothing, we were just expecting a summons, when they would get them, because everyone got them. This husband of mine whom I’m living together with now, was in [the] labour service for five years, and in the army. For five years. Well, it was terrible, though I actually didn’t feel it so bad [back then], because my first marriage was not a love-match, so it was not so striking for me that he was away from home. I can’t explain it better. I only knew that we kept making parcels for him to send them or bring them to him […]73

Since Erzsebet wasn’t in love with her husband, she did not worry too much, but she fulfilled her responsibilities as a wife by sending clothes and food to him. This is one of the few female testimonies where worries for absent family members are not emphasized, but instead belittled.

Mrs. Miklós Váli married in June, 1940, and describes how she and her husband went on their honeymoon to Sopron, close to the Austrian border. They were planning to continue their trip to Vienna, but her husband was summoned to Transylvania. “He came back on December 7, this was how the honeymoon ended […]” Váli’s husband was drafted for another period, but this time she and another labour serviceman’s wife wrote letters and applied to the Minister

70 Weiss (2004), p. 81, written in Swedish in the original: “[Ä]ven om de varit många fler, skulle de inte ha stått i kö för att dansa med mig. En svarthårig, mörkögd, judisk flicka var inte intressant, inte spännande, inte tilldragande. De ville helst ha blondiner, germanska Gretchentyper som var olika dem själva.” (Translated into English by the author.)

71 Weiss (2004), p. 124: Klara’s newly wedded friend’s husband was conscripted, but she was equally worried about herself, as she was still unmarried.

72 Weiss (2004), pp. 137–174, 280. Klara married another man after the war, but Sanyi always remained her one true love.

73 RWA, F2C:16, file 340, p. 11.
of Defence for their release. To their surprise, the entire company No. 106 was let go.74 Rozsa Solymosi remembers, as described in the prologue, that her father was terribly shaken when her brother was taken to the Eastern front:

We saw [my brother] out to Rákosrendező railway station. Father was in tears. While standing on the stairs of the cattle wagon, my brother said, “don’t you cry, Father, I will manage to endure this short spell anyway.” /…/ Then we had heard nothing from him after the Voronhez battle. The[n] came my brother’s birthday, and we hushed it up. We did not say a word to Father, hoping he would forget about it. 18 February. Father did not say a word to me and my foster mother also hoped we would forget about it. Then, entering the bathroom, I found my father there shaving, and I saw tears coming down his soaped cheeks. The tears gushed. If I close my eyes, I can still see [two of] him: standing in front of the mirror and in the mirror, in tears. He escaped from us to hide there.75

When it comes to issues such as marriage, love, and feelings, there are strikingly few men who talk about them, practically none. Rozsa’s testimony is the only one that touches upon male feelings. Her father did not want to show his grief, but instead cried in the bathroom. If her father had been interviewed, would he have talked about these feelings? This difference cannot depend on gendered experiences, since it is certain that men, too, had feelings, thought about relations and love, and missed their loved ones. This is an example of how narration strategies can differ from individual to individual, as described by Rachel Pascal Bos. The gender difference sometimes lies in the choice of what to tell.

George L. Mosse has shown that the ideal modern male was supposed to exercise self-control. Therefore, middle class men are not supposed to show or talk about their feelings. But Mosse’s description concerns the ideal modern Christian man; Jews and homosexuals were regarded as marginalized groups and were represented by negative stereotypes.76 Paula Hyman writes, in accordance to Mosse, that Jewish male characteristics were seen as being synonymous to female characteristics in the early twentieth century. However, “Jewish males doubtless felt a need to distinguish themselves from women and to eliminate any hint of the feminine in their self-presentation.”77 Did this repudiation of female characteristics form the identity of the Jewish male during the whole twentieth century? If yes, it is not surprising that male survivors do not speak about their feelings in the interviews.

75 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 19.
76 Mosse (1996), chapter 4.
The youth and the children

The youth, both male and female, also had their share of problems and special experiences which were connected to the labour service system. Ivan Becker, who was in his early teens when Hungary joined the war, talks about how the family’s life changed when his father was drafted, first as a commander of a labour brigade, and later as a regular worker:

My father was away, and so we had no money, and [my] uncle […] had connections in a rather large printing plant in Budapest and arranged [it] that I could be an apprentice there, make some money to… to essentially have my mother and myself from… [to k]eep ourselves fed.

I: And your mother did not work?

I. B.: She did not work. She did some embroidery [with] little beads for money, but really didn’t have much money […]. It brought in some and I brought in some so I think there were some people helping us a little bit too. […] I don’t know [who] they were or why. These acquaintances who were better off than we were.78

Ivan Becker states that the labour service system had an immediate impact upon his life. Ivan’s uncle determined that Ivan could work as an apprentice in the printing plant, even though he had not yet turned fifteen. Ivan’s mother earned some extra money as an embroiderer, a “typical” female handicraft. It is also important to point out that Ivan came from a lower middle class family, and that he was the only child. Even though it was a small family with both mother and son bringing in some income, they still had difficulties in supporting themselves, and had to rely on help from acquaintances.

In contrast to Ivan Becker, I would like to bring in Marianne Balshone’s testimony. Her experiences of the labour service system were much more indirect. Marianne was from an upper middle class family, and she was a few years older than Ivan. She was born in 1925, and thus was in her late teens during the war. Her father worked as “commander of exchange” and was probably either too old or too prominent to be drafted. She had rather vague recollections of the labour service system:

I am sure I was aware of it. But if you ask me today, I cannot recall the day; I cannot [remember] what they [sic] really happened, because… at those times those things did not happen to me or my circle. We were aware of it or even we [were] saying “OH GOD!” It just shouldn’t happen to us. And… being very young, very young, really makes a difference.79

78 RWA, F2C:19, file 508, p. 8.
79 RWA, F2C:19, file 502, p. 6.
After this, Marianne continues by telling everything she knew about the labour service system: what the men were wearing, how the conditions were etc. It is interesting to note that she recounts all of this, even though she did not have any personal experience of it. For the researcher, it is impossible to know whether she, in fact, knew these things back then, or if she gained the information after the war. Most likely, it was probably a little bit of both. I argue, however, that what is of importance here is that the labour service system did not interest her very much. As brought up in chapter 2, people tend to remember details that they are interested in, and this could partly explain why Marianne did not remember much about the labour service, along with the fact that she was young and that none of the people closest to her were drafted.

Ervin Forrester was another young person in his late teens, who remembered that he did not sense much antisemitism or discrimination in Hungary. However, he recalled that his uncle was summoned, and that the entire family was very worried about him. They tried to send him some parcels, but it was difficult. The uncle’s wife was also in a difficult situation. She did not have any income, and Ervin’s family tried to help her in various ways.

Judit Farkas was born in 1928, and was eleven when the Second World War broke out. According to her testimony, she was a protected child, and was shocked when she realized that both the war and the current antisemitic politics could also affect her life. Judit remembers how she and her mother spent two weeks’ winter holidays at the Palota Hotel in Lilafüred, and during their strolls in the forest she saw labour servicemen working with lumber. Her recollection of this event is the contrast between the luxurious hotel she and her mother were at and the hard work the Jewish labourers were performing in the winter cold. But this did not affect her until her father was drafted and placed on one of the islands in Óbuda, close to Budapest.

We went to visit him. That was the place where my first horrible incident hit me. Soldiers were standing around where we arrived […]. In heavy rain they drove us along the island, permanently shouting roughly at us, they had weapons in their hands. On a […] square surrounded by trenches and barbed wire, around standing armed guards. Labourer[s] were standing in rows. Coming closer to them I saw my dear father standing there and I cried and cried.

Judit’s family could survive, as they still had their sporting goods shop. They received help from a “straw man”, Mr. Óvári, who officially owned the shop although it actually was run by Judit’s mother and grandmother. Here we can see an example of Hungarian non-Jewish citizens helping Jewish persons, as

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80 See also Rozsa Solymosi’s testimony RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 26, where she mentions that “the young girls of that age took an interest in quite a lot of things, but politics was the last of them.”
81 RWA, F2C:18, file 349, p. 4.
82 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 15.
83 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 17.
mentioned in chapter 4. Later, in 1944, Judit was called up into the labour service as a sixteen-year-old girl. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 7.

The labour service system was something that made an imprint even on small children. Peter Tarjan was only five when Hungary joined the war in 1941. He recounts that he does not have any recollection of when and how the war began, but he remembers how his parents talked to each other in “hushed tones”, often in German, so that their little son would not understand what they were discussing. He also remembers that his father had to go into the labour service, but he cannot give any details about his own experiences around these events. It is obvious that Peter was too young during the war to have clear recollections of the period. It is nevertheless significant that he remembers that his father was drafted, thus indicating that this was an exceptional event in his childhood.

Concluding remarks

How did the labour service system shape Hungarian Jewish experiences? How did the informants construe the treatment in the labour battalions, and how did they respond to the system? These questions were some of the issues addressed in this chapter. As many as ninety-three (or 62 per cent) out of 151 informants refer to the labour service and its effects. It is known from previous research that the majority of the labour servicemen suffered brutal treatment and were forced away from their families, which affected them both physically and mentally. The work was heavy, there was not enough food, and the workers suffered from insufficient clothing and disease. The ways in which the informants interpreted the circumstances in the labour service confirms this, but some of the survivors also testify to decent treatment. The differences between the perceptions of the labour service depended partly on geographical place, and partly on individual agency. The labour servicemen within the Trianon borders were more often treated better than those who ended up on the Eastern front in the Ukraine, or in Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the informants recount that their treatment within the forced labour service greatly depended on specific individuals. The more antisemitic the guards and commanders were, the more brutal the treatment.

Jewish males who were old enough to enter the military were the first physical victims of the Holocaust in Hungary, as previously shown by Tim Cole. Age and gender were thus the most important factors that shaped the experiences of the labour service system. The impact of the labour service system on Jewish males could also depend on social class, both in negative and

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84 RWA, F2C:19, file 503, p. 2.
positive ways. The interviews confirm Braham’s notion on social class: those who belonged to the upper or middle class had more difficulties in adjusting to hardship than those who were used to physical work.87 But on the other hand, wealthier individuals could in some cases buy food and proper clothing, and were in this way better equipped against hunger and cold. Social stratification was thus upheld in the labour service at least to some degree, but at the same time, an upper class background could be disadvantageous for those who could not endure hard work.

Women were not physically persecuted at this stage, but they suffered because of the absence of their husbands, fathers, and brothers, as stressed by many informants. Their responsibilities grew when the families’ male bread-winners were taken away. The labour service system altered the gender order even more than the anti-Jewish laws. Gender roles and relations changed because of the male absence. In practice, the Jewish woman suddenly became the leader of the family. She had to support the family and at least to some extent become the decision-maker. This can partly be compared to the war situation in general in Hungary and in other countries, where similar changes in the gender order occurred, according to Ulla Wikander and others.88 This male absence forced women to work outside of the home. The difference was, however, that Jewish women had fewer employment possibilities because of the restrictions within the labour market. They had to cope both with antisemitism and the loss of their male family members simultaneously.89

Young women experienced difficulties in finding spouses due to the lack of Jewish men, as was shown in the case of Klara Weiss. Female interviewees more often talked about how they felt when their families were split. This does not, however, mean that men did not have any feelings; they were just not as eager to talk about these sensitive issues. Therefore, George L. Mosse’s description of the ideal modern man as self-controlling and strong also portrays the ideal Hungarian Jewish male.90

Those informants who were children or youngsters also talk about suffering, but in different terms than those who were adults. They remember the anxiety they felt for their fathers and other relatives in the labour service, and some of the teenagers even had to work in order to help support their families.

In sum, the categories of gender, age, and geographical place were of central importance when it comes to the effects of the labour service system on the Jewish informants. The complexity of the experiences becomes visible in the testimonies. Young males between the age of 20 and 48 experienced discrimi-
nation within the labour battalions, while women, children, and the elderly remained at home. According to previous research and the empirical material used here, harsh treatment became more frequent over time, and the experiences differed from place to place. Social class, however, did not have as evident an impact as it did during the enactment of the anti-Jewish laws, but could nevertheless be of importance for how the men endured physical labour. Some Jewish men were exempted due to disabilities, connections, or distinctions they had received during the First World War.
PART THREE

EXPERIENCES OF PERSECUTION AND GENOCIDE
1944–1945
Historians usually divide the Holocaust in Hungary into three phases. First, there was a period of identification, concentration, and deportation (March 19–July 7); second, there was a period of relative calmness, without extensive persecution (July 7–October 16); and third, there was a violent period of mass killings, deportations, and death marches (October 16–February 13).

The deportations during the first phase mainly concerned the Jews in the provinces, while the atrocities occurring in the third phase largely affected the Jews in the capital. During the entire period, Jewish labourers, both from the provinces and the capital, continued serving in the Hungarian Army. This chapter is based on previous research and the events are presented in a chronological order.

The German occupation

Operation Margarethe I, the German occupation of Hungary, was planned in the autumn of 1943. The reasons for the occupation were manifold. The Red Army had advanced in the East and the Western Allies in the South, causing the Italian declaration of a cease-fire with the Allies in July 1943. Hitler had seen Hungary’s reluctance in fulfilling the demands of “solving the Jewish question”, and the Hungarian government tried to establish contacts with the Allies. The Germans wanted to avoid losing yet another one of their allies. Hence, both the war situation in general and the German desire to finish their work concerning the “Jewish question” were the factors which led to Operation Margarethe I.

The immediate motive for the occupation was, according to Braham, the Hungarian request for the withdrawal of the Hungarian troops from the Ukraine in January 1944. At the same time, Hitler had received intelligence reports concerning the American presence in Budapest, there to work out the

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details of Hungary’s extrication from the Axis. This disturbed the Germans, and the occupation plan was soon put in effect.

In March 1944, Hitler invited Horthy to the castle of Klessheim in Salzburg, to discuss the military situation and the Hungarian demand concerning the withdrawal of troops from the Ukraine. The negotiations on March 18 were dragged out in order to delay the Hungarian delegation’s return to Budapest. On the morning of March 19, German troops had already reached the capital of Hungary. The occupation was carried out without any resistance from the Hungarian Army.

Directly after the occupation, Miklós Kállay and his government was replaced by pro-Nazi officials. The extreme rightist Dőme Sztójay, who had been Hungary’s minister in Berlin for ten years, was appointed Prime Minister. Horthy was still officially the head of state, but he withdrew from politics for over three months. Hitler’s minister plenipotentiary, Edmund Veesenmayer, was put in charge of Hungarian affairs, and Adolf Eichmann was appointed chief of “Office IV [Amt IV]”, which would ultimately be in command of “the Final Solution of the Jewish Question”. Veesenmayer and Eichmann were supported by Prime Minister Sztójay, but also by László Endre and László Baky, two antisemitic radical rightists at the Ministry of the Interior. These two and other pro-German high officials secured the Germans both unrestricted access to and support from the civil and military authorities.

A Jewish Council was established in Budapest only a week after the occupation. The purpose was to control the Jews through their own community: the Council functioned as a middleman between the Nazis and the Jewish community. Eichmann ensured the Jewish Council that he would protect the Hungarian Jews against violence if they cooperated with the new government. The Council had only male members, and was led by the Neolog Samu Stern. They chose to cooperate, and met the German requirements. Jenő Lévai writes: “To begin with, the demands made by the Germans were of a material nature and assumed the most extraordinary forms both in the capital and in the provinces[…] In addition to the general equipment of a more military nature […], the Germans demanded all kinds of luxury goods and not infrequently in considerable quantities.”

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7 Braham (1994), vol. 1, p. 468; Kramer (2000), pp. 134–136; Lajos (2004), pp. 59–60. According to Attila Lajos, the Jewish Council in Budapest was willing to cooperate with the Germans and to satisfy their needs. In exchange, the members of the Jewish Council received special documents and special treatment. The role of the Jewish Council in the Hungarian Holocaust is widely debated.
8 Lévai (1948), p. 85.
The Jewish Council received its first orders very quickly. They were forced to deliver 300 mattresses and 600 blankets to the authorities. This requirement was not easily met, and because of this the Germans threatened to execute 10,000 Jews if the task was not fulfilled before the given date. At last, within the time limit, all of the mattresses (taken from the Jewish hospital) and the blankets (used by Jewish labour servicemen) were delivered to the Germans.9


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9 Lévai (1948), p. 81.
10 The original Hungarian text says: “These ‘big Jews’ also live in the internment camp: 1. Baron Samu Madarassy-Beck, the retired president of Leszámlító Bank. 2. Emil Wolf, the former manager of the Chinoïn chemical factory, who does not wear the yellow star in the internment camp – his wife is Christian. 3. Samu Weiner, the former ‘leader’ of the Jewish mill industry. 4. Károly Somogyi, the former co-owner of the Haasz and Somogyi hardware company.”
A number of anti-Jewish decrees were introduced in a steady stream during the following weeks and months. On April 5, the Jews were forced to identify themselves by wearing a ten-centimetre six-pointed yellow star and they were forbidden to belong to professional chambers and organizations. Jewish property (finances, telephones, radios, cars etc.) was confiscated and Jewish literature was burned in bonfires. The Jews were not allowed to move or change their address, or to travel without a permit. More than 3,000 Jews (mainly Hungarian leading politicians and influential businessmen and bankers) were arrested in ten days. Figure 6.1 shows four of these interned prominent men, published in a contemporary newspaper. Thus the situation for the Hungarian Jewry deteriorated rapidly when antisemitism was institutionalized according to the German pattern.

The annihilation process in Hungary was very similar to the process in other parts of German-occupied Europe, but it differed from the other countries because of its rapid pace. The Germans were more effective as a result of earlier experience, and the Hungarian authorities co-operated fully by leading the ghettoization process in the provinces. Aly and Gerlach claim that the cooperation between the Germans and the Hungarian authorities was crucial to the implementation of the extermination process in Hungary. Local initiatives, along with German orders, made the process relatively easy.

Hungary was now divided into six zones (see table 6.1). The ghettoization in Zone I (around Munkács and Ungvár in Northern part of the country) began on April 16. Ghettos were established near the railway stations, which made it easier to load the wagons with human cargo. Ghettoization of Zones II–V followed in May and in June. At the same time the deportations were staged, also beginning in Zone I, on May 15. Each train was filled with 3,000 persons, and during the first weeks approximately 12,000 Hungarian Jews were deported daily to the extermination camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Hungarian local authorities and Gendarmerie managed to deport 437,402 men, women, and children in 147 trains in slightly less than two months. In Auschwitz-Birkenau, German guards and their collaborators carried out the actual extermination.

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13 See Hilberg (2002), vol. 1 for a thorough account of the destruction process within the German-occupied countries.
16 The Germans chose some of the prisoners to do the “dirty work” upon their arrival and during the gassings. These groups of prisoners were called Sonderkommando. See Levi (1989); and Gideon Greif, „Wir weinten tränenlös”: Augenzeugenberichte des jüdischen “Sonderkommandos” in Auschwitz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1999).
Table 6.1. Ghettoization and Deportation of the Hungarian Jewry in 1944

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Area of Hungary</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>Number of ghettos</th>
<th>Date of ghettoization</th>
<th>Date of deportation</th>
<th>Number of deported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Carpatho-Ruthenia</td>
<td>Kassa, Munkács</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>April 16–28</td>
<td>May 19–24</td>
<td>190,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Northern Transylvania</td>
<td>Kolozsvár</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>May 3–10</td>
<td>May 15–June 7</td>
<td>98,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Northern Hungary</td>
<td>Miskolc, Győr</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>June 5–10</td>
<td>June 11–16</td>
<td>51,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Southeastern Hungary</td>
<td>Szeged, Debrecen</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>June 16–26</td>
<td>June 25–28</td>
<td>40,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Western and Southwestern Hungary</td>
<td>Pécs, Sopron</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>June 30–July 3</td>
<td>July 4–6</td>
<td>29,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Suburbs of Budapest</td>
<td>Újpest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>June 30–July 3</td>
<td>8 July</td>
<td>24,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>434,351*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*According to the reports of Lieutenant-Colonel László Ferenczy, who was in charge of the ghettoization. The figures that are reported by Veesenmayer are a bit higher; a total of 437,402 deported. The number of 98,000 in Zone II is an estimation, given by David Cesarani. According to Braham, the total number of deported from Zones I and II is 288,333. Here, 98,000 was subtracted from 288,333 to get the number of 190,333 deported in Zone I.

While the Hungarian countryside was emptied of Jews, more than 150,000 Jews still remained in Budapest. The deportation of the Budapest Jewry was meant to be the final step of the extermination plan in Hungary. Anxiety was increasing in the capital as rumours concerning deportations were spread.

Horthy had been informed of the deportations from the beginning, but apparently he did not intervene when the provincial Jews were deported. In June, the Budapest Jewish Council became aware of the so-called Auschwitz protocols, detailed eyewitness reports from the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. The secretary of the Council, Ernő Pető, forwarded this information to Horthy’s son, Miklós Horthy Jr. After reading the Auschwitz protocols, he appealed to his father to act. Simultaneously, Horthy received protest letters from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, King Gustaf V of Sweden, and Pope Pius XII. This and an attempted but failed coup to overthrow Horthy, planned by Baky and Endre at the Ministry of the Interior, led to intense discussions in the Hungarian Council of Ministers as to whether to cease their collaboration with the Germans. In early July, the Jewish inhabitants in the suburbs of Budapest (Zone VI) were surrounded and some of them were deported. As a result of all of this, Horthy put an end to the deportations on July 7, 1944, and the Jews of Budapest were saved for the moment.17

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17 Holocaust in Hungary (1982), p. 22; Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 824–832, 871–882. Horthy was approached by not only his son, but also by Count Móric Eszterházy and by Count István Bethlen, who insisted that he should act. See p. 871. See also Rudolf Vrba, I Escaped from Auschwitz (Fort Lee: Barricade Books, 2002) about the Auschwitz protocols. Vrba was one of the authors of the protocols.
Relocation of the Budapest Jews into “Jewish houses”

The ghettoization within Budapest was planned in May 1944, but the actual ghetto was not established until late in November 1944. In the meantime, however, there were attempts to create “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” areas in the city. The hilly, more “luxurious” side of Buda was designated for Christians only, while the flat side of Pest was allotted to Christians and Jews. In May, the authorities introduced a number of decrees regulating which the specific hotels, restaurants, movie theatres, and bathhouses Jews were allowed to visit. All of these “Jewish” facilities were located on the Pest side. On June 4, shopping was restricted to a specific period of the day. According to this regulation, Jews were allowed to do their grocery shopping between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m., while purchase of other items was restricted to the hours between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.\

By June, the motives for the ghettoization of the Budapest Jewry had taken shape. The aim was to “take the ghetto to the Jew”, which, according to Tim Cole, can be seen as a more pragmatic solution to the “problem”. So-called “Jewish houses” were established in apartment buildings where many Jews already lived. These buildings were scattered all over the city and as a result, the number of individual relocations was minimized.

On June 16, the list of the 2,639 “Jewish houses” was made public. This information reached the citizens through posters and the press, in which it was made clear that all Jews had to move to these specific yellow-star-marked houses by June 21. Each family was entitled to one or to a maximum of two rooms, in the case that the family was large or the rooms very small. The majority of the houses were in Pest (2,057), while 582 were located in Buda. This was due to the demographical pattern of the “Jewish presence” in the city: 18.9 per cent of the inhabitants in Pest were Jewish, while the percentage in Buda was 6.1.

Consequently, pragmatic reasons and solutions were what drove the process towards establishing scattered Jewish houses instead of one or a few large ghettos. The often repeated explanation in historical writing, a fear that one large ghetto would open up for the Allied bombing of the rest of the city, is thus not completely valid.

Many non-Jewish and Jewish inhabitants in the buildings concerned contested the ghettoization plan of June 16. Hundreds of complaints reached the City Council, and the media also criticized the plan. The authorities decided to change the existing plans, reducing the number of Jewish buildings (from 2,639

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18 Cole (2003), chapter 7.

19 An earlier plan of several small ghettos both in Buda and in Pest was thus abolished. See Cole (2003), pp. 88–95.

20 Cole (2003), pp. 104–105, 111–113. See also Braham (1994), vol. 2, chapter 24 for the relocation of Jews in Budapest into Jewish houses. László Endre at the Ministry of the Interior was one of the architects behind this first ghettoization process in Budapest.

21 See Cole (2003), pp. 115–125 on this discourse.
to 1,948) and also opening up the possibility of “mixed” houses. Non-Jewish residents were able to stay in their homes if they wanted to, while Jewish residents were forced to move. The new resolution was announced on June 22. The ghettoization process had now changed from thinking in terms of areas to planning not only in terms of buildings, but also in terms of single apartments.\(^{22}\)

The decision clearly changed the living conditions in the Jewish houses and apartments. The resolution from June 16 had meant living in rather confined quarters, but now the new orders led to seriously overcrowded Jewish apartments in many of the city’s districts. Cole shows that in district XI, 2,154 Jewish persons were to be housed in 194 apartments in eighteen buildings. This gave a ratio of 11.10 persons per apartment, instead of 4.53, which would have been the result of the June 16 decree. Now, 15.8 per cent of Budapest’s total population would live in 5.75 per cent of the city’s total number of buildings.\(^{23}\)

Horthy seemed to regain some of his lost authority after halting the deportations. Braham states that “[h]is decisive intervention showed the Germans and their Hungarian accomplices that they could not proceed with their deportation plans without the cooperation of the Hungarian authorities.”\(^{24}\) During the summer, despite continuing pressure from Veesenmayer, Horthy repeated his opposition of further deportations. In early August, he fired some of the most pro-German members of the government, and replaced them with other, less pro-German persons.\(^{25}\)

Eichmann tried to stage the last deportations in late August, and the Prime Minister Sztójay assured him that the Hungarian authorities would support this, but this time the neutral countries reacted, after an appeal from the Jewish Council. A note, signed by Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Rotta and Minister of Sweden Carl Ivan Danielsson, among others, was presented to the Hungarian government. It stated that they knew what deportation meant, “even when masked as labor service abroad” and demanded that the government “put a definitive end to this process, which for the honor of humanity should not have been permitted in the first place.”\(^{26}\)

This intervention by the neutral countries was absolutely essential for the survival of the Budapest Jewry. Eichmann went back to Germany, and Horthy continued with his attempts to free the government from pro-German elements. Prime Minister Sztójay was replaced by General Géza Lakatos on

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\(^{22}\) Cole (2003), pp. 131–132, 154–159. The majority of the complaints, more than two hundred, came from non-Jewish inhabitants, who requested a cancellation of conversion of their apartment buildings into Jewish houses. About 150 complaints came from Jews who requested that their houses become Jewish houses, and more than hundred requests came from individuals from mixed marriages, who appealed to be allowed to remain together. See also Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 852.

\(^{23}\) Cole (2003), pp. 159–164.


\(^{25}\) Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 889, 918. Those who were released at this point were Andor Jaross, Béla Imrédy, and Antal Kunder. Miklós Bonczos replaced Jaross as Minister of the Interior.

August 29, and the extreme rightists Baky and Endre at the Ministry of the Interior were relieved from their duties in early September. Lakatos was ordered to form a new government, which eased the anti-Jewish pressure in Budapest. As a result of these manoeuvres, the situation for the country’s remaining Jewry was not as critical as it had been in early July. Some deportations and mass killings occurred, however, but these were now against the government’s policy. In the meantime, the Germans repeated their demand for the total evacuation of Jews from Budapest.

The Arrow Cross takeover and its immediate consequences

The second, calmer phase when Horthy and the new government took at least some political action against the Nazis lasted until October 15, 1944. On that date, Horthy declared a Hungarian armistice on the national radio. Horthy’s attempt for peace failed, however, due to last-minute changes in his plan. Horthy decided to carry out the plan three days ahead of schedule, mainly because of the extreme pressure that was being placed on him by the extreme rightist Arrow Cross, the Germans, and by the Soviets as well. His troops did not have enough time to mobilize, and the Arrow Cross managed to seize power. The very same afternoon, the Arrow Cross occupied the broadcasting station. The day after, Horthy surrendered to the leader of the Arrow Cross party, Ferenc Szálasi, whom the Germans supported. The declaration of armistice was thus annulled.

The euphoria that many Hungarian Jews had felt when they heard Horthy’s proclamation on October 15 soon changed to disappointment and fear. Anti-Jewish excesses started directly after the Fascist takeover. Propaganda against “judeo-bolshevism” was distributed via radio broadcasts and leaflets, and Horthy was described as “a hireling of the Jews”. Jews were not permitted to leave their houses for ten days, which led to severe conditions regarding food and water, and to deteriorating health for many. The news of the Szálasi coup and the violence that followed it caused a series of suicides among the Jews, while Arrow Cross men looted and slaughtered thousands of Jews around the city during the coming weeks and months.

27 Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 918–919, 1398–1399. For example, approximately 1,500 Jews were deported from the Sárvár internment camp on July 24, and close to 3,000 labour servicemen from Bor were massacred at Cservenka on October 7–8.

28 On the coup, see Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 947–952. Horthy and his family left for exile in Germany. Miklós Horthy Jr. was arrested by the Gestapo and was later taken to Mauthausen and to Dachau. See p. 952. See also Lévai (1948), pp. 335–441 concerning Horthy’s plan, the negotiations with the Soviets, and the putsch.

The Germans now realized that they had a chance to bring “the Final Solution” in Hungary to a close. According to Braham, there were approximately 160,000 Jews left in Budapest at this time, and about 150,000 Jewish males in the labour service system. Eichmann, who returned from Germany directly after the coup, negotiated with the new Minister of the Interior Gábor Vajna so that 50,000 able-bodied Jews would be transferred to Germany for forced labour, with the remaining able-bodied Jews building fortifications for the defence of Budapest. The rest of the Jews (mostly women, children and the elderly) were to be placed in camps or in a city ghetto. The Jews who had been exempted or protected before the Szálasi coup would from now on be treated like all of the other Jewish persons. The neutral legations and the International Red Cross protested against this, and the decision was revoked a few days later, on November 2.30

The systematic attacks against the Budapest Jews began on October 20. Arrow Cross men and Hungarian policemen raided Jewish houses and gathered all of the Jewish males between sixteen and sixty years of age at the horse race track or at the Kisok sports field. These age limitations were neglected by many perpetrators, and males over sixty years, as well as some of the sick and handicapped, were also forced to leave their homes. The men were divided into labour battalions, and taken to fortification construction work south and southeast of Budapest.

Two days later, the Arrow Cross started another drive, gathering the rest of the Jewish males between sixteen and sixty, and the Jewish females between eighteen and forty years of age. According to Braham, some 25,000 Jewish men and about 10,000 Jewish women were taken into the labour service within one week. Some of the men and women within the age limits were exempted, including Jews in mixed marriages, relatives of labour servicemen, workers in war industries, and mothers who had many children.31

It is evident that the definition of “Jew” became broader during the Arrow Cross era, not necessarily in theory, but definitely in practice. Only men were called up in the labour service system before October 1944, but now also women were drafted. Additional special call-up orders for Jewish women were issued on November 2 and 3, ordering the registration of sixteen to fifty-year-old women who knew how to sew, and able-bodied women between sixteen and forty years of age.32 Jewish property, left behind by the persons taken into the labour service or forced into the death marches, was collected by Szálasi’s men. These assets and goods were to become “national wealth and had to be handed over to the State”, as Lévai put it. The property was to be used to cover war costs and expenses caused by the execution of the anti-Jewish decrees. The only properties that did not have to be handed over were religious items,

personal letters, medicine, food, cooking utensils and necessary furniture, and 
amounts of money under 300 pengó per family.33

The two ghettos of Budapest
In August 1944, about 3,000 Swedish-protected Jews had moved to Lipotváros, 
district V, more precisely to some of the yellow-star buildings on Pozsonyi 
Street. According to Tim Cole, those who had access to these safehouses had 
to possess both a protective passport issued by the Swedish legation and a 
replacement certificate from the Jewish Council. To make room for these 
“protected Jews”, “unprotected Jews” who lived in these apartments were relo-
cated into Jewish houses in other parts of the city.34

After the Arrow Cross coup, a plan to implement two different ghettos for 
protected and unprotected Jews, took shape. These plans were made public in 
mid-November, and the so-called International ghetto was officially established 
in district V, close to Pozsonyi Street and Szent István Park. According to 
Braham, close to 15,600 protected Jews were formally allowed to re-settle in the 
International ghetto.35 According to the Swedish authorities, some 17,000 Jews 
moved into these diplomatically protected houses. In reality, the figure might 
have been twice as high. Tamás Stark brings up figures from different sources 
(Jewish sources and sources from the Szálasi regime) which indicate that about 
40,000 to 50,000 Jews found refuge in the protected houses.36 Cole stresses that 
“[w]hatever the precise figure, ‘protected Jews’ formed a sizable minority of the 
city’s ‘Jews’ in winter 1944”.37 These tens of thousands of Jews were assigned to 
apartments where less than 4,000 persons had been living previously. The living 
conditions were harsh, and it was not unusual that about 50 to 60 persons lived 
in a two-room apartment.38

The International ghetto consisted of 122 houses, designated for use by Jews 
protected by the neutral countries or by the Red Cross. 72 of these buildings 
were protected by the Swiss legation, 31 by the Swedish, and the rest fell under 
the protection of Portugal, Spain, the Vatican, the International Red Cross, the 
Swedish Red Cross, the Governor, and the Ministry of the Interior. The ghetto 
was not sealed, but concerned only these specific buildings, enjoying extra-
territoriality and protection by the sovereign neutral states and the Red Cross.

34 Cole (2003), pp. 198–199.
35 Of these, 7,800 were under protection by Switzerland, 4,500 by Sweden, 2,500 by Vatican, 698 by 
Portugal and 100 by Spain. See Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 974–975. However, the actual number was 
much larger, perhaps doubly as much.
What happened to the Jews who had been living in the houses that became part of the International ghetto? Tim Cole shows that these Jews were simply relocated. Males between sixteen and sixty years of age and females aged eighteen to forty were taken to the brickyards in Óbuda, awaiting further deportation through death marches towards the Austrian border. Children and the elderly were relocated into Jewish houses in other areas, and in late November they were taken to the ghetto for “unprotected Jews”.

The International ghetto only existed for a few months. In December, the Arrow Cross started to also raid protected houses, and took protected Jews to the banks of the Danube. Physically fit persons were taken to the death marches, while children and the elderly were taken to the Pest ghetto. Braham writes: “The situation became so critical early in January 1945 that Raoul Wallenberg decided to have the Swedish-protected Jews transferred into the large ghetto, where their survival was presumed to have a better chance.”

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Approximately 5,000 Swedish-protected Jews were transferred to the Pest ghetto, while those who lived in the odd-numbered buildings on Pozsonyi Road were allowed to stay.40

The Budapest ghetto, located in district VII in Pest, was mapped out on November 29, 1944. The area was chosen because of the large number of Jews already living there: about half of the 296 apartment blocks were yellow-star houses. The non-Jews living in the area were moved to other parts of the city, and this time the authorities did not accept any complaints. The ghetto was to become a space of “non-Jewish absence”. All “unprotected Jews” were relocated into the ghetto. Buda was therefore made totally judenfrei (except for people in hiding), and the Budapest Jewry was now concentrated to two areas in Pest: that of the International ghetto in district V, and the ghetto in district VII. The latter was sealed on December 10. The ghetto population by that time was 44,416. The Jews lived in 240 buildings (the other 50 were sealed or designated for “public use”), with an average population density of 5.75 persons per room.41 However, in January 1945 there were close to 70,000 people living in the same area.42 This meant that the average population density per room increased to about 9 persons. Most of the ghetto inhabitants were children, women, and men over 50 years of age, or sick persons. Adult, able-bodied women and men were either taken to the labour camps or to the death marches, or were placed in the International ghetto, as already mentioned.

The conditions in the ghetto were poor. Diseases flourished in the overcrowded apartments, and there was a constant lack of food and fuel. Even though the ghetto only existed for less than two months, the severe conditions and the frequent killings took many lives. Small children were especially vulnerable, as will be shown in chapter 9.

The death marches and mass killings along the Danube

Since there were not enough trains to provide Germany with 50,000 workers, the Jews recruited by force in Budapest were marched on foot to the Austrian border.43 These so-called death marches began in early November. Approximately 2,000 Jews per day were sent to the border town Hegyeshalom. They were to be used in building up Vienna’s defence and at the same time the marches would make Budapest judenfrei. According to Yehuda Bauer, the first marches can be explained pragmatically, as the Jews were de facto taken to forced

labour, while the later ones were conducted only with the purpose of killing as many as possible.⁴⁴

Most of these Jews were first taken to brickyards in Óbuda, west of the Danube. After a few days they started to march to Hegyeshalom, a 200 kilometre walk that took about a week. The conditions faced during the marches were dreadful. Without food, water, and proper clothing, the women and men were forced to walk and sleep in the cold winter weather. Many died during the march, before ever reaching Hegyeshalom. Almost every attempt to escape was in vain. Even though one could manage to escape from the guards, the chances of survival were minimal.⁴⁵ According to Aly and Gerlach, more than 25,000 people were taken to Hegyeshalom during November 1944. Of these 25,000 at least 5,000 (20 per cent) died because of malnutrition, cold, exhaustion, and shootings. Roughly 70 per cent of the Jews taken to the death marches were women.⁴⁶ This was due to the fact that those remaining in Budapest were mainly women. A large part of the men who were taken to Hegyeshalom were forced labour workers.

Already on the day of the Szálasi coup and during the following months, the Arrow Cross organized raids and killings of the Budapest Jews. According to Aly and Gerlach, about 4,000 persons took part in these killings. The party bureau provided the headquarters, under which every district of the capital had its own Arrow Cross office. The “death squadrons” were organized under these offices. The squadrons raided Jewish houses, the ghetto, Jewish hospitals, Jewish orphanages, and even people in the streets. Thousands of persons were executed on the shores of the Danube, and pushed into the water. The killings became more frequent and cruel after the siege of Budapest had started in December 1944. The approximate number of Jewish inhabitants in Budapest by that time was 120,000. According to Aly and Gerlach, most of the victims of these killings were Jewish men.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Aly & Gerlach (2002), p. 360. Aly & Gerlach discuss the number of people taken to Hegyeshalom, as well as the number of deaths. According to them, it is hard to arrive at an exact figure. However, the earlier estimates of 50,000 people are exaggerated. Eichmann reports 27,000 and Veesenmayer mentions a figure of 30,000. According to information received from Raoul Wallenberg, there were approximately 30,000 people taken to Hegyeshalom, while another Swedish eyewitness account says there were 25,000.
Resistance and rescue

What is exactly meant by resistance? Nechama Tec uses Roger S. Gottlieb’s definition, which I also find relevant in this context. According to Tec, resistance can be defined as “activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed.” This definition includes organized resistance groups, which in turn can be differentiated as “armed or unarmed, spiritual or nonspiritual, urban or rural, and many other forms.”48 What is common to resistance activities is a motivation to eliminate or reduce oppression, and a certain set of dynamics. Resistance appears “in many guises”, but is at the same time determined by varying sets of conditions, such as the social, cultural, economic, and political conditions within a country, as well as geographical circumstances.49

In Budapest, several organized Jewish and non-Jewish resistance and rescue actions were staged. The Zionist Budapest Relief and Rescue Committee led by Ottó Komoly and Rezső Kasztner worked, for example, with emigration to Palestine, the organization of Jewish self-defence and assistance to refugees. Both legal and illegal methods were used when dealing with these matters, according to Szabolcs Szita.50 The Zionistic youth Halutz underground movement engaged in active resistance against the Germans in Budapest. They distributed false documents to Jews in need, and they also smuggled food into Budapest, and people out of the country.51 According to T. D. Kramer, at least some 5,000 Jews were smuggled out of Hungary and over 200,000 false documents were produced and distributed by the Halutz movement.52 According to Jenő Lévai, members of the Zionist youth movement often wore “various illegal uniforms” (for example Arrow Cross or Gendarmerie uniforms) and patrolled the streets at night. They could sometimes approach real Arrow Cross members and confiscate their identification papers, claiming that they were false, and could then distribute a number of authentic identity documents.53

48 Tec (2003), p. 261. The debate concerning the term resistance is very broad. Some scholars refer only to organized, armed resistance groups, while many researchers also define non-armed resistance as resistance. Some scholars go so far as to claim that even mere survival of the Holocaust can be seen as an act of resistance. See, for example, Resisting the Holocaust, ed. Ruby Rohrlich (Oxford: Berg, 1998); Bauer (2001), chapters 6 & 7.
49 Tec (2003), pp. 261–262.
50 Szita (2005), p. 3 and chapter 6. The committee’s work, mainly through Kasztner’s negotiations with the SS, resulted for example in the attempted emigration of 1,684 prominent Jews from Budapest by train. The passengers were told that they were heading to Palestine via Spain, but they were eventually taken to Bergen-Belsen. Some three hundred of them were allowed to continue to Switzerland, where they were received as refugees. Kasztner survived Bergen-Belsen, but was later prosecuted for his dealings with the Germans. He was assassinated in 1957 in Tel-Aviv. See pp. 209–215 on the Jerusalem Trial.
The neutral countries managed to distribute temporary passports \(\textit{[Schutzpässe]}\) or documents stating that the person was under protection of the specific state. These actions started already in the summer of 1944, but the rescue attempts culminated later during the autumn. Individuals such as Raoul Wallenberg (a member of the Swedish legation, financed by the War Refugee Board), Charles Lutz (the Swiss legation), and Angelo Rotta (the Vatican), just to mention a few, worked strenuously to help the city’s Jews. The holders of the temporary passports later moved into safehouses or protective buildings in the International ghetto.\(^\text{54}\) Paul A. Levine describes these activities as “bureaucratic resistance”, which was of considerable importance for the survival of the Budapest Jewry.\(^\text{55}\)

Other international organizations were also present in Budapest in 1944, but the results of their activities varied. For instance, even though the War Refugee Board never realized a mass rescue of Jews, they worked with small-scale rescues using bribery and smuggling.\(^\text{56}\) The International Red Cross led by Friedrich Born worked mainly with the protection of Jewish children and the children of Jewish converts, in co-operation with Ottó Komoly, György Gergely and reverend Gábor Sztehló.\(^\text{57}\) Valdemar and Nina Langlet worked for the Swedish Red Cross with various activities, such as the distribution of Red Cross safety documents, helping to hide refugees, establishing children’s homes and homes for the elderly, food distribution etc. The Swedish Red Cross was supposed to help all people regardless of their origin, but in many cases the city’s Jews were the actual recipients of the Swedish Red Cross rescue actions.\(^\text{58}\)

Jewish armed resistance in Hungary and in Budapest was very rare. There are several reasons for this, according to Robert Rozett. First, the Hungarian gentile underground movement was weak, and there was no plan for a nationwide uprising against the Germans. Rozett writes that without this prospect, “Hungarian Jewish armed resistance could not be placed in the context of mass rescue.” Second, “most of the Jewish men of fighting age who might have joined the activists to form a broad-based resistance movement had been drafted” into the labour service.\(^\text{59}\) A third significant aspect was timing. In most


\(^{56}\) Kremer (2000), pp. 330–333. The War Refugee Board was mainly financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution.


\(^{58}\) Björn Runberg, \textit{Valdemar Langlet. Räddare i faran} (Bromma: Megilla-Förlaget, 2000), pp. 20–21, 32–33. See also the memoirs of the Langlet couple: Valdemar Langlet (1946) and Nina Langlet, \textit{Kaos i Budapest} (Vällingby: Harriers Bokförlag AB, 1982).

places, active resistance was a response to the experience of suffering. As the German occupation occurred as late as in 1944, there were only a few attempts to organize armed resistance. Rozett mentions that the Zionist defence committee met soon after the occupation, but as its leader Moshe Schweiger was arrested, preparations were discontinued. Instead, the Hungarian Jewish resistance activities included negotiations with the SS, escape abroad, diplomatic resistance (provision of safety documents) and the manufacturing of false documents.60

International resistance and rescue was thus of great importance for the survival of the Budapest Jewry in 1944 and 1945. Rozett concludes in his article on international intervention that the rescue activities in 1944 rested on three pillars: international concern, cooperation between international diplomats and Jews, and the approaching Soviet Army. These factors hindered the total destruction of the Hungarian Jewry. “Either directly or indirectly, most of the survivors owed their lives to the activities of international diplomats and Jewish activists.”61

The Soviet Red Army drew closer to Budapest during the autumn of 1944. They broke through the line built up by the German and Hungarian Armies on December 9, and the siege of Budapest started around Christmas, lasting for almost two months. Heavy bombardments and street fights were carried out in the city, resulting in severe human losses and damage to the infrastructure.62 The Arrow Cross terror faced by the Jewish population culminated during the siege.63

The Red Army liberated the surviving Jews in Pest (the ghetto, the international ghetto, people in hiding) on January 17–18, and those remaining in hiding in Buda on February 13, 1945. Hungarian Jews within the labour service were liberated between October 1944 and April 1945, depending on their geographical location.64

The problems for the Hungarian Jews faced did not cease, however. Day-to-day survival in war-ravaged Hungary was a struggle. The returnees from the labour service and the camps suffered from various physical and mental diseases. There was a severe food shortage, and many of the Holocaust survivors died during the following months. Aid committees and organizations were established, including the National Relief Committee for Deportees ([Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság – DEGOB]), which took care of the returning survivors from various concentration camps in Austria, Poland, and

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60 Rozett (1997), pp. 136–137.
Germany. The events were not discussed publicly, at least not in depth. Many survivors were met with silence from their fellow citizens.

Hungarian Jews regained legal equality under the Armistice Agreement of January 20, 1945, and all of the anti-Jewish laws enacted during the Horthy and the Arrow Cross eras were annulled on March 17, 1945. It was declared that the “anti-Jewish measures had not been in accordance with the constitutional sentiments of the Hungarian people.”

In sum, the annihilation of the Hungarian Jewry started soon after the German occupation on March 19, 1944. The ghettoization was organized from mid-April onwards, and deportations to the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau started in mid-May. More than 400,000 Hungarian Jews were deported in two months. Miklós Horthy halted the deportations on July 7, and this calmer period for the country’s remaining Jews continued until October 16, when the Fascist Arrow Cross Party seized power. During the last months of the war, the Jews of Budapest experienced terror, hunger and overcrowding in the city’s two ghettos.

During the Arrow Cross rule, the difference between “Jews” and “Jews” became less distinct. Even women were drafted into the labour service, and persons who earlier had been exempted from the anti-Jewish laws through their contacts now became targets of antisemitic actions. The death marches to the Austrian border began in late November, and continued through December and early January, 1945. Thousands of Jews were killed during these marches, and during the mass killing actions along the Danube. However, thousands of Jewish inhabitants of Budapest were saved. They found refuge in the International ghetto (which was later also subjected to Arrow Cross raids) or in hiding at friends, neighbours, or within convents or prayer rooms. The neutral states and the Red Cross, as well as private persons, all worked hard, trying to make the situation tolerable for the Jews. On February 13, the Red Army took over the capital, and the sanctioned persecution of the Jews stopped.

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CHAPTER 7
Jewish Perceptions of the Events in 1944–1945

What did the events during the last year of the Second World War mean to the Hungarian Jews when analyzed in terms of gender, age, and social class? In general, there were considerable differences between the fate of the provincial Jews and that of the Budapest Jews. As mentioned above, the deportations started in the provinces and were stopped just before they reached the capital. But how did the informants studied here experience the atrocities on a micro-level, and how did they perceive the situation?

In the following two chapters, I analyze specific Jewish experiences by using survivor testimonies. The focus is on Budapest, but experiences from the provinces will also be investigated. I want to illustrate how the Jews perceived the persecutions, and how they responded to the events. The experiences as perceived by the informants are brought up in chapter 7, while Jewish responses and survival strategies will be explored in chapter 8. The empirical evidence is presented in chronological order, as much as it is possible to situate these events in time. However, it is sometimes difficult to follow the chronology, and the distinctions between perceptions and responses. Chapters 7 and 8 will thus overlap to a certain extent, but the common denominator is that they both deal with Jewish experiences in 1944–1945 in one way or another.

The informants frequently speak about seven important themes: the anti-Jewish regulations, the Pest ghetto, the International ghetto, the Allied bombings, violence, the labour service, and the death marches. These themes represent different circumstances or situations created by the perpetrators or other external factors during the German occupation in 1944–1945. One individual could experience all of these situations within less than a year, while many of the Jews never experienced, for example, violence or the death marches. At the same time, the majority of the Jews in Budapest lived in Jewish houses during at least one point in time, and they all experienced anti-Jewish regulations and the Allied bombings of the city.

This chapter starts by describing and analyzing how the Jews perceived the situation in the provinces and then in the capital. The focus is on the Budapest Jews and the presentation of the experiences is structured according to the themes mentioned above. The survivors, who play the leading roles in this study, were all somehow connected to the Swedish legation and/or Raoul Wallenberg, and many of them lived in the International ghetto at one time or
another in late 1944 and early 1945. I would like to stress, however, that many of the informants did not stay in the International ghetto for this entire period, but lived in the Jewish houses scattered all over the city during the summer of 1944, with many of them staying in the Pest ghetto during November or December 1944. Some of them escaped the labour service, and some of them were hiding. Thus the variety of experiences is wide, even though the majority of the informants in this study belonged to a special group connected to the Swedish legation and the International ghetto.

The provinces

The German and Hungarian authorities established more than 170 ghettos in the provinces during April, May, and June 1944.1 When the announcement of the establishment of the Beregszász ghetto came in late April, Mrs. Davidowits baked her last flour into bread. This is how her daughter, Aranka Siegal, recalls their exchange of words and her own thoughts about the yeast that her mother usually saved for the next baking:

“I am not going to bother to save the growing yeast for the next baking,” [Mother] said. “There is no next. This is the last of our flour, and who will be here to bake bread?”

I had once asked Mother about the neat little ball of dough she always saved from her Friday baking and tucked inside a flowered tin box for the following Friday. She had answered, “I brought this tin box with me from Komjaty when I first moved to Beregszász. My mother gave me a ball of her growing yeast to take with me. She got her original ball of dough from her mother. This way the bread we bake stays the same for generations.”

“Are you going to give me a ball of the dough when I get married?” I asked.

“Of course,” she had answered.

I stood now remembering that promise and watching her scrape up every morsel of dough from her wooden kneading bowl. With a determined expression on her face, she formed it into the last loaf of bread. Over the next few evenings I watched her sitting at the stove, the top plate covered with even slices of bread. She sat and patiently turned the slices until they were browned on both sides. Satisfied that they were done, she placed them in a pillow case.

“Why are you making all the bread into toast?” I asked.

“Bread mildews, but toast keeps,” she replied.2

This quote is both symbolic and informative at the same time, and exemplifies the visibility of gender patterns within the testimonies. On the one hand, for these women representing four generations, the “dough ball” had become a

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symbol of the continuity of their family and a specific mother-to-daughter ritual. Mrs. Davidowits understood that times were changing, and that she and her family were probably not going to return to their home for a while, if at all. Baking out the last piece of the dough symbolizes discontinuity and fragmentation, rather than the continuity of generations. On the other hand, the episode shows how important gender-related skills were for survival before the upcoming deportations. The bread Mrs. Davidowits baked lasted through their entire stay in the ghetto. She also knew how to keep the bread from getting mouldy. The baking became not only a matter of cultural reproduction, but also of physical survival.

During the ghettoization process, a majority of the adult male Jewish population was conscripted. The women and the remaining elderly men organized the move to the ghettos, which were located in small areas of city blocks close to the railway stations, in brick factories, or sometimes even in the open air, for example, in brickyards or in the woods. The brick factories usually had railways, and this was one of the practical reasons for using the factories as ghettos.3

The people in the Beregszász ghetto, which was a large brick factory building, consisted predominantly of women and children.4 Mrs. Davidowits tried to create a home for her family and their friends, the Gerbers. She hung up some cloth and blankets to create privacy, and demanded that the badly built lavatory area be reconstructed. The others could not understand why she was making such an effort. They would not be in the ghetto very long. Mrs. Davidowits answered that she did not want to “give in to them”, to become one of the “Schwein”.5 She wanted to maintain a certain level of normality, even in an abnormal situation, and to cling on to their earlier, “civilized” life.

Judy Cohen remembers how she and her family moved to the ghetto in Debrecen: “I remember we were all miserable. The women tried to make meals with the meagre supplies but it was never enough. Lack of adequate food and medical supply, lack of freedom, lack of privacy made life seem more and more hopeless every day.”6 Judy also states that for her as a teenager, menstruation in combination with the lack of privacy and sanitary facilities was particularly problematic.7 This was naturally a problem that only women experienced. But after a while the women’s bodies “adjusted” to hunger and anxiety. Mrs. Pál Kanders and Judit Farkas from Budapest also report that they stopped

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4 See also Cole (2006) on the Veszpréim and Kőrmend ghettos; the pattern was similar in these two towns.
menstruating when the situation worsened and the lack of food became more prevalent.\textsuperscript{8}

Five out of twenty of the informants from the provinces speak about physical or sexual violence taking place in the ghettos. Just before the Jews of Beregszász were deported, they were subjected to a body search. Aranka Siegal recounts how the German soldiers sexually harassed her, her friend Judi, and her sister Ibolya, all in their teens:

The lines in front of us started to disintegrate, and we moved forward until we could see a group of German soldiers stop the line in front of the Gerbers and search the people, reaching in and under their clothing. Then the Gerbers were next. One of the soldiers grabbed Judi and put his hand inside her blouse. Mother pulled Joli down and clutched Ibolya and me to her sides.

“Nein! You will not touch my daughters!” she declared in German and repeated in Hungarian, her voice filled with anger and fear.

They laughed at her, and as we came into the first line position, Ibolya, Mother, and I were pulled apart by three of the leering Germans. The back of my neck was suddenly in an iron grip, and a coarse, rough hand brushed down my chest and over each of my breasts, bursting the buttons of my blouse. Bending over me so close that I could smell his sausagy breath and see the tobacco stains on his teeth, the soldier reached into my bloomers and felt inside my private parts. I couldn’t tell if the stinging in my eyes was more from hurt or shame.\textsuperscript{9}

Aranka’s experience of the body search was etched into her memory. She perceived the perpetrator – the German soldier – as rough and with “sausagy breath”. Other Hungarian survivors describe similar types of treatment. Olga K. from the ghetto of the small town of Salgótarján in Northern Hungary lets us know that her father, uncle, and aunt were beaten up after the German occupation. In the ghetto, the Hungarian Gendarmes exposed the Jewish women to a gynaecological search. Olga K. painfully describes how she witnessed the Gendarmes performing a body search on her 10–12-year-old cousins.\textsuperscript{10}

Lujza Molnár stayed in the ghetto of Ózd in Northern Hungary with her grandmother, mother and father for two weeks. Her father was badly beaten up when the Gendarmes were searching for gold and other valuables. Lujza had never seen anything like this. Her father was totally blue and the wounds on his back were bleeding. He asked Lujza to wash his back, because he did not want to show the wounds to his wife. This was the first time Lujza saw his father half naked. All of the men between the age of 16 and 60 were beaten up, according to Lujza, but none of the women. The young girls were, however, exposed to

\textsuperscript{8} RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 41; F2C:15, file 335, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{9} Siegal (2003), p. 213.
\textsuperscript{10} Olga K., 1995, interview by University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, New York, 4 June 1995, tape no. 03012–0, 00:56:00.
body searches by the Gendarmes.11 Judy Cohen’s father was also physically abused; his feet were so badly hurt that he could hardly walk. However, in his case it was the Germans, and not the Hungarian Gendarmes, who were responsible for the beatings.12

One of the male informants, Mr. K., recalls that in the ghetto of Miskolc the Jews were “interrogated” by the Hungarian civil authorities and the Gendarmerie. Those who were rich were suspected of not handing over all of their valuables, and they were tortured and badly beaten up. Mr. K. remembers that an older lawyer, Dr. Béla Holländer, was practically beaten to death. He continues his eyewitness report, remembering that the Gendarmes were especially cruel:

No Jewish woman of any age was spared from these “interrogations”, if she was rich. In these cases, the torturers’ greed for money was combined with sadism. The unfortunate women and girls were undressed and hung up from their feet, their heads upside down, and they were beaten between their legs with sticks and whips.13

These testimonies refer to specific cases when older men were beaten and women were humiliated through body searches or other types of sexual violence. Gender and age thus were important factors in how the informants from the provinces perceived the treatment they were exposed to. In the previous example from Miskolc it is also possible to see the impact of social class. In this case, only those who were well-off were exposed to the “interrogations”.

Budapest

How did informants from Budapest perceive the period between March 1944 and February 1945? What consequences did the occupation in March and the Arrow Cross coup in October have on their lives? The ghettoization process in the capital differed from the process in the provinces. The Budapest Jewry was not deported, but a number of new anti-Jewish regulations and severe persecutions caused a considerable deterioration in the quality of their lives. The seven themes brought up in the introductory part of this chapter, namely the anti-

Jewish decrees, the Pest ghetto, the International ghetto, the bombings, violence, the labour service system, and the death marches, will be discussed in the following, as perceived by the survivors.

**Experiencing another wave of anti-Jewish regulations**

*Stigmatized by the Yellow Star*

Just a few weeks after the German occupation, on April 5, the law of compulsory identification for Jews was announced. Twenty-three, or 18 per cent, of the informants describe this event in their narratives and comment on the decree of the yellow star. Fourteen of the informants mention it in a “matter-of-fact” tone, describing the experience in neutral terms. Six out of twenty-three refer to the decree in negative terms, while three of the informants comment on it positively. Rozsa Solymosi states: “Of course, I wore [the star]. I was proud of it. […] I never felt ashamed. […] I only covered it, so that I could go shopping.”¹⁴ Tomas Ungvári states that the star didn’t bother him.¹⁵ Ivan Gabor also perceived wearing the yellow star in positive terms: “I loved it. I just loved it.”¹⁶ It must be pointed out that Tomas was fourteen years old and Ivan was only ten in 1944. Rozsa is the only adult who does not talk about the yellow star in negative or neutral terms. Ivan’s story is rather peculiar, but when we look at it through a child’s eyes, it is understandable:

> [Y]ou could buy different quality of star, and I was arguing with my mother that I want a nice star. […] One of them was like, how do you call it, like, like shiny, beautiful one. […] I remember it was a deep yellow, one of them, I told my mother, “I want it!” “No, it’s more expensive!” “No, I want it!” And I, she sewed it to [sic] my jacket, and I felt so proud. I said that I am a general. I couldn’t understand at that time what it meant. So even this was fun for me.¹⁷

Negative comments, however, appear more frequently in the interviews. Mrs. Mihály Kádár tells about her feelings concerning the new regulation: “On April 4th or 5th we had to put the yellow patches on. At that moment I had a feeling that everybody was free to do whatever he wanted with me; I felt stigmatised.”¹⁸

¹⁴ RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 32.
¹⁶ RWA, F2C:22, file 544, p. 10.
¹⁷ RWA, F2C:22, file 544, p. 10.
¹⁸ RWA, F2C:13, file 326, p. 6.
Ervin Forrester recalls:

The obligation to wear the yellow stars tried us very much. Our only hope was that we would be able to stay in our flat and hoped that the War would end soon. [...] The public feeling was quite embarrassing [when wearing the star].

Andrew Stevens perceived the order to identify oneself this way as an insult. He comments: “At least they could have given us one with a snap on. No, we had to make it [ourselves].” Andrew continues by declaring that it was his mother who made the stars for the family. Both obtaining the proper fabric for the yellow star and sewing it onto outer garments were female tasks. This was in accordance to gender relations within families. Women often took care of domestic matters.

Magda Szanto experienced the decree of identification as not only humiliating but also difficult in practical terms. It was very hard to find the right type of yellow fabric for the star, especially directly after the decree was introduced in early April. Later on, it was possible to buy factory-produced stars.

Tomas Ungvári mentions another interesting detail concerning the yellow star. Tomas’s family belonged to the upper middle class, and the parents owned a fashionable tailor’s shop in Budapest. Tomas remembers that customers came and asked for some “good yellow material” and that his parents would give advice as to which fabric best suited their garments. They designed their stars of silk so “we wouldn’t ruin our… our wonderful garments by a cheap yellow thing, so it should be silk. [...] We are people of [a] certain standing. So it should be silk.” According to Tomas’s narrative, the fabric chosen for the star became a marker of social position. Those who could afford it had stars made from silk.

Some of the survivors in my sample were exempted from wearing the yellow star. This was clearly a question of social class and connections. Five informants (4 per cent) comment on exemptions they received. The two who received their exemptions directly from regent Miklós Horthy belonged to the upper or upper middle class, and the two who received it from the Red Cross belonged to the middle or upper middle class. The fifth person who mentions this issue received her exemption from the Swedish legation, and belonged to

19 RWA, F2C:18, file 349, p. 8.
21 See Magda Szanto (1958), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 771, p. 2; RWA, F2C:1, file 003, p. 8; F2C:22, file 555, p. 8; F2C:22, file 560, p. 10. See also Kaplan 2002, p. 126, where a child survivor tells how her mother sewed the star on everyone’s winter coats.
23 RWA, F2C:22, file 558, p. 12.
the middle class. Her father was the chief technical advisor for the government. None of the individuals who were exempted from wearing the star belonged to the lower or lower middle classes.

Relocation into Jewish houses

In late June, the Jews were relocated into Jewish houses, which were scattered all over the city. During this concentration into Jewish houses, women, children, and the elderly had difficulties in organizing their required moves. This was one of the problems that many families had to solve without their male members. Carrying heavy things would normally have been a task for males. Magda Szanto remembers the difficulties:

As tens of thousands of people had to relocate within a few days, it was as good as impossible to find any carriages. You had to drag the load by yourself. You were lucky if you could find a handcart, a baby carriage or suchlike. From early morning to late evening, you could see women, the elderly, and children all over the streets, dragging on their heavy burdens in the blistering summer heat.

Mrs. Tibor Török recounts similar severities:

Unfortunately, our house was not designated [as] a Jewish house and [for] this reason we had to leave our home. It was the most severe thing that happened to us [at] that moment. […] At the time I was alone with my little daughter, Zsuzsika. I had to perform the difficult tasks of selection, packing [the] necessary wares and moving without any help.

Living in the Jewish houses was not easy. Eight of the informants describe the situation in very negative terms. Mrs Török continues: “I felt helpless and did not like the situation at all. I felt the whole house was under undefinable pressure.” In addition to the feelings of helplessness and insecurity, everyday life changed very drastically. The apartments were overcrowded, and the kitchen and bathroom facilities were no longer private. Noemi Renkei recalls: “In four large rooms, with one bathroom, one extra toilet and one kitchen, a
total of 22 people lived together. [...] Two were babies, and one young child, a girl. I myself was newly married, but my husband was in a paramilitary labor camp on the Eastern front.  

Alexander Szanto writes in his eyewitness report about the crowded houses. He states that a family of three or four could consider itself lucky if it had a room of its own. Most often two families had to share one room. Single persons were in an especially difficult position, as they were forced to sleep in bathrooms or in corridors because of the lack of space. Civil status could thus affect an individual’s situation in the overcrowded ghetto, as families could obtain a private, if crowded room, while single persons suffered more from not having their own private space.  

In contrast to these negative portrayals, three of the informants describe the situation in surprisingly encouraging terms. Peter Tarjan, who was eight years old at that time, remembers that he experienced these changes positively. Peter’s family lived in an apartment building that was designated as a Jewish house. Now they had to move all of their furniture into one room and allow strangers to move into the rest of the apartment. As a child, however, he enjoyed this crowded way of living, as there were always other children to play with. Another informant, at that time an 8-year-old boy, tells about how they moved into a Jewish house. In contrast to many other informants, he did not find it very problematic.

The apartment we moved to was actually owned, or used to be owned, by a friend of my father, so that families who were friends before this law was operational were obliged to move together, it was less objectionable than if it happened to total strangers. So we got a room there, but as I remember it, [...] we just carried our belongings, our clothing and kitchenware and that sort of thing. But not that we would have had to hire a mover to move the furniture, since there was no room for the furniture in the new apartments, since the people who lived in it already had furniture in it. So we just made use of the furniture that was already there.  

Tomas Ungvári, who was fourteen years at that time, mentions that he had a positive feeling about staying in the Jewish house. He was happy to have his family and relatives close to him, and the apartment had “the smell of a larger family finally reunited.” Tomas also remembers that it was warm: “you wouldn’t believe how delightful [...] the warmth of bodies [being] around [was]. There was always company, always discussion, always this and that.” All three of these examples of positive experiences were retold by child survivors, and in

31 Alexander Szanto (1957), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 598, p. 10.
32 RWA, F2C:19, file 503, p. 7.
33 RWA, F2C:22, file 560, p. 6.
contrast to the adult survivors, these children’s experiences seem to have been less dramatic than the adults’. These child survivors emphasize the joy of having company, instead of the negative sides of overcrowding. The negative consequences of the authorities’ decision to ghettoize were problems left mainly to the adults.

One of the main female tasks in this situation was to feed the family.\footnote{For instance, Ernő Szép’s sister took care of the grocery shopping and the cooking. Szép (1994), pp. 20–21.} Valéria Nádas recalls that “in the apartment itself, where there were so many people together, life went on with smaller or bigger frictions.” But when it came to the kitchen she states: “You can imagine that so many women in one kitchen could not get on too well together, but in spite of that the atmosphere was relatively peaceful.”\footnote{RWA, F2C:10, file 315, p. 34.} Mrs. Török also comments on the kitchen situation: “We all used the kitchen together but I had a cupboard and dishes of my own. For that reason I had no conflicts with the others.”\footnote{RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 3.}

Families from the upper and middle classes could more easily cope with their decreasing income along with an increasing lack of food. As described in chapter 5, labour service men from well-off families sometimes received food packages from home. Similarly, some families had been able to save some money or store some food in case of an emergency. Judit Farkas belonged to an upper middle class family, and remembers that her grandmother had invested her money in gold and in jewellery, which was negotiable currency on the black market in early 1944. Only later on did it become hard to obtain food, even for those who had money or valuables.\footnote{RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 21.} Sara Gresz, also from an upper middle class family, states that her father had a large amount of savings, which they then used to buy food and other necessities.\footnote{RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 35.} Both Mrs. Pál Kanders (lower middle class) and Zsuzsa Gordon (upper middle class) remember that their families had storages of food which were of great help during the last year of the war.\footnote{RWA, F2C:16, file 339, p. 58; F2C:7, file 306, p. 58.} On the other hand, as also described in chapter 5, it was sometimes harder for the well-off families to cope with their losses and the lack of money and food. Agnes Adachi comments on this by saying: “I think for those rich people it was more difficult even than for us. Because there was nothing to take from us.”\footnote{RWA, F2C:19, file 501, p. 7.}
Another problem the Jewish women faced was that of grocery shopping. This problem was a result of the anti-Jewish regulation that restricted Jewish presence in the streets of Budapest, the curfew imposed in June 1944. On the one hand, the Jews were at risk while walking in the streets with the yellow star on their chests. On the other hand, the curfew brought up the problem of a shortage of provisions. Magda Szanto relates how groceries were often sold out by the time the Jews were allowed to go out. However, there was a way to solve this predicament. As mentioned above, Rozsa Solymosi described how she hid her star when she went out for groceries during curfew. There was only a small risk that she would be discovered, and thus she could avoid harassment in the streets. Four other women in the interviews also describe how they hid or took away the star when they went out.

Grocery shopping was mainly a female task, but there were also exceptions. Two informants refer to male family members taking care of the shopping. György Frigyesi recounts that everyone in his family avoided going out, but if they needed to buy groceries, it was György’s father who took on this task. György comments that his father did this even though he had a typical “Jewish” beard, and probably risked being harassed. Another exception is that of István Belai. He was 15 years old in 1944, and he was the one who ran all the errands in his family. István was raised as a Catholic, even though his mother was Jewish, and because of this he was never circumcised. This might also be the reason why he dared to go out.

While the female informants had problems in obtaining fabric for the yellow stars and in locating food for their families, the remaining male informants – i.e. those who were not in the labour service – faced other risks and severities. Some of the male informants also went out without the star, but they risked “trouser inspections”. Tivadar Soros describes this phenomenon in the following words:

Each district had one or two Arrow Cross buildings whose sole purpose was torture and the ‘cutting off’ of Jewish lives. People suspected of being Jews were taken to these locations to assess their Jewishness. For men the assessment was extremely easy. Documents were of no importance. They had to take off their

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43 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, pp. 29–32. See also F2C:20, file 539, p. 7.
44 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 34; F2C:15, file 335, p. 33; F2C:19, file 502, pp. 14, 21; F2C:20, file 516, p. 19.
45 F2C:9, file 314, pp. 40, 48.
46 F2C:17, file 345, pp. 22–23.
47 See, for example, RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 19; F2C:20, file 508, p. 13.
clothes, and those who were circumcised were unlikely to come out alive. Women had a better chance, because such simple criteria were unavailable.48

For example, a male living under a false identity was in great danger if his identity papers were controlled in the street. If a Hungarian police officer, a German SS officer, or a Gendarme wanted to know a male’s origin, he could simply pull down the male’s trousers and check as to whether he was circumcised.

Nine out of eighty male survivors recount trouser inspections in Budapest.49 Two of them personally experienced this.50 Emery R. was one of them. He was caught in the streets by the Arrow Cross and taken to the Gestapo headquarters. He was badly beaten and tortured before they sent him to the Arrow Cross headquarters. He was suspected of espionage, and sentenced to death. However, he was able to escape from prison before his execution.51

George Meyer’s father was forced to pull down his trousers in the middle of the street. He was circumcised, but refused to admit that he was a Jew. He lied and claimed that he had been circumcised because of a medical condition; he had undergone surgery. He was beaten up and taken to a prison, but as the Arrow Cross could not prove that he was a Jew, they eventually let him go.52

While George Meyer’s father had to make up a lie in this precarious situation, Tivadar Soros was prepared in advance, in the event he would be caught in a trouser inspection. Tivadar’s family lived under false Christian identities during the last half year of the war. He had heard of and thought about the problem of circumcision, and as a precaution he arranged forged medical certificates for himself and his two sons, certifying that they had been circumcised because of phimosis (tight foreskin), not because of a Jewish religious tradition. Tivadar knew that the certificate was not a guarantee against arrest, but it gave him a certain feeling of security.53

Marion A. Kaplan notes that Jewish men in 1940s Nazi Germany avoided seeking medical help since they “would be endangered by their circumcision.”54 In Poland, it was also a known fact that men had smaller chances of surviving

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51 Emery R., 1998, interview by University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, Chicago, 20 June 1998, tape no. 42664–2, 01:03:00. Emery’s nose was broken and one of his testicles was crushed during the torture.
in hiding or through passing due to this.\textsuperscript{55} For example, Barbara Engelking notes that circumcision was a problem that affected all Jewish men. She writes that “attempts were made to remove the visible effects of circumcision by operations” and that other ways of dealing with the problem were found, such as in Tivadar Soros’ case.\textsuperscript{56} Trouser inspections were thus a general problem that European Jewish men faced during the Holocaust.

Consequently, women and men had different possibilities of moving around the city. Men risked being caught if they were exposed to a trouser inspection. However, one’s appearance was also a factor that could create a sense of security. Ivan Becker and Judy Kallman recount that since they were blonde and did not look “Jewish”, they could move freely in the streets, as long as they did not wear the star.\textsuperscript{57}

The Pest ghetto

As described in chapter 6, the Budapest ghetto was mapped out on November 29, 1944.\textsuperscript{58} Ernő Kun witnessed how the city’s Jews, with yellow stars on their chests, marched towards the ghetto area: “It was a heartbreaking sight when these human columns, consisting mainly of women, children and sick people carrying their bags, walked towards [the ghetto].”\textsuperscript{59} A large part of the 70,000 people living there were children, the elderly, or sick persons. By now, most of the women and men had already been taken into forced labour or on the death marches, which explains the age distribution of the ghetto inhabitants. Women who were not conscripted lived either in the ghetto, in hiding, in the International ghetto, or in the remaining Jewish houses during the last weeks and months of the war.

At least twenty (16 per cent) out of the 124 Budapest informants worked, lived or had close relatives in the Budapest ghetto at some point in time. Fifteen of them were women, and out of the male persons who recounted the ghetto only two actually lived there. One of the most vivid survivor testimonies in the Raoul Wallenberg archive is that of Piri Herling. Her apartment building


\textsuperscript{56} Engelking (2001), p. 47. Engelking brings up an interview with a Polish Jewish survivor, Józef. Józef was arrested and suspected of being Jewish. He explained that he had a phimosis operation when he was a child. He did not have a certificate to prove this, but a doctor was called in and he confirmed that this could be the case. This “simple” lie helped Józef significantly, as he was then transferred to the “Aryan” cell instead.

\textsuperscript{57} See RWA, F2C:20, file 508, p. 13; F2C:20, file 509, p. 9. See also Kaplan (1998a), pp. 204–205.

\textsuperscript{58} Cole (2003), pp. 210–220.

\textsuperscript{59} Ernő Kun (1958), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.IIIi, Reel 62, file 957, p. 6, in German in the original. “Er war ein herzzerreissendes Bild, wie diese Menschenkolonnen, bestehend vorwiegend aus Frauen, Kindern und Greisen, bepackt mit Bündeln und Handkoffern, dahinwankten.” (Translation into English by the author.)
was bombed out in late 1944 and she did not have anywhere to go, so she moved into the ghetto. The living conditions were, according to Piri, dreadful:

You never ever in your life saw that filth, that smell. It was just horrible and so many people died there. There was a very famous drug store, a big corner store, it was piled up from the floor to the ceiling with bodies. They didn’t have an ounce of flesh on them. It smelled to high heaven. My sister also came… moved in there because there were very few buildings where you could live. It was overrun by bed bugs. There was no electricity, so we had a candle. So one hour I slept and my sister picked [off] the bed bugs from me and burned [them in] the candle. And [after] another hour we changed [places]. She slept and I picked the bed bugs. It was just unbelievable.60

There are many similar testimonies found in the material, and some of the themes, for example food, overcrowding, and death, come up regularly. Agnes Sereni worked as a voluntary nurse at the Jewish hospital, and describes the lack of food in the following words:

They brought in some kind of a… soup [from] time to time. Can you imagine, we were starving. I don’t know even how we survived that many days or weeks. And we couldn’t touch that stuff. The Germans give that to them, and maybe they were feeding the people in Auschwitz… it smelt terrible and it was… agh! Absolutely horrible.

I: You couldn’t eat the soup?

A. S.: Couldn’t, I couldn’t.

I: What did you eat?

A. S.: I find [sic] the onions. You don’t believe it. And I gave one thin slice for my mother and one thin slice for myself. And we lived[d] on that onions [sic] for a few days.61

In this situation, the women’s role as food supplier became even harder. The inhabitants of the ghetto were not allowed to go outside the ghetto walls. Sometimes people left the area in secret. Mrs. Pál Kanders and her little son lived in the ghetto during the siege. She describes how she “tempted fate” and left the ghetto on several occasions. While the Arrow Cross men and the guards were seeking refuge in the air raid shelters during the bombings, she took her son with her and sneaked out while “the bullets were whistling” around her. The reason for taking this risk was the lack of food. She felt the pressure of

61 RWA, F2C:19, file 504, p. 27.
supporting her family, but at the same time, she did not want to leave her son, so she brought him with her when she went out during the air raids.62

More and more people moved into the apartment where Mrs. Kanders was living. “You had sympathy with everybody, but we didn’t have food for so many people, it was a terrible feeling, I often said I’d already eaten only so that the old people and the children would have something. Many times I went to bed on an empty stomach.”63

Klara Rosta and her female family members were hungry already when they arrived at the ghetto. The children had not eaten for a day, and had to sleep on empty stomachs. The next day they received some soup, but this was given to the children, and the women had to fast yet another day.64 Oli Solti states: “We didn’t have food, we got every day a little piece of bread, like this. We didn’t eat it, we gave it to my daughter.”65 Only women refer to the food situation in this way, saying that they did not eat so that their children and the elderly could get something in their stomachs. Michal Ungar, who has studied the Łódź ghetto, and Ruth Bondy, who survived Theresienstadt, also note women’s sharing their meagre portions of food with their children.66 Nechama Tec has explored this phenomenon in detail. In interviews with survivors, she often asked if they recalled their mothers’ eating habits during their time in the ghetto. Many of the interviewed expressed irritation, perhaps due to the fact that they had accepted rations from their mothers. Some of the survivors stated that they did not recall seeing their mothers eat. In other testimonies and diaries it is recounted that the women gave their rations to their husbands and their children.67

Overcrowding was another critical problem faced by the inhabitants of the ghetto. In January, the average population density had increased to about nine persons per room, as shown in chapter 6. Magda Szanto states that there were twelve persons in the small room where she and her parents lived. They could not lie down and stretch out, but had to sleep sitting in chairs or on the floor. During the bombings they went down to the cellar (there were no proper air raid shelters), which was even worse. One could not even stretch one’s legs, and there was absolutely no possibility of reclining.68 Josef Rosta lived together with twelve other persons, mostly old and sick people, in one room, and they placed the furniture along the walls or in the courtyard to create more space on the floor to sleep on.69 Ilma Junker remembers how more and more people

64 RWA, F2C:1, file 009, p. 15.
65 RWA, F2C:21, file 536, p. 30. See also F2C:11, file 319, p. 69.
68 Magda Szanto (1958), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 600, p. 2.
arrived every day, and that the newcomers could not get rooms in the apartments, but had to stay in the aisles, the stairs, or in the basements.⁷⁰

According to the informants, the sick, the elderly and the children suffered the most under these conditions. Hunger, cold, diseases, and the bombings resulted in high death rates. The sick could not receive any help, as the Jewish hospital did not have any resources. Every day a few of the elderly or the sick died, and Josef Rosta remembers that it was hard to get the bodies out in the courtyard, since they had to be carried through the overcrowded rooms. The bodies were placed in the streets and market places.⁷¹ When the ghetto was liberated, thousands of corpses were found in the streets and outside the Dohány Street synagogue.⁷²

**Living in the International ghetto**

While the Pest ghetto inhabitants suffered from hunger, cold, overcrowding, and diseases, the situation in the International ghetto was not much better. Overcrowding was a severe problem here, too. According to Peter Tarjan, about seventy persons shared a three-room apartment.⁷³ Braham has also shown, as previously mentioned, that it was not unusual that about 50 to 60 persons lived in a two-room apartment⁷⁴, which would give an even higher average population density than in the city ghetto. The difference between the International ghetto and the Pest ghetto was, however, that the buildings in the fifth district, where the International ghetto was located, were larger and more modern. And what was of even greater importance was the fact that these buildings were protected by the neutral countries, which gave a certain sense of security.

One of the child survivors, an 8-year-old boy at that time, has some scattered memories of the family’s stay in a Swedish protected house:

> It was immensely crowded, it was much more crowded [than in the Jewish house]. I remember, that we lived in a kitchen, and the kitchen wasn’t used as a kitchen at all, it was piled full of furniture, and there was a desk, a sort of old-fashioned writing desk with drawers. And my father and I slept on the top of this desk, and my mother and several other people... [...] slept on mattresses on the floor, around this desk. [...] In this furniture-filled kitchen, it seems to me, [...] there were six people. And in the ex-dining room next door, there must

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⁷⁰ Ilma Junker (1959), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 965, p. 8. See also AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 1128, p. 3 and RWA, F2C:1, file 001, p. 7; F2C:1, file 003, p. 21; F2C:15, file 335, p. 54.


⁷² Lévi (1948), p. 418.

⁷³ RWA, F2C:19, file 503, p. 10. See also F2C:7, file 307, p. 64 and F2B:6, file 519, tape 1, side B, one overcrowded rooms in the International ghetto (approximately 100 in a conference room and 128 in a basement).

have been twenty or thirty people. And that wasn’t atypical. The whole house was filled to that extent. So it was extremely crowded.75

Mrs Tibor Török also recalls the overcrowded apartment where she and her 2-year-old daughter lived:

Yes, 46 people – mainly women, some men and children – shared the flat. But my position changed for [the] better thanks to Zsuzsika. She was used to sing and croon in order to get asleep. She awoke several times in the middle of the night […] and the others could not withstand her singing. So the following morning we were suggested to move to the small servant’s room. I was very happy to be alone in a detached room. The original tenants [had] moved away earlier and they left almost everything in the flat: furniture, dishes and instruments in the kitchen. But, unfortunately, the pantry was empty.76

The legations of the neutral countries provided the International ghetto with protection and food supplies. As a result, the living conditions were slightly better than in the city ghetto. However, the food was still insufficient, as Török’s testimony indicates.

The above-mentioned child survivor continues his narrative:

As I told you, the natural question comes to mind of what did we eat, or how did we eat? And I have no recollection. I remember… I remember a conversation where my father asked my mother whether he should trade his wedding ring for a loaf of bread. It was a golden wedding ring, a loaf of bread was two kilos or something like that. And my mother said to him, ‘Ask the child.’ And so he asked me. And I said, ‘Well, why not?’ Because did I care about a wedding ring? And on the other hand I was quite hungry, and so a loaf of bread seemed to me to be a very good idea indeed.77

Marianne Cooper, only a child in 1944, remembers that she and her mother lived in a safehouse with three unfamiliar families. Her perception was that life was very hard: “There was no food, sanitary conditions left a lot to be desired, nobody had any money.”78 Marianne recalls that sometimes her mother baked corn muffins. Marianne states in the interview that she still hates the smell and the taste of corn, due to her experiences in the safehouse. “I remember having been spanked several times because I was crying there, I was hungry. I have very clear recollections of that. I was disturbing the peace, basically. And I remember my mother, later on, apologizing to me for having spanked me.”79

75 RWA, F2C:22, file 560, p. 15.
76 RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 6.
77 RWA, F2C:22, file 560, p. 15.
78 RWA, F2B:6, file 517, tape 1, side A.
79 RWA, F2B:6, file 517, tape 1, side A. Corn muffins: side B.
Others did not experience hunger as badly as Marianne. Mrs. Tibor Török tells in her interview:

I was a trained cook, so I could prepare edible food from the simplest raw materials. As a result we had [a] hot meal at least once a day. Of course, the others were green from envy. Most of my flat-mates were spoiled women who never were forced to cook. In spite [of the fact] they had lots of canned food they were willing to exchange their expensive canned sardines for a simple soup after three days.80

This quote brings us to some important insights concerning gender and social class. I have earlier noted that women had to supply the family with food, and that they needed to “prepare edible food from the simplest raw materials”. However, the social position of the inhabitants in the International ghetto differed from those living in the Pest ghetto. Some of the most eminent Jewish Budapest families lived here, and women who had not been cooking in their previous lives but instead had maids and other household staff had difficulties in adapting to the situation in the ghetto. A similar phenomenon was brought up in chapter 5, regarding survival within the labour service system. Men from the upper social classes had more difficulties in enduring the hard physical labour than those from lower social classes. Hence, those who were privileged before the war seem to have experienced the changes more severely and had more problems in adjusting to the situation.

Having children involved different types of problems. The lack of food was one of them, and mothers whose children kept crying found themselves in a stressful situation. Mrs. Török adds that “it was a problem to wash the children because it was a rare case when we had warm water.” Concern for the smallest ones during the bombings was also great, according to her.81

One of the most important aspects of living in the safehouses was the protection they received from the neutral countries. Those who moved into the International ghetto had received safety documents, which were temporary “passports” stating that the holder of the document was under protection of the undersigned legation. In the beginning, social class and connections were of great importance for obtaining such a document. Attila Lajos has noted that it was mainly well-off families who received safety passports.82 For instance, social democrats, people with connections to Sweden, and prominent members of the Budapest upper social classes were provided with Swedish safety passports.

80 RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 6.
81 RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 7.
Figure 7.1. Copy of Éva Szilágyi’s protective passport, issued by the Swedish Minister Ivan Danielsson.
Source: RWA, F2C:1, act 005.
Teréz Otta was a member of a well-known Social Democratic family. She recounts that in July 1944, Raoul Wallenberg visited them and informed them of the possibility of receiving safety documents. Wallenberg had their names on a specific list of prominent Jewish families of Budapest.\(^{83}\)

Later on, the criterion for receiving a safe conduct was broadened, and the majority of Jews who sought help received some type of document. The value of these documents was undoubtedly high, at least for the individual. Even though the Arrow Cross did not always respect the documents, individuals possessing safety documents could at least feel a bit safer than those without any kind of protection.

**Bombings**

All of the inhabitants of Budapest experienced the frequent air raids in 1944. However, for the Jews this experience was slightly different than for the rest of the Hungarians. The Allied forces started to bomb the Hungarian capital during early summer of 1944, and the bombings intensified during the siege in the winter of 1944–1945. Ten out of 124 Budapest informants (8 per cent) refer to the fear and the difficulties that the bombings caused. Mrs. Tibor Török describes the air raids in the following words:

> The war became a common threat [to the Jews and the Christians]. There were air raid alarms frequently and we lived through several serious air raids. It was not a rare case to go to the cellar two times an evening. Interestingly enough, the crowd went down the staircase orderly and in silence. I even now can remember the picture of the 8-year-old Évi and my two-year-old Zsuzsika stumbling sleepy and shock-headed before me. They stepped by their heels on the lower flange of their pajamas. They went hand in hand. We, adults, were carrying survival packages – we were silly enough to think that we would remain alive in the cellar of a bombed house.\(^{84}\)

Zsuzsa Gordon was 15 years old at that time, and she emphasizes the fear she experienced during the bombings:

> I was very scared about the bombing raids, I’m really saying this as a child… I know there was one case when on July 2, 1944 there was an air raid and [...] our house got hit. [...] They had to break through the wall because that was the only way we could get out. My mother, as a young woman she was strong, she wanted to help and went over and broke through the wall also and helped people get out. I started to scream that my mother should take me with her wherever she went, like in a kangaroo’s pouch, or I don’t know what I was

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\(^{83}\) RWA, F2C:5, file 302, pp. 1–3.

\(^{84}\) RWA, F2C:14, file 333, pp. 3–4.
thinking. Then I know my mother got mad, I should stay quiet, people needed help here.\textsuperscript{85}

As we can see, the bombings created more responses than just fear and confusion. Although Zsuzsa was frightened, her mother acted without hesitation in this chaotic situation. She did not allow her fear to limit her actions.

Even though the war was “a common threat”, to use Török’s words, it sometimes created diverse experiences for the Jews and the non-Jews. In some “mixed” houses, the Jews were not allowed to go down to the air raid shelters. Only Christians had this privilege. One of the non-Jewish informants speaks about the dilemma of the foreign refugees and those in hiding. As these persons were not registered, they could not show up in the shelter.\textsuperscript{86} Peter Tarjan remembers that he and some of his relatives did not go to the basement during the air raids, but he is not sure whether it was because of the risk of getting caught (they were not registered in the house) or because of the smell and dirt in the basement.\textsuperscript{87}

One of the survivors, Mrs. Dénes Simor, states that the Jews had much more than the air raids to be afraid of:

Here is the difference between the lot of a Jew and that of a non-Jew. If you began talking about the war with a Christian woman, she at once mentions and complains about going down [to] the cellar. For us, bombardments were nothing. In spite of the fact that people died and we knew we could also die, we didn’t care about them. It was, of course, unpleasant to get up at night, take our things and go down to the cellar. […] We weren’t afraid of bombs, though my husband was also killed by one. We had to be afraid of [the] Germans, the Gestapo or the Arrow Cross men.\textsuperscript{88}

Mrs. Török expresses her feelings in a similar way:

We played with children or told them children’s stories in order to distract their attention from bombings. We were afraid of air raids but tried not to express our fear. We were more afraid of the Arrow-Cross men. Frightening news came that the young workable women were deported from the protected houses too.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} RWA, F2C:16, file 339, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{86} RWA, F2C: 13, file 329, p. 37. This informant was involved in hiding Jews in her apartment.
\textsuperscript{87} F2C:19, file 503, p. 13. Peter continues: “But I do remember that [Panni]... her uncle Béla and I were always upstairs during the bombing raids and these were... these were moments of relief from the terribly crowded conditions, you know. There was suddenly room to breathe, the windows were early broken, so we had the air blowing through. They tried to fix it with papers so that we would not freeze. It was a very very cold winter.”
\textsuperscript{88} RWA, F2C:8, file 309, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{89} RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 7.
Kaplan mentions similar circumstances in Germany: “Exhaustion and fear notwithstanding, the anonymity of the bombings came as a relief to Jews who dreaded more personal attacks.” Kaplan states that while German non-Jewish civilians have emphasized the “horrors of the bombing”, the German Jews, in the same way as Mrs. Simor describes, “dreaded the Gestapo far more.”

**Violence**

Apart from the isolation and concentration of the Jews through anti-Jewish regulations and the creation of Jewish houses and the ghetto, the survivors also testify to violent treatment. They experienced physical, verbal, and/or sexual harassment. In the following, some examples of how the informants perceived violence are brought up, and the importance of gender, age, and social class in connection to experiences of violence is discussed.

**Raids and mass killings**

The Arrow Cross squadrons started to raid Jewish houses directly after the coup. They also raided some of the protected houses in the International ghetto, including buildings that were assumed to hide Jews. Thirty-nine of the 124 Budapest informants (32 per cent) had personal experiences of these raids. Thousands of Jews were taken to the brickyards or shot and pushed into the Danube. There is no information concerning who these people were. However, as we know that the majority of the young men were drafted, it is obvious that this group was less prominent among the victims executed by the Danube. Furthermore, I have found three testimonies that indicate that groups of women and children were sometimes let go. Rozsa Solymosi’s narrative in the prologue is one of them, Kate Wacs’s is another. Kate and her family were caught in a raid, and they were lined up facing the wall, with their hands up. The Arrow Cross separated the women and the children from the men. Kate, her mother, grandmother, aunt, and a female cousin stayed together. Guszi, Kate’s brother, tried to sneak over to the women’s group, “pretending to be small”, but Kate’s mother wanted him to stay with the men. She believed that the men would be spared. Luckily, Guszi finally ended up with the group of women and children. They were taken to the ghetto, while the group of men, including Kate’s uncle Frici, were taken away. These men were probably killed by the Danube.

In three additional cases, women were spared partly due to gender-related factors. Rozsa Solymosi pretended to be pregnant, and Margit Jarovitz reports that her sister was in fact spared in a raid just because she was pregnant. Mrs.

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91 RWA, F2C:1, file 003, p. 19; F2C:11, file 319, pp. 60–61; F2C:20, file 523, p. 11.
92 RWA, F2C:1, file 003, p. 19.
93 RWA. F2C:11, file 319, pp. 44–45; F2C:20, file 539, p. 15.
Török testifies that she survived two selections which took place in the Swedish protected building she lived in: “All the women under 40 years of age were taken away except me. [My daughter] Zsuzsika was slim and underdeveloped to an extent that she looked like a one-year little girl when I took her into my arms. The police officer had mercy on me so I could remain in the house.” These examples show that age, pregnancy, or the presence of small children could affect the way Jews were treated: all of these women survived the Arrow Cross raids. It thus indicates that members of the Arrow Cross movement adhered to pre-war gender-related norms at least to some extent.

The interviews also reveal other cases when women were not harmed, but probably for other reasons than gender or age. Mrs. Kanders placed her mother-in-law in a bed, with a bandage around her head, and fooled the Arrow Cross by saying that she was very ill. She could thus remain in the ghetto, taking care of Mrs. Kanders’s child, while Mrs. Kanders herself was taken away. Marianne Cooper remembers how her older sister and mother also fooled the Arrow Cross, pretending to be physically injured. In spite of the fact that Jews did not have any legal rights, it seems that sometimes the perpetrators respected the moral code of sparing the sick, the pregnant and the elderly women, as well as children.

Other times, the informants observed exceptionally atrocious treatment of Jewish women and even children. During an Arrow Cross raid, an old woman was shot just because she refused to give her diamond ring to an Arrow Cross man. Margit Jarovitz was called names and beaten with a whip during a raid, and Eva Rudas was called “Jewish whore” and struck in the face by an Arrow Cross man when she was taken to the brickyards. Agnes Sereni witnessed how women and young girls were brutally chased down in their underwear and severely beaten during an Arrow Cross raid. Marianne Kutner was only nine years old when she and her sister were taken by the Arrow Cross and brought to a hotel where they were kept prisoners. She recalls that the Arrow Cross took out two, three, or four persons at a time for “interrogations”. Marianne and her sister were beaten with rubber hoses on the soles of their feet.

Judy Kallman, one of the child survivors, had very clear memories of the raid her house was exposed to:

[The Germans] invaded the Red Cross territory, and they came, and they got all the Jews out. And we were all lined up. And they started shooting one by one, they started killing people. And I remember as a child, talking about how a child

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94 RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 8.
95 RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 64.
96 RWA, F2B:6, file 517, tape 1, side B.
97 RWA, F2C:21, file 539, p. 12.
98 RWA, F2C:21, file 539, p. 12; F2D:1:1, file 993, p. 4.
99 RWA, F2C:19, file 504, p. 23.
100 RWA, F2C:21, file 540, p. 12.
thinks, um… I said, if they come to my turn, I’m going to lie down flat on the
ground and make believe I’m dead. So they will think they shot me. You see, I
thought I would outsmart them when it came to my turn.\footnote{RWA, F2C:20, file 509, p. 11.}

Judy was probably saved by a phone call. She does not know who and how, but
someone came and interfered. The shooting stopped and the remaining
inhabitants of the house were rescued.

Otto Roboz was the director of a Jewish orphanage. About 800 children and
400 adults were living in the buildings of the orphanage during the second half
of 1944. Roboz remembers that the orphanage was attacked twice. First,
Hungarian police squads attacked one of the buildings in August 1944. Every-
one except the elderly, the sick, and small children had to line up. They were
taken away, but after a few hours they were brought back. The second time the
orphanage was raided was in December, this time by the Arrow Cross. They
attacked a building on Munkácsy Mihály Street, and “ordered everyone without
exception – even the babies – to assemble in the courtyard.”\footnote{RWA, F2C:20, file 513, memoirs, p. 13.}

Everybody had their belongings taken, and the treatment turned out to be much more brutal
than in August. Roboz reports in his memoirs:

They killed Endre Tibor Lohr, a 3-year-old child, Iván Vámos, a baby of a year
and a half, together with his mother, Mrs. Sándor Vámos, our 30-year-old nurse. They also shot Mrs. József Kraus and Mrs. József Stern, respectively 78 and 68-year-old sick women. They lined up the children from the Orphanage, but sent 15-year-old Lajos Kohn, who was so crippled that he could not keep up with
the procession, back into the building. As he limped toward the building, they
shot him in the back.\footnote{RWA, F2C:20, file 513, memoirs, p. 15. See also Agnes Adachi’s testimony on the killing of children in RWA, F2C:19, file 501, p. 16: “A little boy of maybe two year old, I don’t know how, why he was on
the street with his yellow star. And a priest, a Catholic priest came out of the church with a green
fascist shirt over his collar and took out a revolver and killed the kid.”}

The other inhabitants of the orphanage were taken through the city to the
Danube. Otto Roboz managed to alert the Swedish legation, and almost the
entire group was saved by an intervention from the Swedish authorities. This is
only another example of how violence against Jews escalated in 1944, and how
even children, women, the sick, and the elderly became victims of the brutal
treatment.

Sexual harassment and rape

It is almost impossible to determine how often sexual harassment and rape of
Jewish individuals occurred during 1944 and 1945. What is related in the
interviews are only fragments of experiences, and the issue is not easy to
approach by either the interviewer or the informant, as it might cause feelings of shame or discomfort. Therefore, the source critical aspect of silence must be taken into consideration. How much do the survivors speak about difficult issues such as sexual harassment and rape, and how much is left out? We will never obtain an exact answer, but this should not hinder us from studying the fragments of information available.

### Table 7.1. Sexual Violence in the Jewish Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narratives about sexual violence</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body search</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other type of sexual harassment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In total</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: RWA, OSA, memoirs, interview with Lujza Molnár 2005.

Thirty out of the 151 informants (20 per cent) talk about sexual violence in their testimonies. As shown in table 7.1, five of these narratives dealt with sexual harassment, and twenty-five with rape.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned one type of treatment that might be categorized as sexual violence or sexual harassment, namely the body search. Aranka Siegal described how she and the other women from Beregszász ghetto were brutally examined before the deportations. Lujza Molnár and Olga K. testified to similar treatment, and Mr. K. described how the Gendarmes beat women from the upper social classes in their genital areas. The informants from Budapest do not speak of people being exposed to systematic body searches. However, one of the informants testifies to other types of sexual violence. Katalin Lebovitz was caught in the street together with another, to her unfamiliar, woman. They were brought to the Royal Hotel, one of the Arrow Cross’s headquarters, and Katalin witnessed how the other woman was tortured:

> They took us in a room and this lady was lain on the table like this, like that hard table. And you know these guns that have this little... thing you would look through... […] the sight. I saw that this ‘Nyilas’ took her pants off and put that thing into her. I went hysterical. I got so scared.105

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104 See Dwork (1991), pp. 167–168, for an eyewitness story on how 13-year-old Mária Ezner from Abádszalók was exposed to a bodysearch. This time midwives performed the task, not the Gendarmes. Mária’s mother was beaten on the soles of her feet during the search for valuables.  
105 RWA, F2C:20, file 523, p. 12. “Nyilas” is the Hungarian word for Arrow Cross.
After this Katalin was tortured. She was accused of espionage, but refused to confess. She was then forced to drink salt water: “[T]hat makes you throw up. Oh, did you ever tasted [sic] salt water to drink? [...] After a mouthful you can hardly swallow the thing. It brings everything up in you. So, if you are really weak, you... you give in, because you don’t want to drink anymore of that junk.” The Arrow Cross finally gave up, but before Katalin could escape she was taken to her own apartment, where she witnessed an Arrow Cross soldier raping a young woman. This was when she fled, leaving the young girl alone with the Arrow Cross man.106

In the sources used here, narratives about rape are brief and presented in a rather implicit manner. However, as many as twenty-five persons (mostly women, but also a few men) talk about rape. Two of them were personally raped, while the other narratives deal with rumours, fears of rape, or witnessing rape. Of these twenty-five testimonies, twenty-two are brought up in connection to the Russians, and three refer to rape by Hungarians or Germans. Only two women, including Katalin Lebovitz, have reliable first hand information about Hungarian perpetrators raping Jewish women.107 According to historian Sybil Milton, rapes by Germans did occur, even though they were rare.108

When the Russians arrived in Hungary and in Budapest, rapes were conducted against both Hungarian and Jewish women. There are no exact figures on how many, but some estimates suggest that approximately 50,000 women in Budapest were raped by the Red Army.109

107 RWA, F2C:20, file 523, p. 13 and F2C:21, file 540, p. 12. One woman states that both Germans and Hungarian Nazis did rape women, but she gives no concrete examples. See RWA, F2C:1, file 003, p. 22.
The female survivors often refer to their fear of rape. Eight out of 71 female informants clearly express their fear, both during the Arrow Cross period and during the liberation of Budapest. Some other women talk about rape, but they do not express their own feelings regarding it. It is nevertheless possible to sense their anxiety between the lines. The fear of rape was clearly connected to rumours, and rumours concerning the Red Army raping women flourished among the inhabitants of Budapest already before the siege. Correspondingly, Myrna Goldenberg has pointed out that Jewish women in concentration camps were often terrorized by rumours of rape. Sara Gresz was one of the Budapest informants who felt unsafe after the Red Army had invaded the city. She describes how she was hiding to save herself:

Then there came a more dangerous period, when the Russians kept coming and wanted women and eau de cologne. They drank anything that contained alcohol, you know. I spent many nights ‘embedded’ covered with sheets and pillows all over. It was really unsafe.

Similar descriptions were told to James Mark, who interviewed Hungarian women (both Jewish and non-Jewish) in an oral history project in the late 1990s. Mark shows that women often indicated some kind of precaution against sexual violence in their narratives: hiding (for instance, in a pile of coal), smearing their faces with soot to appear less attractive, wearing clothes and scarves that made them look older, or wearing clothes that made young girls look like boys.

Four female survivors give first-hand testimonies about Russian soldiers raping women. Of these four women, two were raped. The then-24-year-old Stefánia Schwartz was raped in the middle of the night shortly after the liberation. The Russians came in, robbed them all and raped the women. She tells in her interview:

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110 None of the male informants reflect on their feelings concerning rape. However, Camilla Andersson has noted a Polish Jewish man who expressed his fear of rape in Auschwitz-Birkenau in an unpublished student paper “‘Att lida går över men att ha lidit går aldrig över.’ Kvinnliga och manliga upplevelser och berättarteknik i Förintelsen Polen” (Uppsala University, History Department, 2007) p. 31.


112 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 61.


They came in and ravished me... How should I have seen it as liberation! And all the young girls who were staying with me there, 16-year-olds. Well, it was most terrible, when it would have meant life, it was horrifying.\textsuperscript{115}

In Stef\'ania Schwartz’s testimony it becomes evident that even teenaged girls were raped, not only adult women.\textsuperscript{116}

Heddy Bleier from Budapest was raped while she was hiding under a false identity in the village of Kisláng. Heddy reports how Russian soldiers raped her, her mother, and her sister-in-law. The rapes occurred at the same time and in the very same room: “There was no emotion, [...] just revulsion and fear. The soldiers were dirty and smelled of vodka. When they had gone, [my mother] said, ‘Well, we survived that one too. This all goes with it, my dears. Never mind.’”\textsuperscript{117} Heddy’s mother probably used this “never mind” as a survival strategy. James Mark refers to a similar testimony, where a Jewish woman named Katalin describes how she was raped by the Russians:

When I had to get up, because nature was calling, they [the Red Army soldiers] noticed that I was not a child, and then the situation began to get tricky because they had already begun to court the girls. When later I had to go out, one or two of them escorted me to the neighbour’s, and they used the opportunity — when I was already married — but I did not die from it. I was lucky because they were provided with condoms from the Tétényi Rubber Factory... So when things happened I was astonished but I said, ‘so, all right, we survived, that’s no problem’... you must understand that a great many came from a very bad environment in Russia and were very poor.\textsuperscript{118}

Mark states that Katalin downplays the importance of this violation (“I did not die from it”) in her testimony. He writes: “The idea of psychological trauma was also rejected: the rape was neither a defining moment in her life nor did it have a damaging effect on her (‘we survived, that’s no problem’).”\textsuperscript{119} Mark suggests that “[l]ike other Jewish and left-wing women who were raped, Katalin avoided a language of trauma, as this might have implied that she was a conservative who wished to demonize the Soviets and marginalize the importance of Fascism and the Holocaust.”\textsuperscript{120} However, not all Jewish women downplayed

\textsuperscript{115} F2C:17, file 345, p. 65. The English translation of Stef\'ania Schwartz’s interview is: “they came in and ravished me...”, but in the Hungarian version she more clearly states that “They came in and raped me” [“bejöttek és meger\'szakoltak”].
\textsuperscript{116} According to Niclas Sennerteg, Russian soldiers in Germany raped young girls and women between the ages of twelve to eighty. Sennerteg (2001), p. 152. See also Mark (2005), p. 138.
\textsuperscript{117} Varga (1994), p. 120.
\textsuperscript{118} Quoted in Mark (2005), p. 153.
\textsuperscript{119} Mark (2005), p. 153. The aim of Mark’s article is “not to uncover the realities of rape at the end of the war, but rather to reveal the political resonances behind the conflicting ways in which rape stories have been told, and to address the political importance of these narratives about the Red Army in Hungarian society since 1944.” See p. 135.
\textsuperscript{120} Mark (2005), p. 154.
the traumatic impact of rape, even though both Katalin and Heddy’s mother tried to diminish the importance of the rapes. Both Stefánia Schwartz and Heddy Bleier express themselves clearly in this matter. How could Stefánia consider the Red Army’s arrival as liberation, since she was brutally raped by them? Heddy speaks about her own trauma in the following:

[T]o go through that, with your children in the other room, Manyi and mother being raped at the same time a couple of feet away, I didn’t know who I was anymore – it was like losing your soul. I just thought, this is the price of survival, it has to be paid.121

Heddy became pregnant and was infected by syphilis. Free abortions were offered to women raped by the Russians, and she chose to remove the foetus. Eventually she recovered physically.122

One last comment I would like to make here is the way in which Heddy describes the perpetrators; they were “dirty” and “smelled of vodka”. The similarities to Aranka Siegal’s description of the German perpetrators who exposed her to the sexually humiliating body search is striking. Aranka mentions the perpetrator’s “iron grip”, the “sausagy” breath and “the tobacco stains”. The perpetrator is described here as a smelly and repulsive person, giving substance to the victims’ words and to their trauma. Negative portrayals of the rapist are also common in other historical narratives and testimonies of rape.123

There is no doubt that sexual violence occurred during the Holocaust in Hungary. What is less certain is to what extent, how, and by whom. Russian soldiers committed rape, yes, but to what extent did German and Hungarian men rape Hungarian Jewish women? The German Nazis and the Hungarian Arrow Cross members regarded themselves as superior to the Jews, and sexual relations with Jews were illegal. Thus it is less likely that they committed rapes on a large scale.124 Nevertheless, to live with the fear of rape and with a possible risk or memories of rape is unquestionably a gender-related experience, and it is evident that deeper investigations are needed. The problem is, as I have already mentioned, the silence concerning sexual harassment and rape. The sources available scarcely bring up sexual violence, and when they do, it is only done

124 The Russian soldiers were not directly encouraged to rape women in the “liberated” area, but raping was tolerated and sometimes indirectly encouraged. Even German soldiers raped women on the Eastern front in the early war years, despite the fact that this crime could lead to a death sentence. Sennerteg (2001), pp. 155, 389 (footnote 261). See also Vigarello (2001), p. 223 for a short comment on the German raid of Nice in 1944.
briefly. And before long, there will be no more survivors to ask about these sensitive issues.

The effects of the labour service system in 1944

After the German occupation, the age limit for conscription was lowered from twenty to eighteen, and as a result, the number of labour service companies would increase from 210 to 575. Altogether, about 150,000 “able-bodied” Jews would be conscripted. The treatment of the labour service men deteriorated during 1944, as already described in chapter 5. Thus the impact of the labour service system grew even stronger, both for the labour service men and the families left behind. An increasing number of women, children, and the elderly experienced the absence of adult male family members. Braham states, however, that “the labor service system turned out to be a source of rescue for many Jewish men threatened by deportation.” Those who were conscripted by the time of the German occupation escaped deportation. Even though the treatment in the Ukraine and in Bor was harsh, those stationed within the Hungarian borders “fared comparatively well, at least until the Nyilas era.”

The narratives concerning male absence are similar to those from the period before the occupation, but there are some differences. Magda Szanto illustrates the situation:

My husband was called up for labour service in May. It was a terrible blow for all of us. We knew from earlier experiences that the treatment and the rations for the Jews in the labour service already was bad – and this time it could be expected to be even worse. And likewise for the defenceless family members left behind, the worst had to be expected. We already heard news from the provinces, that the deportations were fully underway. It seemed to be only a matter of time that the Budapest Jewry’s turn would come.

Magda describes how rumours from the countryside reached Budapest, and that the remaining family members felt insecure when her husband was drafted. She believed that the authorities planned to “deprive the Jewish families of their men through conscription.” The women, the sick, and the children were then

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left “defenceless” against the terror and the danger of the deportations.\textsuperscript{127} It is interesting that Magda Szanto uses the adjective “defenceless” to describe the family members who were left behind. Since the male breadwinner ideal had been dominant in 1930’s Europe, the rumours of killings and the absence of these breadwinners created increasing anxiety and insecurities. The ideal male was thus not only the breadwinner but also the protector, as indicated in the introductory chapter. However, I would argue that the women did not become defenceless in the absence of the men, but instead self-supportive and active. They found new ways of supporting their families, even though the male absence generated feelings of uncertainty.

Mrs. Pál Kanders notes that there were no male members left in her family, and she thus had to support her son, her mother, her mother-in-law, and her sister-in-law all by herself. She began sewing to obtain money for daily groceries. The feelings of insecurity and fear were constantly present.\textsuperscript{128} Mrs. Mihály Kádár perceived the situation similarly:

Following the occupation, curfew was enforced and the gates of the buildings were locked up. We lost our jobs. Men were carried off, we stayed there penniless. I was living in a rented room. My husband was taken away on forced labour service. I went back to my mother and so did my sister who was pregnant and her husband was carried off as well. My younger and elder brothers were taken away, too.\textsuperscript{129}

Mrs. Kádár lists all of the male individuals who were important to her. Her father had died already before the war, but her husband, brothers, and her brother-in-law were all taken away. She does not mention how she and her family were supported, but does say that she sometimes went out to clear away rubble after bombings. She could probably acquire some food during this difficult period as a result of this activity (see also figure 7.2).

A majority of the Jewish families in Budapest experienced the absence or loss of loved ones, and in this case there was little difference between the provinces and the capital. The labour service system affected the Jews equally regardless of where they lived in Hungary. The feeling of uncertainty created by the rumours was evident in the testimonies. There was, however, a difference, in that the Budapest Jews had more time to become informed and become aware of what might happen to them.

\textsuperscript{127} Magda Szanto (1958), AWL, Series I, Section II: P.IIIi, Reel 62, file 771, p. 4. For similar comments, see also RWA: F2C:19, file 516, p. 7; F2C:20, file 536, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{128} RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{129} RWA, F2C:13, file 326, p. 6.
Conscription of women and elderly men

The most significant change in the labour service system came after the Arrow Cross took over, when women and elderly men were called up and forced to work. All remaining Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty and women between the ages of sixteen and forty were drafted. Ernő Szép describes in his memoir how he and thirty-five other Jewish elderly men were taken from their apartment house and brought to the outskirts of the city, to the Kisok soccer field. Ernő writes: “Most of the gentlemen were between 50 and 60 years old, a few under 50; some as old as 65, 70, 72 even. Upstairs, the building commander had made it clear that there was no age limit, we all had to go. [...] Only two bedridden invalids, too sick to move, were allowed to stay upstairs.”\textsuperscript{130} Even if the regulation concerned male persons under the age of sixty, the Arrow Cross members implementing the order did not care about the age limitation. They forced all Jewish men in that particular apartment house into the labour service, where Ernő along with the others was put to work.

\textsuperscript{130} Szép (1994), p. 3.
digging trenches in the November cold. The trip began with a march which lasted for several days: “How strange that walking was more bearable than stopping, which was real torture. If we halted for a minute or two, I began to feel stabbing pains in my feet and legs, the straps cutting into my shoulder; and my back really started to suffer under the relentless pressure of the knapsack.” After three weeks, all of the men over the age of sixty were released, among them Ernő Szép, who had just turned sixty. The other middle-aged men were forced to stay and continue the strenuous work.

Special call-up orders for women were issued on November 2 and 3, ordering the registration of women between sixteen and fifty years of age who knew how to sew, and able-bodied women between sixteen and forty years of age. It is interesting to note how females became the direct targets of persecution after the Arrow Cross coup. Horthy’s actions against the ensuing Nazi pressure had limited the Jewish labour force to males only. Now, when cooperation with the Germans was re-established and the Red Army was approaching Budapest, women were also used as forced labourers. There were, however, age limits for the women, probably because of their estimated physical strength. Mothers with large families were exempted, which indicates that a “traditional” gender-related view of women and children was to some extent still valid.

Susan S. remembers how she was called up and went to the sports arena where all the women were gathered, but she realized that it was not in her best interest to be there, and managed to sneak out without permission. The 24-year-old Mrs. Koltai obeyed the order, and was forced to dig trenches outside Budapest. She and her comrades had to walk long distances every day. Those who could not keep up were shot.

Judit Farkas vividly describes how she, as a 16-year-old girl, was conscripted one morning after the Arrow Cross putsch. The Arrow Cross men came to their house, collecting those who were within the new age limits. Judit’s perception was that “all women from 16 to 50 were called into forced labour.” She speaks about when the Arrow Cross men came to their house, shouting, and how the inhabitants of the house reacted. Some decided that it was safe to send the younger ones. They believed that they would not be harmed, but only used as labour. Other parents chose to hide their teenagers, but Judith was sent into forced labour:

And so we went into the camp. Such an absurdity! A young girl, 16 years old, thin like alth [sic] and to carry a very heavy rucksack, two plaids bound to it, on my side another bag, brandnew ankleboots, worn skitrouser[s]. Consequently my shoulders became full of wounds from the weight to carry, I got blistered

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131 Szép (1994), p. 84.
134 RWA, F2C:7, file 310, p. 23.
heels, I was not able to carry all those heavy things and throw away even my last piece of bread and I could not lift it up… I simply lost my sense [of reality]. I could not pick up my last bread, I dragged my coat in the mud after me. When we reached Horány I fell into the mud and could not stand up. This is the end, they can do with me whatever they want.135

Horány was located on an island in the Danube, and this is where Judit spent the coming weeks. She recalls that it was raining a lot; it was late October. The camp was originally a children’s camp, and the beds were too small. The women had to sleep in these tiny beds, “hanging down” from them. Judit describes an average day in the labour service. The guards woke them every morning with the sound of machine guns:

after awaking, quick[ly] washing ourselves – if it was possible – then a bowl of coffee, or nothing, then marching to work and in the evening home again. Sometimes rain was pouring in torrents, as no digging was possible; they sent us home. In the camp, however, we were sent back, saying that we could dig trenches. On such days we just went to and fro, the whole day long.136

Judit remembers that the digging did not suit her. She was weak and it was hard for her to endure the long days: “[W]e had to [walk] one and a half hours on foot to our working field. So we had to march 3 hours daily. For breakfast we got a tinned coffee [sic], what the soldiers drink, and one slice of bread. In the evening a bowl of soup if one is still able to queue for it. I myself often rejected for being so tired and could not standing [sic] any longer.” The worst days were, however, those when they did not receive anything to drink: “that was even worse than hungering.”

A few hundred women stayed in the Horány camp, but there was only one water tap, which was not enough to maintain their personal hygiene. Judit recounts: “In order to avoid becoming dirty and get lice we decided to wash ourselves in the Danube, which was fairly cold in October. The Arrow Cross men stood at the Danube bank and roared with laughter.”137

Judit was released from the camp with the help of two Hungarian soldiers, who had received a false release order from Judit’s father. He had stolen an empty form from his sergeant in the labour service battalion, which he filled in himself, and thus managed to send for his daughter.138

135 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 38.
136 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 41.
137 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, quotes from pp. 40–41.
138 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 44.
The death marches

A large number of Budapest Jews and Jews in the labour service were taken to the Austrian border as forced labour, to build the defence of Vienna, as described in chapter 6. Jews from both ghettos of Budapest were first taken to the brickyards in Óbuda, and then westwards to the town of Hegyeshalom, a 200 kilometres walk from Budapest.\footnote{For earlier descriptions of the death marches, see Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 963–969 and Lappin (2000). See also Goldhagen (1996), Part V.} As already mentioned, roughly 70 per cent of the individuals taken on the death marches were women.\footnote{Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 963; Aly & Gerlach (2002), p. 360.} This was a consequence of the fact that many men were already in the labour forces. The majority of those men who experienced the death marches came directly from labour service battalions.

Eight (5 per cent) out of the 151 survivors studied here experienced the death marches.\footnote{RWA, F2C:7, file 306; F2C:9, file 314; F2C:17, file 346; F2C:20, file 508; F2D:1:1, file 992; AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 1089; HJA, XX-G, D6/6: Naplók [Diaries]: DD9/6; Bill Basch in The Last Days (1999).} Two of them were women and six were men. One was a child, and the rest were adults. Another five had close relatives who were taken on the death marches,\footnote{RWA, F2C:12, file 324, pp. 39–40 (sister); F2C:13, file 325, pp. 1–5, 23–24 (husband); F2C:19, file 503, pp. 10–11 (mother); F2C:20, file 508 (mother); F2C:21, file 532, p. 10 (husband).} and one survivor witnessed the columns of Jews marching westwards.\footnote{RWA, F2C:20, file 507.} Altogether, fourteen of the survivors had some type of information about the marches.

Ivan Becker, the child survivor, describes how he and his mother were taken to the Óbuda brickyards:

three or four of [the Arrow Cross] basically rounded up the ten of us, and took us [on] what started to be the... the Death March. Now, these were the women, the elderly men, elderly women, and children under 16. Because [those] above 16, if I remember correctly, they already were drafted into the battalions as well. So being fifteen years old I just made it under the... the age restriction and so the group that I was with was basically the... the ill and the women and the young children, some of them very young. And of course recollections on the... the brickyard, the darkness, the mud, it was raining, no place to sit, you couldn’t lie down, it was... we were jammed in there under the roof.\footnote{RWA, F2C:20, file 508, p. 20.}

The brickyards are described as muddy and cold, and there were no proper buildings to sleep in. The eyewitness stories all agree with each other. One woman describes her stay in the brickyards in the following words: “The brick factory was filled with people. It was raining. […] There were some people who
committed suicide. I recall spending a day there. We were dirty, smelly, it was cold and wet.\textsuperscript{145} Another woman recalls:

We spent the night in total uncertainty sitting in the ankle-high brick dust. It was an awful night (then I did not know that there were worse nights to come). Some committed suicide and a pregnant woman experienced birth pains from the excitement. It was very dark.\textsuperscript{146}

There were no toilets, and the only possibility of relieving oneself was to do it on the ground.\textsuperscript{147} The food shortage was evident, and one of the survivors recounts that he had to steal bread from others in order to survive.\textsuperscript{148}

Peter Tarjan was only eight years old in 1944, but he still has very clear memories from the day his mother was taken to a death march:

And then one day they came, the… the fascists came and ordered all women who had children over the age of two, to pack their belongings and gather in the backyard. Just a tiny little backyard in this apartment building. And the last time I saw my mother was from this window and I was on the 6th floor and she was down in the yard. Standing there and… and I don’t know what was going to happen. Until then every time she left, she came back. But this time she didn’t. Well, she left me with this woman, who was her friend and she must have made some arrangements with her. Left her some money or something.\textsuperscript{149}

Many goodbyes were said before and during the death marches. Noemi Renkei lost her grandfather. She also informs us about the route they took; from the brickyard of Óbuda, they were taken to Piliscsaba, Dorog, Sütő, and to Győr (see figure 7.3). Noemi’s grandfather was murdered during the march: “After the second station we lost my grandfather, eventually shot dead as incapable to go ahead.”\textsuperscript{150} Killings and beatings were frequent.\textsuperscript{151}

György Endre’s labour service company was first taken to Mauthausen. From there, they marched to Günskirchen. In his diary, which he wrote during the march, he states: “the women are marvelous, although they walk slowly their stamina is excellent, we take our hats off to them. We have not seen any women killed, but a few men mainly young ones. Those who cannot keep up

\textsuperscript{145} RWA, F2C:13, file 326, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{146} RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{147} RWA, F2C:16, file 340, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{148} RWA, F2C:14, file 332, p. 16. See also AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 1086, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{149} RWA, F2C:19, file 503, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{150} RWA, F2D:1:1, file 992, p. 5. Noemi and her mother tried to escape four or five times, but were turned in by Hungarian civilians. Just before reaching Győr they managed to leave the group, which was guarded by Hungarian soldiers and Arrow Cross men, and caught a train back to Budapest.
\textsuperscript{151} According to György Frigyesi, about 80 per cent of his labour service company, which was taken on a death march, were killed. About 10 per cent escaped and 10 per cent survived the entire march. See RWA, F2C:9, file 314, p. 35.
are shot.”152 This gender-related issue brought out by György Endre is very interesting, but it is hard to know whether women were not shot because of the fact that they were women or because of their strength, that they actually could keep up the pace. György’s observations indicate, however, that in this case women were treated better than men.

Mrs. Pál Kanders tells about how the Hungarian soldiers who guarded them hit them with their swords. Those who were in the front were more likely to be beaten, so everyone tried to stay towards the back of the line, in order to avoid this. According to Kanders, however, some of the guards felt sorry for them. No one was killed during the march, “but there were some who were weak and died on the way.”153 In Dorog, their belongings were taken. Kanders had some money, soap, food, and clothes in her backpack, which they took away from her. After this, it was very hard to obtain food:

Some of [the guards] permitted someone to give us water or a piece of bread, I got from a gypsy woman a yeast roll wrapped in newspaper, which I gave to my sister-in-law, the poor thing ate it so, I said, “Jucikám, leave me a bite too.” We were so starved. […] The civilians didn’t dare to come close to us much. Some were brave and slipped us something to eat, this sorrowful lot we were. Some of us cried the whole way.154

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152 György Endre, 17 April 1945 in HJA, XX-G, D6/6: Naplók [Diaries]: DD9/6, p. 3.
153 RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 67, 69. Tivadar Soros writes: “One short fellow I know told me afterwards that he had never been more grateful in his life for his shortness than on that march from the brickworks toward Vienna. Several of the Arrow Cross guards amused themselves by vying with each other as to who could shoot the most tall people among the marchers. And so the tall people fell one by one under their bullets. The road to Vienna was soon lined with bodies.” Soros (2000), p. 155.
154 RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 68.
They slept mostly in cellars, but one night they stayed in a silk factory in Mosonmagyaróvár, which was “a very bad place because we were sleeping on the tile floor. I was lucky because I had a little overcoat-like vest, made of fur, so my kidney[s] didn’t catch cold. But many of them were shaking and pressing together, getting close so the warmth of their bodies would keep out the cold.”

Ivan Becker describes the death marches in great detail. His story deserves to be quoted at length, since it gives the reader a sense of how the march was experienced by a 15-year-old boy. Ivan and his mother were rounded up in Budapest on December 13, 1944:

We took with us some clothing, some little food, I remember, I had a raincoat, a… boy scout raincoat, with a hood. One of those rubberised… things, I think, rubberised canvas. […] Greenish-grey if I remember. Green inside, the rubber was green inside. Had a water bottle. And that was about it. My mother took my father's silver Omega pocket-watch, if we needed to trade it. It may have had some value. […] She also had some jewellery, she had her wedding ring, plain wedding ring.

Ivan remembers that the weather was cold and rainy during almost the entire march. They slept on market places and in enclosures for cattle, amongst the dung, in the open air. He describes how some parts of the highway were guarded by the Arrow Cross and the provincial police “who essentially, if you didn’t move fast enough they shot you in the side. There were people who were hanging themselves off the trees, you know, some of the suicides. Always being driven from morning till night.” Hungarian peasants were lined up along the road and watching them and sometimes cursing them. “I remember being fed once soup [sic]. Once my… the Omega watch went for half a loaf of bread, from one of the peasants.” Ivan continues:

the reason I remember the raincoat with the hood: it was raining and we came upon a German army vehicle, trucks, […] and they were filming us. And I had the sense that if our friends would know that we are alive and well, if they ever see the film, so I took my hood off and looked into the camera to show that we would be recognisable.

Ivan describes his mother having great difficulties during the march:

She was a well woman [prior to the march] but not… I don’t think she was terribly strong. […] She had a hard time walking, keeping up. And if you… straggled, the stragglers were usually killed. We could hear the shots. And the

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155 RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 70. See also F2C:17, file 346, p. 31, where György Gabor tells about the “terrible” November nights during the march. He escaped and returned to Budapest.

156 All of the following quotes and references are found in RWA, F2C:20, file 503, pp. 19–24.
straggler also is the last one to get into [ wherever] we are going to sleep. And there's usually no place to lie down, or you have to be in the muck when some other people were maybe in the dry. So I [was] always trying to keep up ahead of things. [...] So my mother wanted to stay behind and I kind of dragged her and pulled her to stay up with the column. And... roughly after the seven days we ended up in Hegyeshalom, at the border [...], [ where] the children and the... the rest of the grown-ups were separated.

I.: By who?

I. B.: By the Arrow Cross, still the Hungarians. Because they had the primary duty up to that point. And I remember my mother gave me her wedding ring, which I still have. And the children, some ten of us, I remember roughly, small group of us, was put into a barn in Hegyeshalom, and we must have been there one or two nights. And one morning a very dapper thin German officer came into the barn... [...] And he said to follow him and he has a train, and we could hear the trains going by and leaving and coming and going... to come with him because he's going to take us back to Budapest.

However, another man, a civilian, soon showed up and told the children not to believe the German officer. He guaranteed that if they just waited for one night, he could get them back to Budapest.

I was the oldest in the group if I remember, of the children. And I decided to believe the civilian. And some of them wanted to get back to Budapest as fast as possible, they went with the German. To the best of my knowledge none of them ever came back. We stayed overnight and indeed we got on a train with the civilian. [...] We had a... what it seemed to me one or two days, one or two nights, maybe three days of trip going back, to Budapest. [...] 

I.: And your mother?

I. B.: My mother by that time was out of the picture. She left... before we got to the barn, we were separated out. And so after giving me her ring that was the last [ time] I saw her. Her group, [ I found out after the war], ended up in Bergen-Belsen. I think maybe one or two people came back. We have never found any record of her. No one knew of her. She disappeared. Never found her. Any trace. And so we were on the train. And the... the trip was fairly hair... hair-raising, it was again... I don't remember food or anything else, I remember having to go to the bathroom, whatever, moving train, hanging out the door, which was pretty tricky. [...] This was the first time I cried, on that train when I came... when I realised that my mother is gone, and I am alone, because I don’t know anybody, etc., and I was... fifteen. Fifteen and a half. After that I didn't cry till I was fifty.

After a two days’ train ride Ivan arrived in Budapest on Christmas Eve. He was fifteen years old and treated as a child by the perpetrators. The children were separated from the adults, probably because they were not considered to be fit
for work. In this case, age was of great significance, and increased the survival chances for the children who made the same decision as Ivan did. But what happened to those children who chose to follow the German officer’s orders? They were most likely taken to a concentration or an extermination camp. A majority of those who survived the death marches had either escaped the columns before arriving at Hegyeshalom or were saved by Raoul Wallenberg and his co-workers. Ivan Becker was one of them.\(^{157}\)

**Concluding remarks**

The main issues discussed in this chapter were how the informants perceived the circumstances created by the perpetrators, and the treatment they and their fellow Jews were exposed to. In what ways did gender, age, social class, and place affect their experiences, according to the informants? The themes studied here were the conditions in the Jewish houses, the ghettos, the bombings, violence, the labour service, and the death marches.

Scholars have stressed the central importance of geography in examining Hungarian Jewish experiences. The Jews in the provinces were deported after the German occupation, while the Jews of Budapest were saved from deportations when Horthy stopped the process in early July 1944. Jews of all ages were killed in Auschwitz, as only the adult “able-bodied” Jews without children were selected for work.\(^{158}\) However, the Jews of Budapest experienced a period of persecution and terror in late 1944 and early 1945.

Place was important even within the city of Budapest. The conditions within the city ghetto were harder than in the International ghetto. The informants perceived overcrowding as a severe problem in both ghettos. Single persons were the most vulnerable within the overcrowded apartment buildings, as they did not have families to share a room with and were often forced to sleep in bathrooms, halls, or corridors. This is an example of how even civil status could affect individual Jewish experiences during the Holocaust.

The lack of food and the risk of disease were more evident in the Pest ghetto than in the International ghetto protected by the neutral countries. Children seem to have perceived the situation in the ghettos differently than the adults. According to some interviews, they enjoyed the crowded rooms and the closeness to friends and family. Age was thus another important factor in how the situation was experienced. Furthermore, the risk of Arrow Cross raids was more impending in the city ghetto than in the protected houses. This changed, however, at the very end of the period, and people from the protected houses

\(^{157}\) Mrs. Pál Kanders was also saved by Raoul Wallenberg, as well as Magda Pollai’s husband. See RWA, F2C: 7, file 306, p. 74 and F2C:13, file 325, p. 5.

\(^{158}\) See, for example, Kramer (2000), chapter IV; Cole (2006). On the importance of place and space for the ghettoization process in Budapest, see also Cole (2003).
were taken to the Danube for execution or to the Óbuda brickyards, which was the starting point for the death marches westward.

Previous historical studies and the eyewitness testimonies studied here show that intersections of gender and age were of substantial importance to Jewish experiences even during this period. As earlier shown by Braham, the absence of male persons within Jewish families increased, as larger numbers of men were drafted into the labour service after the German occupation.159 The age limit was now lowered from twenty to eighteen, and after the Arrow Cross came into power, boys over the age of sixteen and elderly men up to the age of sixty were drafted. Another significant change was that Jewish women between the ages of sixteen and fifty-five were also taken into forced labour after the Arrow Cross coup in October.160 Moreover, Aly and Gerlach have noted that more females than males were taken to the death marches, partly due to the fact that the majority of the males were already drafted.161 Persecution became more all-encompassing; neither women nor men escaped the cruel treatment by the Hungarian and German authorities. The youth and elderly males were similarly persecuted. Changes over time thus became more and more crucial. The Numerus Clausus, the anti-Jewish legislation, and the labour service system had indirectly formed the experiences of children and the elderly. Now they were also physically targeted. Mothers of several children could still be exempted, however, and children and the elderly were more often spared than adults, as indicated by the interviewees.

Even though the informants state that the treatment of female and male Jews of different ages became more similar at the end of the war, they also perceived and recounted gendered differences in their experiences. One of these was the so-called “trouser inspection”. Previous research has also brought out this phenomenon.162 Only men were exposed to this, according to the informants, and therefore women could more easily remain outdoors without being har- assed. Another example is the specific female experience of sexual violence. Women more often recounted details concerning rape, and only women mention that they were afraid of rape during this time period. Goldenberg has previously discussed this aspect, and it seems that the fear of rape was a more or less female experience during the Holocaust.163 It is possible that Jewish men were also afraid of rape, but this is not mentioned in the interviews studied here.

When it comes to social class, some important aspects must be emphasized. “Protected” Jews in the International ghetto were privileged. These were often upper middle class individuals with good social connections, as noted by the

informants, as well as by historian Attila Lajos. The first persons to receive protective documents were those belonging to the Jewish elite, and when the International ghetto was established, the “non-privileged” families in the area were relocated to the central ghetto of Pest. However, this also changed during the autumn of 1944 as more people moved to the International ghetto. As a result, the social background of the inhabitants became more differentiated.

Upper and upper middle class persons sometimes had more difficulties in adjusting to the new circumstances. Survivors remember this in their interviews. For example, women who were not used to cooking in their pre-war lives and men who had never worked physically found the situation particularly difficult. They could experience these changes more dramatically than those who were used to more sparse circumstances even before the war. During the death marches, social class seems to have mattered very little, at least according to the testimonies.

In conclusion, the multiple factors of place, gender, and age were of central importance to Jewish experiences during the last year of the war. Where an individual lived at the time of the German occupation was fundamental to his/her existence, but age and gender were also crucial. In Budapest, social class was more significant than for the deported Jews in the provinces. A person’s social position and networks could determine whether one gained access to the protected buildings or not. Over time, these differences seemed to have decreased, and “race” became the single factor of importance even to Budapest Jews. They were persecuted because they were Jews, not because they were Jewish adults or Jewish males.

165 Cole (2003), pp. 198–199.
CHAPTER 8
Jewish Responses and Survival Strategies in 1944–1945

Sometimes, when the Arrow Cross people were raiding [the Jewish houses], we hid my uncle [...] in the sofa, in the space for bed linen. We knew [that] if they opened the sofa, they might shoot us all dead. It also happened that young women were taken away to work. I think it happened before the time of the Swedish protection. Well, my mother took a pillow and put it in my panties. [I was wearing] the dressing gown and [holding] my son. [...] Mother said, ‘Leave this child alone. She is still a child, that is another child – she pointed to my son – and [one more] is coming.’ So they didn’t take me. This is one of the things we lived through.1

Rozsa Solymosi was not a child anymore, but a 25-year-old woman with a 5-year-old son. Her mother, Ilóna, assumed that no one would hurt a pregnant woman, and this is how she could keep her daughter from being taken away by the Hungarian fascists. Ilóna’s way of acting was based on a gendered perception of how men and women would act or be treated based on a given situation. Who would harm a young pregnant woman? As we know, Rozsa was saved, but pregnancy did not always prevent being persecuted or killed.

What kinds of expectations did the Jews of Budapest have when the Germans occupied Hungary and when the Arrow Cross seized power? How did they react to the occupation, the Szálasi coup, and the atrocities that followed? In this chapter, Jewish responses to the events described in chapter 6 and 7 are investigated. The interviews and the reports bring up a number of coping skills and survival strategies that the Jewish survivors developed during this catastrophic situation. Were there similarities or differences in the survival strategies developed by women and men from different age groups and social classes? These are some of the questions raised in the following sections. First, anticipatory reactions (reactions before the physical persecution) and strategies are described and analyzed, then, responses to the situation in Budapest in 1944–1945 are discussed.

1 RWA. F2C:11, file 319, pp. 44–45.
Table 8.1. Jewish survival strategies and coping skills in 1944–1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survival strategies</th>
<th>N*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and family planning</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passing (false identity)</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural activities</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N is the total number of informants who talked about the different strategies.

Sources: RWA, OSA, memoirs. In total 151 informants.

Table 8.1 presents the coping skills and survival strategies studied here. The most important common function of these strategies was to keep up spirits, and to not give in to a situation that seemed impossible to handle. Thirty-two (21 per cent) of the informants speak about hiding and/or passing, forty-five (30 per cent) informants bring up the issue of resistance, and twenty-seven (18 per cent) mention specific survival strategies other than hiding and passing which they used during the German occupation, and especially during the last months before the liberation.

Anticipatory reactions to persecution

Regarding anticipatory reactions, four different survival strategies are pointed out in the testimonies. Emigration as a response has already been discussed in chapter 5, and thus will not be commented on in detail. Second, some of the informants refer to marriage as a survival strategy, which was considered to ease the situation easier for the individuals involved. The third aspect is that of family planning: how did Jewish individuals view both giving birth and their future children’s prospects?

The fourth anticipatory reaction that the informants refer to was hiding and/or passing. This strategy could be employed already before persecutions began, but in most cases it was a direct response to persecution.

As described in chapter 5, the Hungarian Jews reacted to the persecution in other parts of Europe and in Hungary before 1944 in several ways. Emigration was discussed in a number of families, and both optimistic and pessimistic views are discernible in the source material. The German occupation did not dramatically alter expectations. Expressions of fear and anxiety, and of reassurance, were voiced. Optimistic views were not expressed as often as they were earlier, but there were still individuals who did not worry too much. Ervin Forrester’s father thought that the Jews would be safe as long as Horthy was in
power. Zsuzsa Gordon remembers that “[w]e thought that they could only do it in the rural areas,” that is, place the Jews in a ghetto and then deport them, and that the Budapest Jewry would be safe. Zsuzsa’s father did, however, go into hiding, as he was a well-known psychoanalyst and the Germans began to arrest well-known persons. On the other hand, Éva Zellman’s father turned down an offer to stay with some Christian friends, since he believed that nothing would happen to him because of his occupation as a physician. In these two cases, social class affected responses to the situation, even though it led to diverse ways of reasoning.

Marriage and family planning

One of the anticipated reactions to persecution and the German occupation mentioned by the informants was marriage. It was believed that married persons and persons with families would be safe and did not risk deportation to the same extent as non-married persons. The safest option was marrying a Christian. This was problematic, however, as mixed marriages were forbidden. One solution was to obtain forged Christian identity papers, and then marry a non-Jewish person. The Hungarian Christian Sára Karig was involved in resistance and rescue activities in 1944. She married several Jewish or “half-Jewish” men in order to save them. At that time, the marriages were recorded at the registry office, but no one ever checked as to whether a person was already married. This is how Sára could marry several men during a short period of time. These men received marriage certificates, which gave them a certain sense of security.

It is perhaps not surprising that it was a common conception that those who were married to Christians or had Christian identity papers would be treated better than others. But it also seems as if marriage per se was considered to be a safety measure. In 1944, after the German occupation, rumours about the value of marriage started to flourish. Five of the informants touch upon this issue in the interviews. Civil status thus became an aspect that was believed to have an impact on how the German Nazis and the Hungarian authorities would treat the Jews. One informant tells about hearing these rumours, while four of the informants actually got married because they were afraid that something might

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2 RWA, F2C:18, file 349, p. 4.
3 RWA; F2C:16, file 339, p. 68.
4 RWA; F2C:16, file 339, p. 53.
6 RWA, F2C:18, file 350, p. 6.
happen to them. Edit Ernster, who was nineteen years old at that time, refers to this in the following:

We married in [May] 1944. I wasn’t really allowed to marry, because my parents thought I was too young for marriage. And in ’44 when the Germans came in, we heard that single girls were in [a] huge danger of being taken away. And then we decided to marry, and my mother agreed to it, but wanted us to divorce after the war.

Edit is the only informant who mentions that it was single girls who were in danger. The others generally speak about single persons. But why did people believe that it was better to be married? The stigma of being unmarried was perhaps strengthened in times of crisis, but for a young girl like Edit there were probably other reasons for marriage. In accordance with the common view that women and children would not be harmed, it was believed that families would be kept together. Marriage could give one a feeling of security.

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7 RWA, F2C:1, file 004; F2C:19, files 502 and 505; F2C:20, files 523 and 524.
8 RWA, F2C:1, file 004, p. 7.
9 There was another rumour which claimed that Jewish girls were taken to brothels in Germany. This could explain Edit’s comment on the “huge danger” that single girls faced. She does not explain it further, but it is likely that this specific rumour had something to do with it. Judy Cohen mentions
According to Marion A. Kaplan, Jewish marriage rates increased in the 1930’s Nazi Germany. She writes: “Considering the risks of setting up a new life in the Third Reich, one might expect Jewish marriage rates to have dropped. Surprisingly, this was not the case.” Kaplan argues that even in times of hardship, people hope to build a future together.10 Her conclusion might be correct, but I would rather explain the eagerness to marry in a time of crisis by the need for security. Studying the Hungarian narratives, this interpretation seems more likely, since marriage was considered to increase one’s chances of not being taken away or being left alone.

Rozsa Solymosi comments on her feelings regarding motherhood and family planning before the war. She was only eighteen years old when she got married in 1937, and soon after she became pregnant. Even though Rozsa was not interested in politics, she realized that the situation in Europe was critical. She understood that the war could present a severe danger to the European Jews and because of this she did not want to give birth to the baby. However, she did not receive any support from her family or her doctor. As mentioned in the prologue, she gave birth to a baby boy against her own will.11

In contrast to Rozsa Solymosi’s narrative, I want to bring up that of Klara Rosta. Klara was married in 1931, but she and her husband chose not to have children because of “the Hitlerian era”. But when Klara got older, she started to have second thoughts:

When I reached the age of 30, I told my husband that I would not wait any longer, I wanted a child. – “If you want that, you have to make that decision, because I don’t know how long I’ll be together with you. […]” – he replied. I said of course, I accept the risk. My daughter’s name is Dorothea, which means ‘gift of God’. And just that she is, if it weren’t for her, I wouldn’t have endured.12

Klara’s husband “sensed misfortune” and did not want to bring a child into this world. But he succumbed to his wife’s wish, and Dorothea was born in 1937. In this case, it was the female partner who made the decision. This shows that the picture is seldom clear-cut. Klara’s husband agreed that she could make the decision since it was her body and her wish to have children. Rozsa, on the other hand, could not decide over her own body. An abortion was a controversial issue, and I believe that this is the reason why Rozsa did not have the

rumours about Jewish girls being tattooed: “Nur für Deutsche Soldaten”. See Judy Cohen (former Weiszenberg), 2005, interview by the author, Debrecen, 13 May 2005, tape no. 1, side B.
11 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 16.
12 RWA, F2C:1, file 009, p. 2.
power of deciding. For Klara, it was her “right” to give birth, while Rozsa’s arguments for having an abortion were not good enough.\textsuperscript{13}

This question also concerns the role of religion. Orthodox Jews were forbidden to undergo abortion, but in Rozsa’s case religion seems to have been less important. She came from an assimilated upper middle Neolog family, and she does not indicate any religious reasons for not having an abortion.

Hiding and passing

On December 23, 1944, the Hungarian Minister of the Interior, Gábor Vajna, issued a decree ordering all Jews in hiding to report to the Jewish Council and to move into the Pest ghetto. The Arrow Cross now intensified their search for Jews, and they brought thousands of people into the ghetto.\textsuperscript{14} We do not have exact figures on how many Jews were hiding in Budapest during the war, but it has been estimated that about 25,000 Jews were living in hiding in Budapest by the time of the liberation.\textsuperscript{15}

We also lack exact figures on who the individuals in hiding were, that is, whether they were female or male, young or old, or lower, middle, or upper class.\textsuperscript{16} However, the information contained in Jenő Lévai’s \textit{Black Book} gives some guidance. According to these figures, thousands of Jewish individuals were hiding in Christian convents and prayer rooms. Lévai mentions the figure 5,000, of which 1,700 are specified as children.\textsuperscript{17} It is thus likely that children made up a large part of the persons hid by the various Christian communities, a minimum of 1,700 persons. Thousands of other persons were hiding and/or were passing within the city, in apartments, in Christian homes, in cellars, or

\textsuperscript{13} In comparison, see Nechama Tec’s interview with Dobka Freund Waldhorn. She grew up in an Orthodox family, and married against her parents’ will. When she became pregnant her husband pleaded with her to have an abortion. Dobka refused and delivered a baby girl at the ghetto hospital of Vilna. The baby was, however, “disposed of”. Even though Dobka made the decision to continue the pregnancy, she still lost the baby. Tec (2003), pp. 68–69.

\textsuperscript{14} Lévai (1948), p. 395.

\textsuperscript{15} Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 1297. According to Jenő Lévai, some ten thousand were in hiding in late 1944. However, Lévai wrote his book already in 1948 and did not have all available information, so Braham’s figure is likely to be more accurate than Lévai’s. See Lévai (1948), p. 395.

\textsuperscript{16} Approximately 10,000–12,000 German Jews hid during the war. Avraham Seligmann estimates that “an equal number of men and women went underground” in Nazi Germany. See Kaplan (1998a), p. 203. Gunnar S. Paulsson writes that the Polish Jews in hiding in Warsaw were largely from the intelligentsia, and that a majority (61 percent) of those in hiding were women. He also claims that there were more children and old people than middle-aged people. Many young men also went into hiding, but very few were teenaged girls. According to Paulsson, this reflects the fact that the families attempted to save not only their most defenceless members (children, women and the elderly), but also the most resourceful ones – the young males and male adults – who might be able to help those left behind in the ghetto. At least 27,000 were in hiding at one time or another. See Paulsson (2000), pp. 95–96.

\textsuperscript{17} Lévai (1948), pp. 395–399. He also counts up about 200 women, 70 men, 300 adults, and 2,744 “Jews” or Jewish refuges. Lévai does not, however, provide any references for his sources.
wherever they could find a place to hide. In the interviews studied here, there is even an example of a survivor who was hiding in a wardrobe during the last weeks of the war.\(^1\)

Thirty-two (or 21 per cent) of the 151 Jewish informants studied here state that they or their family members lived in hiding or/and were passing at some point during the German occupation. Five out of thirty-two were passing as “Christians” during the entire period, without hiding. However, passing and hiding were often combined. Hiding occurred at different points in time within different parts of Budapest. Four out of thirty-two used hiding as a precaution already before the Arrow Cross take-over.

Fifteen of those who hid were women, and seventeen were men. Five were children or teenagers and four were over the age of forty, which gives us a total of twenty-three adults from the age group 20–40. Two persons were from the working class, six from the lower middle, ten from the middle, eight from the upper middle, and one person from the upper class. Five persons’ social class is unknown. Consequently, the informants who lived in hiding were of different ages, different sexes, and different social backgrounds.

Tivadar Soros took preventive actions already in the summer of 1944. He was afraid that he would be conscripted and started to make a plan for himself and his family. The following quote is from his memoirs, written after the war:

> Not for a minute did I waver in my decision not to obey if the call came. I would go into hiding. But what about my family? What would happen if they took my wife instead of me, or my two sons, or all three of them? It was clear that there could be no half-measures: we would all have to arrange to disappear.\(^1\)

But to disappear was “easier said than done.” Tivadar brought up two specific problems concerning hiding. One of them was related to social class. I believe that the comfortable lifestyle experienced by a middle class family limited their will to hide. How easy is it to leave one’s home, a secure environment, for something very insecure? Tivadar phrased this as follows:

> Middle-class existence holds us by a thousand and one ties. Our homes, our furniture, pictures on the wall – these are all insignificant in themselves, but most people can’t break free from them. […] But it turned out that four years of soldiering and a long period as prisoner of war had taught me a lesson – to value life more highly than anything else. So for me it was relatively easy to break free of [sic] my middle-class material existence.\(^2\)

\(^{18}\) Ervin Forrester hid in a wardrobe in an old hospital, see RWA, F2C:18, file 349.

\(^{19}\) Soros (2000), p. 20.

In hindsight it is easy to assure that hiding would have been the best option for all Jews in Budapest. However, people did not know exactly what the German occupation would mean, or that the Arrow Cross would eventually come into power. What if nothing had happened? In that case, all those who went into hiding had done so in vain. And the more you had to lose, the more you probably hesitated. Tivadar was a former prisoner of war who had learned to value immaterial aspects of life more than comfort. It might be argued that for him, it was an easier decision to go into hiding than, for example, for a person who had always lived in a secure, comfortable environment. Hence it is possible that an individual’s earlier experiences in life were crucial to the way he/she reacted to a critical situation.

However, one’s financial situation was not only an obstacle for hiding. It was one of the factors that made it possible. It was difficult to obtain false identity papers without a certain amount of money. Forgeries were expensive, as it was dangerous and illegal to produce them, and it was also costly to live in hiding.

Furthermore, connections were needed in order to find an adequate place to stay. It required a great deal of courage to go into hiding or pass as a “gentile” without any help, even though this must have been the safest way of doing it. If no one knew about your origin, then no one could reveal you. In any case, the risk of being exposed was high, as suspicious neighbours could speak to the authorities at any time. The Hungarian authorities received more than 30,000 denunciations during 1944–1945.

The second problem Tivadar Soros touched upon in his memoir was “the moral problem of breaking the law”, especially as he was a lawyer:

Lawyers are trained to act within the framework of the existing legal structure. You try to make the law work to your advantage but you know that if you transgress it you become an enemy of society. Nonetheless, as a lawyer I understood the principles of necessity and self-protection. I felt fully entitled, morally and legally, to disobey the state when it threatened me unjustifiably.

To go into hiding and, for example, not to obey the call-up order, was illegal and thus impossible for many individuals. Tivadar himself did not feel morally obliged to obey the law. The family (including Tivadar himself, his wife and two sons) was separated, as he thought it would be too risky to stay together using false papers. The entire family eventually survived the Holocaust.

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21 See Kaplan (1998a), p. 208 about the expenses for food and hiding places for German Jews.
22 Soros (2000); RWA, F2C:19, file 354.
Rivka Klein also went into hiding at an early stage. It seems as if she did it for gender-related reasons. She was seven months pregnant when the Germans occupied Hungary. Her husband wanted to protect her and the unborn child, and managed to obtain false identity papers for Rivka. She describes the period in hiding as one of constantly sitting and waiting. She stayed at home as she did not dare to go out and risk being recognized by someone, even though she had cut her hair and was wearing a wig. After the baby girl had been born, she did not want to leave the house without her, since breast milk was the only food available for the newborn. Rivka was afraid that something would happen to her, and in the event she did not return, the baby wouldn’t survive. Interestingly enough, Rivka’s husband was afraid that something would happen to his pregnant wife. He believed that she was vulnerable, and so he hid her. On the one hand, pregnant women were vulnerable and had to be protected, but on the other hand, pregnancy could also be seen as a fact that might help one to escape the atrocities, as shown in Rozsa Solymosi’s case.

Another interesting aspect that is visible in Rivka Klein’s as well as in Tivadar Soros’s narrative is the fact that the men made the decisions regarding hiding. Marion A. Kaplan points out that decisions, for example when it comes to emigration, “seem to have been made by husbands.” The cases concerning emigration and hiding that I have found support Kaplan’s conclusion. Men were still considered to be the leaders, while women were considered to be the caretakers. Women were supposed to take care of the families’ social well-being, even though their responsibilities had increased. Although the anti-Jewish laws and the labour service system had altered gender relations (the division of labour and the separation of the sexes had changed in the absence of the male breadwinner), it seems as if the given gender hierarchy did not change as much as one could have expected.

Judy Cohen gives another example of decision-making and family hierarchy. In a personal interview with the author, she mentioned how her family had the opportunity to go into hiding, but her father refused. He said that he did not want to hide from the rest of the community: “Whatever happens with the Jewish community, will happen to us.” In daily life, Judy’s father did not bother to use his authority anymore, but in important questions he was unrelenting. Judy continues by relating that her older sister Klára moved away from Debrecen and lived under a false identity in another town. When the Germans occupied Hungary, Judy’s father wrote to his daughter to come back. “My father wanted to show, because there were other people living among us, that he could control us. That maintained. But once in the ghetto […] he saw that his control was meaningless.” Klára came back to Debrecen and was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau with the rest of the family. Klára survived the initial

28 See also Steigal (2003), p. 156.
selection, but eventually she starved to death in Stutthof. Judy adds: “That was the terrible consequence of what my father did earlier.”

False identity papers were an important factor in making passing possible, and they also gave a certain feeling of security. Three women and two men recount that they could move about freely in Budapest, thanks to their false identities. Despite the feeling of security that these papers provided, those who possessed false identity documents most often stayed indoors and lived under the constant pressure of not raising any suspicion about themselves. Sociologist Maria Einhorn-Susulowska writes that the Polish Jews who were passing felt a psychological pressure to assume a new identity. This meant that they had to eradicate the past, to learn all about one’s new identity, to overtake “Christian” appearance and behaviour, and perhaps even to learn new skills or a new language. The person in passing had no possibility of being him/herself, and he/she did not know how long this would need to last. Thus there were several problems, both practical and psychological, connected to hiding and/or passing.

S. Lilian Kremer states that the theme of Jewish women passing as Christians often appears in women’s Holocaust narratives. Kremer writes: “Free of the physical marking that circumcision imposed on men, it was easier for women of Aryan appearance to avoid detection.” This observation corresponds to what was brought out above: circumcision could pose a serious risk to Jewish males. Female informants here occasionally commented on their “non-Jewish” appearance, which allowed them to more easily walk the streets of Budapest. Nechama Tec points out that “[p]hysical appearance, then, for both men and women, and the fact of circumcision were two major factors in the decision of whether to stay hidden or to try and pass as a Gentile.” Kaplan states in her study of the German Jews that men ran a greater risk of being caught than women, because of the absence of men in society at large. Men walking the streets were suspected of being deserters from the German army, or of having escaped forced labour. These two factors, circumcision and the general wartime absence of males, made it risky for Jewish men to try to pass as “Aryans”.

Those who did not have false identity papers were forced to hide, unable to go out at all. Two of the informants were hiding in hospitals, and five in various

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29 Judy Cohen (former Weiszenberg), 2005, interview by the author, Debrecen, 13 May 2005, tape no. 1, side B. See the front cover for a photograph of Judy as a child, along with her sisters Klára and Éva.
30 RWA, files 308, 315, 510, 523, 524, and AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 965.
31 See, for example, Soros (2000) and Varga (1994).
34 See the section on circumcision earlier in this chapter. See also, for example, Teréz Ottó’s comment in RWA, F2C.5, file 302, p. 11 on her “Christian” appearance, which helped her to “pass”.
shops or stores. For instance, Marianne Balshone stayed in a store which had been destroyed by bombing. She received some food from a helpful gentile person.37

Children were often hid with friends or acquaintances. Peter Tarjan, who was only eight years old at that time, remembers how he was hidden in a non-Jewish friend's tailor shop. Peter was terrified, especially during the nights. He missed his aunt, who had been taken away to the ghetto and later on a death march.38 Gabriella Grossberger, at that time a sixteen-year-old girl, stayed at an old lady's tobacco shop. The lady did not know that the girl was Jewish. Gabriella remembers that she could not eat the food she received from the lady, since it wasn't kosher. She was forced to say that she had a stomach ache, so as not reveal her identity. Instead, she went hungry.39

Six of the twenty-three adult informants were hiding with gentile friends or relatives. Emery Kalman recalls:

My last hiding place was by [sic] my former secretary in my office, who was a Gentile girl. And there we hid in a[n]... assistant manager's little cottage or room [close to the Parliament square]... about twelve of us were hiding there. And [there] was constant bombarding over us, and we feared for [our lives] day and night. No food and no nothing, no... no hygiene facilities and it was a horrible thing. That people cannot imagine. Undescribable.40

A few of the informants recount how they hid in pieces of furniture, for example, the previously-mentioned person who hid in a wardrobe in a hospital. Mrs. Mihály Kádár stayed in a Swedish protected house, but once, during an Arrow Cross raid, she hid in a wooden couch and the others placed a washbasin full of water on the top of the couch. After this event, she did not dare to stay in the protected house anymore, and hid in different places during the rest of the war.41 Another male survivor hid in various places after escaping the labour service, and remembers how he hid in a cupboard when the soldiers came to look for him. The lady in the house lied that she had lost the key, and the soldiers left, but threatened to come back. Thus it was time for this person to flee to another place.42

37 RWA, F2C:19, file 502, p. 20.
38 RWA, F2C:19, file 503, p. 11.
40 RWA, F2C:22, file 553, p. 19.
41 RWA, F2C:13, file 326, p. 10.
Passing the time: cultural and verbal activities

Those who did not go into hiding developed other types of coping skills and survival strategies in order to make their lives bearable. Cultural activities, social interaction, and language became important means of survival. The summer of 1944 was relatively warm. The Jewish inhabitants of Budapest lived in Jewish houses, as none of the ghettos were established yet. Jews were forced to wear the yellow star, and were not allowed to go out during the curfew. During the summer months food supplies were meagre yet sufficient, but passing the time was problematic, as one was not allowed to go out. Mrs. Tibor Török describes how people in her house coped with boredom:

It was summer. All the tenants spent their time in the external gallery. The men – the old and those who had been smart enough to avoid being drafted – played cards all day long. The young women played cards too, the elder women were busy with cooking and the children enjoyed the carefree romps and games.43

Judit Farkas was sixteen years old at the time and remembers that it was a “lovely summer and we could not go out, to a swimming pool. We young people of the house gathered and talked, read a lot.”44

The majority of the Jewish men were conscripted to the labour forces, as implied by Mrs. Török: only a few of the adult men remained in Budapest in 1944. Elderly men could still remain with their families. Ernő Szép, who was drafted later on, was sixty years old at this time, and he wrote in his memoir of how women of all ages did the shopping, house-cleaning, and washing. He also described an average day in the Jewish house he lived in:

[My mornings, from ten to eleven, were spent in the company of Mr. T. After that I would read. […] We had lunch after two, although some days it would be at four or even five, after a lengthy air raid, or if my sister could find anything at the store or market during the noontime leave. […] After lunch I would pace for an hour or so on the balcony. Then I would read until about six, when I went to visit Herr Direktor V., the gentleman who reported on the London broadcast.45

According to Ernő’s testimony, the division of labour seems to have followed the prevailing gender order, at least when it comes to the role of the women. The men were deprived of their employment, but women were still in charge of the household. They did the grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning, while

43 RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 3.
44 RWA, F2C:15, file 335, p. 24.
men tried to spend their time in other ways. They did not have a job to go to, and they could not support their families in the same way as before the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws. Women hence gained more responsibility for the family’s well-being, while men lost a significant part of their pre-war role: that of family provider. However, they still continued networking, as seen in Ernő Szép’s description of his everyday life in the Jewish house.

During the autumn and the winter, things became more difficult. The problem was no longer passing the time, but instead an enduring hunger and a fear of frequent air raids, violence, and killings. Many informants used verbal strategies to make their situation endurable. Marianne Balshone remembers that rumours about Raoul Wallenberg could cheer her up. Marianne never met Wallenberg, but she heard stories about how people were saved by him. György Schiller was assigned to provide some of the Swedish protected houses with food supplies, but he reveals that his real task was to cheer people up. He brought the inhabitants of the International ghetto inaccurate news and pieces of information. He lied just to cheer them up, for example, by saying that the people in the neighbouring house who had been taken away were brought back. This might be one explanation of how myths and rumours were created: they served as coping or survival strategies for people in difficult situations. Barbara Engelking has noted that the rumours in the Warsaw ghetto were of two types: “favourable and unfavourable for the Jews”. She argues that the purpose of the favourable rumours was “to keep people’s spirits up, to give them some temporary hope”. The Jews therefore often spoke about things that would make the end of the war come closer.

Teréz Otta describes in her testimony how she used music and poetry to keep her mind off of fear and hunger. She says that she does not know what she would have done without poems, as she often recited poems to herself. Similarly, Sara Gresz remembers how they had language classes while living in a basement during the siege. She describes in detail how they learnt the words for kitchen utensils in French. Another survivor remembers how “mothers who were more intellectual” held classes in literature and maths. All of these three young women belonged to the upper middle or middle class, which can be connected to the nature of their activities during the war. Intellectual exercises and activities were clearly something that was upheld by the middle class Jewry. Moreover, it was in accordance with the Jewish traditional ideal of Bildung, or education.

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46 RWA, F2C:19, file 502, p. 25.
47 RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 28.
49 RWA, F2C:5, file 302, p. 11.
50 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 52.
51 RWA, F2C:16, file 339, p. 58.
On hunger and food

Anna Levin lived in one of the Swiss protected houses, the so-called “glass house”, during the winter of 1944–1945. She describes in a letter that there was no possibility of organizing any cultural or social activities, but that they tried to pass the time by talking about their “chances of survival, the Allied progress in the war, the constant ‘successful disengagement’ the Germans reported over the Hungarian radio, and – one of our favourite subjects – food, and more food.” She remembers how they fantasized about eating their favourite dishes:

Having finished our bowl of thin soup, we talked about the next course being a mixed grill served on a wooden platter, or roast beef in thick paprika sauce, or chocolate cake with a dollop of whipped cream on the top, or whatever our hungry fantasies could conjure up. And, to wash it all down, Tokaj wine in crystal goblet, comme il faut… Such talk helped us sustain our spirit and a hope for survival, into a time when food would be plentiful.52

It is clear that for Anna Levin, talking about food was a way to cope with hunger and boredom. Similarly, Mrs. Davidowits and Mrs. Gerber in the Beregszász ghetto often spoke about their husbands in the labour service and their pre-war lives, and also exchanged recipes for their favourite dishes. Mrs. Davidowits’s daughter, the fourteen-year-old Aranka (Siegal), thought that this was strange, because she herself was constantly hungry and became even hungrier when she thought about food.53 Several scholars have argued that “food talk”, especially sharing recipes and cooking fantasy dinners, was a significant female survival strategy during the war, and was a part of ghetto and camp experiences.54 It is clearly connected to gender, but does this also have something to do with age and social class? Were women from the middle classes who had been housewives before (such as Mrs. Davidowits and Mrs. Gerber) more keen to converse about recipes and cooking? Or did women from all social classes behave in this way? I claim that this behaviour can also be linked to social class and age. The younger were less interested in food talk than the adult women, as the adult women had once had their own households. The fifteen-year-old Judy Cohen was deported from Debrecen to Auschwitz, and remembers the following details concerning conversations about food:

Auschwitz-Birkenau was a living hell, absolutely living hell. And besides that, there was this humorous part of our existence that the women were cooking all the time. Ah, it used to drive us younger girls crazy! They were cooking, they were baking, they remembered what they used to do for the Jewish holidays.

52 Both quotes are found in RWA, F2D:1:1, file 991, letter no. 2, p. 3.
53 Siegal (2003), p. 184. See also Lujza Molnár, 2005, interview by the author, Budapest, 5 May 2003, tape no. 3.
Sometimes they argued how many eggs to go in this, and like they were virtually cooking.\textsuperscript{55}

As a teenager, Judy found this behaviour problematic for her own survival. She did not want to think about food when she was hungry. Ruth Bondy also points out the age aspect in her article about women in Theresienstadt and Birkenau: “Most girls and young women avoided speaking of food while hungry, but former housewives would ‘cook’ for hours, telling each other how they used to prepare mushroom sauce with cream or debating the preferred number of eggs for dumplings.”\textsuperscript{56}

However, not only women conversed about food. Ernő Szép remembers how he dreamt about food when he was in the labour service. He also writes how he heard other two labour servicemen describe their favourite meals. One of them said:

I’ll describe what used to be my favourite menu in Budapest: Perch-trout à la Mornay, sautéed veal, sautéed potatoes, with Debrecen sausages and goose liver added (and here he gave a sigh of pain and pleasure); and then, an “omelette surprise”, and for cheese, a Gervais. For drinks, I used to start with a cocktail, then a glass of beer, followed by my special wine, a Riesling, Festetich vineyards (here a loud smacking of the lips); and I always had a snort of Benedictine with my coffee. Do you think we will ever eat like that again? My heart aches, my friend, when I think of those bygone nights.

The other man replied:

And how! As for me, my dear, I went in for good old Hungarian-style cuisine. Listen to this dinner menu: Noodle and potato soup, pan-roasted steak, cabbage strudel, perhaps some egg dumplings, and my cheese was Brie, but it had to be runny! Regarding cheese, I am a partisan of the French. There is nothing like Brie in this whole wide world.\textsuperscript{57}

In these passages one can sense a longing for freedom and the old times. As I interpret it, and as have been noted by Myrna Goldenberg, “food talk” could also serve as a sort of coping skill or survival strategy for men.\textsuperscript{58} Of course hunger was something that all the victims experienced, but it was handled in different ways. In comparison to females describing recipes and thus remembering something normal from their lives before the atrocities (and hopefully something that would also resume after the war), these men would remember

\textsuperscript{55} Judy Cohen (former Weiszenberg), 2005, interview by the author, Debrecen, 13 May 2005, tape no. 1, side B.
\textsuperscript{56} Bondy (1998), p. 316.
\textsuperscript{57} Szép (1994), p. 167
\textsuperscript{58} Goldenberg (2003)
the extravagance of eating good food but probably not the preparation of it, like some of the women did.

Another interesting fact is that female and male informants describe the food situation in different ways. Several female food reminiscences deal with specific foodstuffs. One woman remembers eating bacon, which she would never have done normally.59 Other informants describe how boiled beans became a reason for celebrating, as their everyday diet consisted only of peas, and another woman remembers how they were given chocolate, oranges, and nut pastries on Christmas Eve.60 Teréz Otta recounts in her interview how she suffered from hunger, and that she could not believe her eyes when she once managed to get two eggs.61 The male narratives also bring up the issue of hunger, but they seldom describe it in detail.62

Children’s reactions and coping skills

For children and the young teenagers, who were used to going to school, experiences during this period became strongly etched into their memories. Tomas Ungvári, fourteen years old in 1944, remembers that his everyday activities were playing with other kids, playing the violin, and studying, even though the schools were closed. He describes how he and some other boys had Latin lessons with their old Latin teacher. The teacher termed these gatherings for the “Latin Academy”, and they had competitions in Latin composition and speech.63 Again, the importance of educating one’s self, even in times of upheaval, becomes visible in the interviews.

One of the child survivors remembers how the families who shared the apartment gathered in the vestibule, talking and spending time together. The children spent their time collecting bomb fragments and small pieces of metal, which they then traded with each other. The bigger the metal fragment, the higher the “prize”. This child survivor remembers that he was even aware of the origin of these bombs, that it was the Allies who bombed them. He states that “we wished them the best of luck. And we hoped that there would be more and more of it, and we knew that it is just one of those hardships that we have to tolerate.”64

Zsuzsa Gordon, who was fifteen years old at that time, remembers that except for the literature and math classes some mothers held, the children were not allowed to go out, not even during the hours when the Jews were able to do their shopping. She recalls that in her house there were lots of children, and

60 RWA, F2C:11, file 320, p. 50; F2C:16, file 339, p. 100; F2C:10, file 315, p. 59.
61 RWA, F2C:5, file 302, p. 11.
62 See RWA, F2C:5, file 303, p. 6; F2C:13, file 328, p. 26; F2C:17, file 346, p. 23; F2C:20, file 508, p. 16.
63 RWA, F2C:22, file 558, p. 15.
64 RWA, F2C:22, file 560, pp. 10–12.
they played in the court corridors. In the mornings they played school, and during the day there were other games. Ivan Becker, who also was fifteen years old in 1944, remembers that he read a lot, and that they often played marbles. He also made some smuggling trips to the suburbs in Budapest, where he could get, for example, sausages which he could then trade for bread. Ivan was blonde and “very Christian-looking”, but was afraid of getting caught or hit by the bombs.

István Belai was thirteen years old in 1944, and his coping strategy was to sleep as much as possible. He states that he could not stand the monotonous food supplies, and that he hated poppy-seeds, which was one of the things still available. He slept rather than eating the food and listening to the shooting. He remembers how he woke up during the incredible silence that followed liberation, which was in contrast to the bombings and the fights during the siege.

Peter Tarjan, eight years old at that time, remembers the food they ate during the very last weeks of the siege:

There was a little stove and there was a great big enamelled pot. And this enamelled pot was used to cook our... our one meal a day. And it was always peas. And I remember sitting in the dark and shelling whole peas... [...] I remember sitting around this ice cold water, and taking the peas out and putting them in another dish. And then they cooked it, and I think we had no salt, because I still remember the taste, I mean for weeks we ate nothing but peas. And in between shelling peas and the bombing raids I read a lot.

One of the youngest survivors in the Raoul Wallenberg archives is Marianne Cooper. She was only six years old in 1944, but she has vivid memories from the period of the German occupation. She remembers that they played cards, as there was not much else to do. Marianne was a bit too young to play one of the games, as she could not quite count yet, and she laughs when she tells how she revealed her cards all the time, just to get the numbers right.

Déborah Dwork claims that every child had unique experiences during the Holocaust, but some aspects were more or less general. “The first of these [aspects] was a fundamental lack of comprehension of why events transpired as they did, and a concomitant, ever-present fear and tension. Their previous lives

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67 RWA, F2C:17, file 343, p. 17.
68 RWA, F2C:19, file 503, p. 13.
69 RWA, F2B:6, file 517, tape 1, side A.
had not prepared them for this new existence.” This fear is also visible in the narratives studied here, but it can be noted that some of the informants in the Raoul Wallenberg archive describe parts of their recollections in fairly positive terms. Since children often live in the moment, they were not always aware of the dangers of the war or the genocidal violence. In my interpretation, children coped with the situation differently from the adults. For some of the children, this period was unlike ordinary everyday life, and the concentration of the families into specific houses meant more friends and more sparetime activities, as they were not allowed to go to school. Suzanne Kaplan has noticed that some child survivors refer to this “positive” aspect of living conditions in the ghettos: “the children lived near parents and other relatives who augmented a possible sense of security.” Dwork also gives examples of this. According to her, eleven-year-old Andrew Nagy from Budapest knew that his life was at risk, but he was still with his mother and they had the possibility of living in their own apartment (along with twenty other people), which happened to be one of the Swedish protected houses. From his view, his life was not falling apart.

Appearances

Taking care of one’s physical appearance seems to have been a survival strategy for some of the survivors. George Hajos, who belonged to the working class, relates that he always wore neat, clean clothes, in case he was caught in the streets. According to him, one’s chances of surviving were less if one was caught while wearing rags. Mrs. Kanders from the lower middle class, in contrast, smeared her face with soot when she had to go out to find food. She explains this by the fact that she was pretty and that she was “always afraid something might happen on the way.” This indicates that women and men sometimes perceived the dangers in the streets differently. For a man, it was helpful to look tidy, while this might be dangerous for a woman who was attractive. Whatever the actual case, these two persons used different strategies which were each strongly connected to gender, but also to social class. George’s working class background and earlier experiences led him to a perception that tidy persons were generally treated better.

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70 Dwork (2002), p. 295. One of the examples Dwork brings up is that of four-year-old Judith Ehrmann-Denes, who hid in Budapest with her mother and babybrother. She remembers “being there and not understanding”, and that she felt anxious all the time (p. 295).
73 RWA; F2C:21, file 528, p. 21.
74 RWA, F2C:7, file 306, p. 59. She also states that she survived partly due to her power of will: she was determined to not allow her son become orphaned, and that she would raise him.
Rozsa Solymosi developed an interesting coping skill that was also related to appearance, and perhaps to social class as well. To preserve her self-confidence and humanity, she dressed up during the bombings:

Some of the women came down to the shelter unwashed, unkempt, wearing a shabby and dirty bathrobe at noon, or at half past two. But I went down in my full-length dressing gown, with my son and his teddy bear. [...] They wore [clothes] exactly alike. People said I had lost my mind, but I didn’t. Only [this was] what kept me going.75

In spite of, or perhaps because of the graveness of the situation, Rozsa felt that she and her son should wear proper, neat clothes. This was her way of maintaining a sense of normality. Rozsa’s middle class background probably had an impact on her behaviour, and she compares herself to the other women who wore unkempt clothes.

As described in chapter 7, women went out more often than men, for example, to do grocery shopping. Some women took advantage of their “non-Jewish” looks, and went out without the star.76 They could hence walk down the streets during the curfew, and thus obtain better food supplies. Marion A. Kaplan has also pointed out this fact: German Jewish individuals with “Aryan” looks had less to fear, and were more easily allowed to pass.77

Suicide

Suicide was not a survival strategy, but a desperate reaction to the atrocities and the harsh life conditions in the ghettos, in hiding, and in the protected houses. Suicide was a way of escaping, a tragic way of reacting. Suicide rates dramatically increased directly after Ferenc Szálasi and the Arrow Cross had come into power, and the Jewish houses were sealed off for ten days.78 Braham writes that suicide was most common “among the converted and highly assimilated Jews – those who suddenly found their world in shambles.”79 For instance, Endre Milkó, the Swedes’ representative for the protected houses on Tátra Street,

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75 RWA, F2C:11, file 319, p. 43.
76 See RWA, F2C:5, file 302, p. 11; F2C:7, file 306, p. 86; F2C:11, file 320, p. 35; F2C:19, file 502, p. 21; F2C:11, file 319, p. 32.
77 Kaplan (1998a), p. 35.
killed himself after receiving the news that they would be transferred to the ghetto in early January 1945.80

In the empirical evidence studied here, nine (6 per cent) out of the 151 informants refer to suicide. Three of them knew people who killed themselves, two other considered suicide, and four witnessed suicides. Ivan Becker, who witnessed a neighbour jumping from a balcony, recalls that later his mother suggested that they should end their lives. This was just before they were taken on a death march in December 1944. Ivan recalls his reaction: “And I refused. And I refused to let her. There was no struggle, it was just a… just saying no, that’s not the way to do it.”81

Aranka Siegal describes how a prominent physician in Beregszász, Dr. Feher, committed suicide after the German intrusion:

Approaching Dr. Feher’s house, I heard loud voices and, as I came closer, saw people all over the yard. I wandered into the courtyard and soon heard the reason for the gathering of the crowd. Dr. Feher was dead. German soldiers had broken into his house last night and violated the women – both his wife and his daughter. He could no longer bear to live, he wrote in a note, and then shot himself with a hunting rifle.82

Edit Ernster also knew people who killed themselves. Edit’s family lived in her grandmother’s house in 1944, and even though they had converted to Christianity and possessed Christian identity papers, the entire family carried cyanide tablets with them. Edit kept the poison in her pocket, and she was instructed to swallow it in case they were deported. She recalls that she received the capsule from her mother, who argued that it would be better to commit suicide than to be killed by gas. Edit’s great-aunt eventually took the pill and died. Edit does not know the exact reason as to why she gave in, but she immediately died of poisoning.83

One of the child survivors describes in detail how he reacted when a friend of the family killed herself: “If I remember correctly, […] we were sitting in this vestibule and the adults were talking and I was around, I looked out, and one could see through a window the courtyard, and I saw something falling […] down, in the courtyard.” After the fall, a lot of screaming was heard, and news of the suicide spread in the building. The informant reacted with curiosity and wanted to see the “horror”, but he was not allowed to. “I was bitterly dis-

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80 Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 976, 1014. See also György Schiller in RWA, F2C:8, file 311, p. 29 on Endre Milko’s suicide. Schiller’s story agrees with the information included in Braham.
81 RWA, F2C:20, file 508, p. 21. See also Zoltán Singer in Wartime System (1995), p. 36: “More than once, we had to walk all through the night because we had nowhere to stay and falling asleep on the open ground meant certain death. Many people chose this painless means of suicide to escape further suffering.” Additional references to suicides are those from the Óbuda brickyards, see RWA, F2C:13, file 326, p. 9 and F2C:14, file 333, p. 5.
appointed that I couldn’t see this”, he recounts. He also remembers that his mother talked about the suicide afterwards, and said that it was the wrong thing to do, that one must not give in. The informant continues:

But then, what I remember throughout these years is that I wasn’t really reacting to the events as they happened. What I was reacting to was the adults’ reaction to the events that happened, and I got pretty good at reading the adults. And I could sort of sense what was serious and what was not serious by looking at the adults. Also another tell-tale sign was when there was anything serious and the adults switched to German or Yiddish, and… since I didn’t understand what they were saying, or I could understand it only very spottily, what they were saying, I knew that there was something important to be said, that I wasn’t supposed to know about. And so I responded to their responses, and that’s how I really understood that… the young woman committing suicide was something really quite serious, because no doubt they themselves had similar thoughts. In any case, I remember that that left a mark on me and in subsequent months, years, I dreamt about it, and I often thought about it. Especially of course, I forgot to say that I knew the person who killed herself.84

This child survivor’s narrative truly gives the reader insight into the situation. The adults were screaming and terrified, but the child was curious about the woman who jumped out of the building. And he seems to have understood more than the adults realized: he knew for example that speaking Yiddish was a strategy for not letting the children know what was happening. This informant sensed the graveness of the situation, and somehow learnt to cope with it. At the same time, he later dreamt about this poignant event which had left a deep impression on him.

This type of observation of parents’ behaviour was not an isolated reaction among children. Kaplan has shown that children often “listened to the adults’ talk and interpreted the looks on the adults’ faces.”85 This was their way of gaining information about the situation, which was so different from their lives before the occupation.

Mrs. Tibor Török and Ina Dembicka reveal that they had considered committing suicide. Ina Dembicka was a Jewish refugee from Krakow who had lost her relatives during the Aktion Reinhard. She had been hiding for years, and finally ended up in Budapest. She thought about ending her life on several occasions.86 Mrs. Török recounts that she thought about suicide soon after the liberation:

84 All quotes are found in RWA, F2C:22, file 560, p. 11.
86 AWL, Series I, Section II: P.III.i, Reel 62, file 1096, p. 3.
It was winter. [...] We walked the streets till the evening in order to get some food and firewood. It was unsafe to be on the streets in the evenings. I was desperate because I was unable to find a way out of the situation. It was the time when I was thinking about suicide. I thought over the last four years, the horror, humiliation we lived through, how much we feared, suffered from hunger and cold and remembered the children who lived through the same events. Faith, much energy and power was needed to withstand all those. The martinet was killed; we were liberated and could feel being human again. But the city was in ruins like our lives. Where I would take energy, might and nerves to build a new life from? I felt the mission was too difficult and I was afraid of being unable to fulfil it.

I was tired, very tired.

Who knows? Perhaps I would have committed suicide if I had not had a man and a child to take care of. But I thought my husband, whom I loved sincerely and my daughter, who was given the life by me and who had saved lives in spite of her early age, needed me. They had nobody else to rely on.87

It should be pointed out that according to Mrs. Török, the reason for her not committing suicide was because she felt responsibility for her family. Her husband had been sick for a long time, and her daughter was only two years old. These were the only things that kept her alive. Her perception of the situation does not correspond to the male protector ideal, but to an ideal which is put forward by Török herself. She had to be strong in this situation, for the sake of her family.

These examples show that not only older, prominent male persons, but also young and old women ended their lives or considered suicide. It is evident that the situation in Budapest was extremely harsh, and that this affected, needless to say, the informants’ psychological health to a great extent. An interesting point in this context is that suicide was more common in countries where Jews were more assimilated, and thus less religious and/or traditional. Jonathan Webber, professor of Jewish studies at the University of Birmingham, points out that apart from some famous examples, such as the suicide of Adam Czerniaków (the head of the Jewish Council in Warsaw), suicides were surprisingly rare in the ghettos of Eastern Europe, compared to Germany and Austria.88 Furthermore, Marion A. Kaplan has explored suicide rates among German Jews and writes: “Fragmentary suicide statistics, memoirs, and the work of [Konrad] Kwiet suggest that more men than women committed suicide – at least in the early Nazi years.” Kaplan states that the first waves of suicide consisted of men who experienced the despair of losing their jobs and

87 RWA, F2C:14, file 333, p. 20.
livelihoods. She continues, however, that during the deportations, when the threat of death was more evident, the number of women ending their lives may have exceeded the number of male suicides.\textsuperscript{89} In the current case, Budapest Jewry is more comparable to the Jewish communities in Germany and Austria than to those in Eastern European countries. This would support the assumption that the suicide rates in Budapest were fairly high during 1944–1945, and that assimilated Jews were more likely to end their lives.

Resistance and rescue

One of the most prominent survival strategies was to take part in resistance or rescue actions. In chapter 6, resistance was defined in reference to Nechama Tec, as “activities motivated by the desire to thwart, limit, undermine, or end the exercise of oppression over the oppressed.”\textsuperscript{90}

The 24-year-old Ernest Bokor became friends with a young Arrow Cross man while he was in the labour service at a textile factory, which produced uniforms for the Hungarian military forces. Ernest, as well as the other Jews at the factory, worked night shifts, while the non-Jewish workers worked day shifts. Ernest and his gentile colleague were responsible for the same machine and Ernest used to leave part of his product to his co-worker, so that he would obtain better results during the day shift. They became friends, despite the fact that the man was a member of the Arrow Cross party, and this turned out to be advantageous for Ernest. After the German occupation, another colleague at the factory forged Ernest’s identity papers, changing the word “Israelite” to “Roman Catholic”. After receiving the Christian documents, Ernest went straight to his Arrow Cross friend and asked him to help him join the Arrow Cross party. “So in the end […] he brought me an application, I filled it out, and, he signed in it that he knows me.”\textsuperscript{91} This is how Ernest became a “Nazi”, and started to go to the Arrow Cross meetings in Budapest. The information which he received at these meetings was used by him in resistance actions.

Ernest wore the Arrow Cross uniform, which gave him the security he needed to remain outdoors and perform actions against the regime. He describes how he once rescued a group of Slovakian Jews. He staged a raid in the synagogue where the Jews were hiding, and pretended to take them to the Danube, waving his gun and shouting dirty words at them. But instead, he took them to a narrow, dark street, and let them go.

Eventually Ernest found out that other Jews were playing the same dangerous game that he was. One day he was approached by a member of a Zionist underground movement, also wearing an Arrow Cross uniform, who had

\textsuperscript{89} Kaplan (1998a), pp. 181–182.
\textsuperscript{90} Tec (2003), p. 261.
\textsuperscript{91} RWA, F2C:20, file 510, p. 12.
recognized Ernest from Zionist meetings before the war. This man asked Ernest to join the Zionist resistance network. The group co-operated with Raoul Wallenberg and some time after the Arrow Cross coup, he gave them a special task. Ernest and some of the other Zionist resistance movement members went by truck to the Óbuda brick factory, in order to save some of the unfortunates who were supposed to be taken on the death marches. Ernest relates how they started to load the trucks: “On one side we packed them [the Jews] in, the other side they jumped out. So I told [the Arrow Cross] ‘listen, I want to take away these Jews from here. But come on and surround them so they cannot jump off.’ So they came over and they surrounded the trucks. We pushed in as many as we could.” During this action, Ernest was pointing his machine gun at the Jewish victims, and again, shouting dirty words at them. They drove away with the truck, provided the people with Swedish safety documents and let them go.\(^{92}\)

Ernest was one of the forty-five informants who referred to resistance actions in their narratives. Forty-one (24 per cent) of the informants, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were in one way or another involved in resistance activities in 1944 (see table 8.2), and four informants had close relatives who were engaged in helping Hungarian Jews and Jewish refuges. At least five of the Jewish informants joined the Zionist underground movement, six took action for the Red Cross (Swedish, Hungarian, or International), and ten worked directly for the Swedish legation. Non-Jewish informants were involved in the Hungarian resistance movement, or organized Jewish aid in different ways.

These figures do not reflect the entire Budapest Jewry, as these informants in most cases had connections to Raoul Wallenberg or the Swedish legation. Nevertheless, the importance of multiple factors playing a role in the resisters’ experiences is still of considerable interest, since the testimonies provide us with information of these persons’ gender, age, and social class.

Table 8.2. Jewish and non-Jewish informants in resistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Jewish</th>
<th>Non-Jewish</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underground movements</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives in resistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for the Red Cross</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for the Swedish Legation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: RWA, OSA, HJA. In total 167 Jewish and non-Jewish informants.

About a third of the activists were females, and two-thirds were males. The average age of the informants involved in resistance activities was 29 years. However, there were age differences between those who worked for the underground movements (29 years), those who worked for the Red Cross (38 years), and for those at the Swedish legation (26 years). A majority (twenty-six individuals) of the persons engaged in resistance activities were thirty years of age or younger in 1944. This leads to the conclusion that age mattered: the younger generation was more likely to resist than the older. There are of course many reasons for this, including physical strength, but another significant explanation may be the fact that younger persons without their own households or families had less obligations to other people. They simply had less to lose. For those who had other people depending on them, it was difficult to become involved in dangerous actions.

Figure 8.2. Portrait of a Hungarian Jew wearing the Arrow Cross uniform. Source: USHMM, Photo Archives, photograph #94470.

93 Three of the persons are of unknown age.
94 See also Tec (2003), chapter titled “Resistance”.
Earlier studies have shown that both women and men participated in resistance activities during the Holocaust, but in different ways. For example, very few women were leaders, and women very seldom carried arms. Due to the fact that Jewish males were circumcised, women acted more often as couriers, as they had better chances of surviving an identity check. The table above shows that among the informants, both women and men, and non-Jewish and Jewish, all took actions against the perpetrator. For the Jewish informants, resistance became a means of survival.

In this case, it seems that men were more often organized into underground resistance groups, while women tried to resist in other ways. The women who were employed by the Swedish legation worked as typists or other types of administrators, and received protection from the legation. A few women, however, took part in rescue actions. Eighteen-year-old Katalin Lebovitz was one of them. Katalin and her fiancé lived under false Christian identities, and as a result of contacts in the Zionist movement she started to work for the Swedish Red Cross. During six weeks, on about a dozen occasions, she went to the ghetto in a Red Cross ambulance, and pretended to take sick people to the hospital. When the Arrow Cross saw the Red Cross label on the ambulance, they were let in. Katalin recounts:

We went into the ghetto and took out people, you know. They gave us names, who to bring out. They faked, they were told to act sick and we came with a [...] stretcher. I [...] acted like [a] real nurse and everything. But this was, part of it was fake. We were saving the people and taking [them] to these [safe]houses.

When the interviewer asks who they were supposed to rescue and who gave them the names, Katalin responses: “I don’t remember that. We just got the name. I didn’t get the name. I was just a nurse. The… the driver and the one who was in the front. Those were the big wheels. We [the nurses] didn’t know too much. And that was a good policy, you know.” As these fake patient transports were very risky, the nurses were not given too much information. In the event that they were caught, they would have no information. Katalin seems to have a humble attitude to her rescue activities: she was “just a nurse”. The “big wheels” were those in the front – the men. Katalin continues by saying, “you know, you couldn’t save everybody. It was impossible. But we did a lot.” Eventually, the situation became more difficult, and the Arrow Cross would not allow them to enter the ghetto. The rescue attempts stopped, and Katalin lived in a basement of one the Swedish protected houses for the last weeks of the war.

95 See, for example, Tec (2003), pp. 256–282.
96 RWA, F2C:1, file 004; F2C:10, file 315; F2C:11, file 319; F2C:16, file 342; F2C:17, file 344 and 345; F2C:19, file 501.
97 All the quotes and references above are found in RWA, F2C:19, file 523, pp. 13–18.
Figure 8.3. Swedish Red Cross document certifying that Katalin Lebovitz is under protection of the Swedish Legation. Source: RWA, F2C.20, file 523.
Katalin’s husband Jenő Lebovitz forged documents for the Zionist underground organization. Jenő was artistic and his skills were of great use, as he could make the finest rubber stamps for the forged identity papers. Jenő also went into the ghetto, just like Katalin, although not as a Red Cross worker but as a German SS-soldier. Somehow he had managed to obtain a uniform, which entitled him to “arrest” Jewish individuals and bring them out of the ghetto. These people were then taken to the protected houses in the International ghetto.98

The 22-year-old Martin Priesler had been a member of the Hungarian Zionist movement since he was twelve or thirteen years old, and now he joined the underground resistance group. He recalls that the group co-operated with Raoul Wallenberg in processing protective passports. Martin wore a SS-uniform and smuggled people, food, clothes, and medicine. One of the Zionist underground bases was in the Jewish high school building, where the young men were trained to handle arms. Martin recalls that they had machine guns, rifles, revolvers, and hand grenades.99 He does not mention whether there were any women involved in this group, but it was unlikely that women would have been either given guns or trained to use them.

The 25-year-old Marton Szendrei was also involved in the Zionist movement, through which he received illegal papers and a gun. Together with two other members of the underground movement, they went to the Kisok sports arena, where hundreds and thousands of Jewish young women were gathered. Marton and his companions wore Hitler Jugend uniforms and claimed to be in need of a group of female workers, hence saving some 14–20 girls from the labour service.100

As previously mentioned, earlier research has shown that mainly women acted as couriers within the resistance.101 One exception is found in the Raoul Wallenberg archive material. The 40-year-old Yehuda Mandel escaped the labour service and contacted the Jewish community in Budapest. He received false documents as a gentile soldier, and was asked if he could work for the Zionist underground. Yehuda said yes, since he felt that he would be safe, as he looked like a Hungarian peasant. His task became to deliver protective passports from Raoul Wallenberg’s office, mainly to persons in the International ghetto.102 Yehuda recalls that he started with this work in November, and that it lasted for two months. He delivered safety documents at least thirty times, and each time “it was five or ten Schutzpasses which I carried, and of course some-

98 RWA, F2C:19, file 524, pp. 10, 14. See also Andrew Steven’s testimony about his involvement in the Zionist underground movement. They wore Hungarian army uniforms and were able to freely move around the city. See RWA, F2C:22, file 555, pp. 11–16.
102 RWA, F2C:22, file 552, p. 12.
times there were more, and sometimes there were less.”

Yehuda’s courage, along with his background in the lower class, gave him the possibility of covering his Jewish origin and pretending to be a Hungarian peasant. Yehuda helped at least a few hundred Jews receiving their safety documents.

Jewish women who worked for the Swedish legation also made an important contribution to the resistance. The 31-year-old Magda Kellner was one of the young women who administrated the work with protective passports and documents. The criterion for getting Swedish protective papers was that there had to be some kind of connection to Sweden. Magda remembers how hard and challenging the work was: “We did everything possible to find some kind of relation [to Sweden] for people. It was terrible to refuse somebody. We had to save lives, it was an enormous responsibility and, in fact, it was a tremendously nerve-wrecking job.”

The 35-year-old Valéria Nádas also worked at the Swedish legation in late 1944. She recalls that the staff slept on mattresses next to the office where they were administrating the protective documents. There was a chain of persons who participated in the work: “We were typing them. Then there was somebody who stuck [sic] the photos on them. Some other persons took them to the appropriate places.” Valéria continues by recounting that they also produced documents which proved that a person’s safety papers were in the process of being issued. This was a way to circumvent the authorities’ limitations of how many safety documents the legation was allowed to produce. According to Valéria, the staff at this specific office consisted of ten persons, both women and men. However, it was “mainly men who were engaged in the life-saving actions, went into field, took the Schutzpasses to the protected persons to the Vienna high road.” It was also the male co-workers who visited the Swedish protected houses in the International ghetto. This indicates that the division of labour was structured according to the existing gender order. Women stayed in the office and worked with administration, while men went out and delivered protective documents and participated in rescue attempts. One of the Jewish male survivors worked as a doorman and guard. It is interesting that males seem to have acted as couriers, in spite of the fact that it was more dangerous for them to be outdoors. This observation also contradicts the findings of previous research. Could this have something to do with the gendered perception of women needing to be protected? As it was dangerous in the streets, the male protectors took the role of courier. In addition to this, there were other exceptions as well. I have argued that the administrators were mainly

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103 RWA, F2C:22, file 552, p. 15.
104 RWA, F2C:7, file 307, p. 60.
105 RWA, F2C:10, file 315, p. 54.
106 RWA, F2C:10, file 315, p. 56. See also RWA, F2C:16, file 342 (Mrs. Miklós Váli) and F2C:17, file 345 (Stefánia Schwartz) who worked at the Swedish legation as typists.
107 RWA, F2C:14, file 332, p. 21.
female. However, Ödön Singer worked as a secretary at the Swedish legation. He also helped with other things, however, such as financial administration, food, clothes, and requests for protective papers.108

The Raoul Wallenberg project also interviewed several non-Jewish resisters. I will not present all of them, but I would like to bring in the narrative of Sára Karig, which gives us an idea of how Jewish children were saved. Sára was born in 1914 in a Lutheran-Catholic middle class home in Baja. She went to secondary school in Szeged, but moved to Budapest in the early war years, to work at the British Council. She became involved in resistance activities already in the early 1940s, after the law against mixed marriages was enacted in 1941. I have earlier described how she “married” several Jewish men, just to help them to obtain Christian marriage certificates. Furthermore, Sára was involved in a resistance group that had a “small workshop where documents were produced.” This workshop was at Professor Károly Szladics’s home, where both Jewish and non-Jewish resisters gathered. Sara states that “I and my circle of friends […] took the point of view that a state which had denounced and given her citizens away didn’t exist for us anymore, and her laws didn’t affect us.”109

One of the central aspects of Sára Karig’s interview is her detailed description of her work at the Swedish Red Cross children’s bureau. She was in contact with Valdemar Langlet, the chief of the Swedish Red Cross in Budapest, and from March to December 1944 she assisted within the children’s department on Eskü Square. In July, the Swedish Mrs. Asta Nilsson came to Budapest and became the person in charge. The working hours were determined by the circumstances: “There was always one of us there on duty. If there was less work to do, we spent less time there. We had other things to do, too, because, after the German invasion the bombardments began, during the air-raids, I put on the International Red Cross armband and went to bring food to people who were hiding at several places.”110

The staff at the children’s department organized childcare for children whose parents were anxious and wanted to place them under Red Cross protection. A few of the children were actually orphaned, but regardless of whether they had parents or not most of them were placed in Hungarian Christian orphanages:

Only a phone call was needed to [find out] if there was [a] place in the orphanage for a child. We told them that his/her parents were unknown, we didn’t know where they were and that the concierge had brought the child to us. In the end we asked if we could direct him/her there. That was all the administration.

I: Didn’t anybody ask if he/she was a Jewish child?

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108 RWA, F2C:15, file 336, pp. 28, 74. See also the interview with one of the Swedish delegates, Per Anger, on the rescue work of the legation. RWA, F2C:1, file 002.
109 RWA, F2C:18, file 350, p. 5.
S. K.: No, nobody. [...] I had the impression that they were never astonished at such things. [...] About 80–90 per cent [were Jewish]. There were “real” Transylvanian refugees among them, too.111

Thus the children’s bureau mainly dealt with Jewish children, and helped Jewish families by organizing safe placements for the children. Sára Karig describes her tasks at the Red Cross: “The children arrived, we fed them, changed the babies’ diapers, washed them and changed their clothes when it was necessary.” The children stayed at the bureau for about one or two days: “Sometimes I took home one child with me and my fellow-worker two, as we could not leave them in the office. But some of the Budapest orphanages, too, very often received them for a shorter time.” However, it was more dangerous to place children in Budapest than in the countryside. The deportations had already been stopped and it was dangerous to remain in Budapest, especially for the boys, who were circumcised. The bureau tried to locate new homes for them in the provinces instead.

All of the children who passed through the Red Cross children department were supposed to be registered. According to Sára, this was “sheer madness”. She refused to do so, “as such records would have been very dangerous when found by the unwarranted.” Sára and her co-workers did ask the newcomers some questions, but since they were dealing with children, not many of the questions were answered. They tried to make friends with them, to help them feel secure “and if he or she was already about 5–6 years old, [we tried] to teach them Ave Maria or the Lord’s Prayer at least.” They might then have a chance of surviving if the Arrow Cross made any inquiries.112 Learning Christian prayers was also a common survival strategy for Jews living on the “Aryan” side in Poland, as well as in other countries of German-occupied countries.113

Charles Szladits (son of the above mentioned Károly Szladits) pays tribute to Sára in an interview in 1979:

One of my friends, who was also marginally connected with us -- at least she provided us with a few hand grenades and also with a few bulletproof vests -- was Sari Karig. She was one of those remarkable persons who had incredible courage. Among other [things], she was the person who when Budapest was already surrounded took the risk to go across the lines to smuggle out a few eminent Hungarians who might have been considered as politically dangerous persons and arrested by the Nazis or by the Germans themselves.114

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111 RWA, F2C:18, file 350, p. 16.
112 All of the quotes and references above are found in RWA, F2C:18, file 350, pp. 11–13.
114 RWA, F2D:1:3, file 1502, pp. 42–43. One of the persons Sára rescued was Professor Szent-Györgyi, the Nobel Prize winner and anti-Nazi. Sari (or Sári) is the Hungarian nickname for Sara.
Sára Karig’s engagement in the resistance against the Nazis and the Arrow Cross was indeed remarkable. At the same time, she was just one of the Jewish and non-Jewish individuals who actively took part in resistance and rescue activities in Budapest. Most who were involved were young adults, both female and male. The tasks were sometimes dissimilar for women and men (for example at the Swedish legation), as shown in the interviews: women were more often administrators, and men were out in the field.

Social class or social background also mattered. People from all social classes participated in resistance and rescue activities, but their positions could differ. The men who participated in Zionist underground or in Hungarian resistance groups were often from the lower or lower middle class,\textsuperscript{115} while the women and the men who worked at the Swedish legation or the Red Cross most often belonged to the middle class, or even to the upper middle class.\textsuperscript{116} There were exceptions, however, including Lajos Bajusz, who worked for the Swedish legation. He was from a poor Christian lower class family, and became a Gendarme during the war. However, he regretted his choice of occupation when he saw how the Jews were treated. In 1944, he started to work for the Swedish legation as a guard, and managed to stop an Arrow Cross raid in front of one of the Swedish protected buildings in the International ghetto.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} See RWA, F2C:11, file 318; F2C:20, file 510; F2C:20, file 524; F2C:21, file 539; F2C:22, file 552. There were, however, also people from the middle class in the Zionist organization. See RWA, F2C:20 file 514; F2C:21, file 538.

\textsuperscript{116} See RWA, F2C:7, file 307; F2C:12, file 323; F2C:17, file 345; file 507; F2C:20, file 523.

\textsuperscript{117} RWA, F2C:10, file 316, pp. 32–35, 37–39.
Concluding remarks

The questions discussed in this chapter dealt with Jewish reactions and responses to the atrocities in Budapest. How did the Jews of Budapest react to the occupation, the Szálasi coup, and the atrocities that followed? What types of coping skills and survival strategies did they develop and use? Were there any differences between female and male reactions, and what impact did age and social class have on the responses?

The themes discussed here were marriage and family planning, hiding and passing, how people spent their time, appearance, suicide, and resistance. An analysis of multiple factors shows that there were some significant examples of gendered behaviour, and that there were situations where age and/or social class mattered in making individual decisions and in reactions. However, similarities within the responses were sometimes more obvious than differences, and in some of the cases it was impossible to draw any conclusions concerning each category. Themes where one of several factors were most visible were hiding, resistance and how the informants spent their time.

According to the informants, women and men of different ages spent their time in specific ways. Women were in charge of the household, and were busy taking care of the grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning. The men who were still present, mostly the elderly, socialized with other inhabitants of the Jewish houses and passed the time by reading, playing cards, etc. The youth and the children continued taking classes, even though the schools were closed. Education was highly important to the Jewish middle class, and in this context, the informants’ narratives concerning schooling in the Jewish houses testify to their middle class background. Earlier research has shown that education and other cultural activities were used as coping skills in ghettos and in camps in other parts of Europe as well.118 In the afternoons, children enjoyed playing with their friends, but there is also one example of a child who, according to his own words, slept through the events. Children seem to have reacted to the events differently from the adults, since they did not always understand the gravity of the situation. One example of this was the boy who was curious about the suicide of his neighbour, while the adults were devastated by it. Even though many children were traumatized by the events during the war, as has been indicated by Debórah Dwork,119 they sometimes experienced the events in a more “carefree” way.

It would be interesting to know more about the gendered division of tasks in the Jewish houses and in the ghettos. Both women and men talk about the females performing household tasks, and in addition to taking care of cooking and cleaning women also tried to earn some extra money to support their

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118 For cultural life, for example, in the ghettos of Kovno, Lodz, and Warsaw, see Dwork & van Pelt (2000), pp. 224–227.
families. The female responsibilities thus seem to have increased. But very few of the informants talk about how men coped with the situation, or whether they entered the “female” area of responsibilities. Did they perform any household tasks? There is a silence concerning this aspect in the sources, thus no conclusions concerning men taking responsibility for the home during times of crisis can be drawn. It can be argued, however, that the silence concerning this issue indicates either that domestic tasks were regarded as female and that males did not perform any such tasks, or that males did perform household tasks but none of the informants wanted to talk about it. If some of the men did cooking or cleaning, was it then too shameful to speak about? Or could this silence simply indicate a bias on the part of the interviewer? Whatever the case was, it shows that gender ideals or “norms” did shape the ways of reacting and/or the ways of narrating. It should also be noted that the men who were present were young teenagers, the sick, or the elderly.

Both women and men experienced hunger, as seen in the majority of the interviews. Women used their household skills to prepare meals from meagre rations. In this situation, those from the lower social classes coped more easily, as they had not had domestic servants in their pre-war lives, and were used to cooking. Some of the female informants recall that they refrained from their own portions of food, and gave them to the children.

Myrna Goldenberg has suggested that both women and men used “food talk” as a coping strategy, but that it is likely that women and men used this in different ways. She argues that women talked about recipes and fantasized about cooking, since they found a sense of normality, security, and hope for the future in doing so. Goldenberg’s conclusion concerning this distinction is probably correct, but slightly one-sided. I believe that this issue should be analyzed with sensitivity to the importance of multiple factors. It seems as if younger women were not as interested in food talk as were women who had run their own households before the war. Age and civil status played a role in individual experiences, and also shaped the ways one coped in times of crisis. The younger girls and women did not find any security in talking about how to prepare specific meals, since they had no such experiences from the period before the war. Here, the intersections of gender, age, and civil status, and perhaps even social class, were crucial. Important aspects are missed if the analysis focuses on only gender.

Female survivors described what kind of food they ate during the war more often than males. Men did state that they were hungry, but they did not speak about food in detail as often as women. Thus there also seem to have been differences in narration strategies and/or memory, as suggested by Bos.

The importance of gender and age were also visible in the testimonies concerning resistance. Within the group of Jews studied in this dissertation,
more men than women were actively involved in resistance activities. Women dealt more often with administrative tasks, while men more often worked “in the field”. The majority of those who were involved were young adults who did not have children or families of their own.

According to the testimonies, both women and men went into hiding. Children were sometimes left at convents or with the Red Cross to be taken care of. It was, however, easier for a woman to pass as a gentile, at least if she had “Christian looks”. Women were not drafted into the labour service before October 1944, and for the men who had decided not to follow the conscription order, it was risky to walk on the streets, since most younger and middle aged men were in the army or in the labour service. According to one survivor, it could be easier for the lower social classes to go into hiding, as they did not have as much to lose regarding material standards. On the other hand, to pass as a gentile or to go into hiding most often required a certain amount of money, as it was expensive to obtain identity papers or a secure hiding place. It is also possible that persons who had experienced difficult situations in their earlier lives were more likely to go into hiding than others.

In sum, it is evident that the Jewish reactions were affected by multiple factors. Social class, age, civil status, and earlier life experiences seem to have affected the ways of reacting in times of upheaval, perhaps more so than gender. Even though patterns of gendered behaviour can be found, female and male reactions were more often similar than dissimilar. Those who had lived through crises before had learnt to be careful, as seen, for example, in Tivadar Soros’s reasoning concerning hiding. Moreover, skills and activities that provided a sense of normality were often used, for instance, exchanging recipes, reciting poems, and reading. These skills were also closely connected to earlier life experiences.
CHAPTER 9
Intersectional Analysis of the Hungarian Jewish Losses

The exact number of losses suffered by the Hungarian Jewry during the Second World War is unknown. According to data from 1947, collected by the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress, the number of Jews in Hungary in 1941 was 825,007. This included the annexed territories from Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The number of remaining Jews in 1946 was 255,500. About 5,000 fled from the country; thus the estimated number of human losses was 564,507.\(^1\) It can thus be concluded that the losses were about 68.5 per cent of the pre-war Jewish population.

While the number of deported Jews is quite exact, thanks to the statistics from the German and the Hungarian authorities, there are no reliable sources for the number of persons killed in the forced labour service or during the death marches, nor do we have the exact number of emigrants. Thus the total number remains an approximation. Braham maintains that the number of casualties suffered before the German occupation given by the World Jewish Congress (63,000, as given in table 9.1) is somewhat exaggerated, and that László Varga’s estimation of 48,000 is likely to be more accurate. Varga approximates the total wartime losses of Hungarian Jewry to 550,000 (66.7 per cent of the total), which would mean that about 270,000 persons survived.\(^2\)

Tamás Stark discusses numbers and estimations in his critical study of the losses of the Hungarian Jewry. Stark argues that the estimated number of returning labour servicemen is too low, as well as the number of survivors who never returned to Hungary after the war, but instead moved to other countries. Stark estimates that somewhere between 270,000 and 320,000 Hungarian Jews survived the Holocaust.\(^3\) In principle, Stark might be right, even though his

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\(^1\) HJA, XVIII-A, 72.100.3: Excerpt from the Publications of the Statistical Department of the World Jewish Congress, Hungarian Section, 1947, p. 2. Braham relies on these figures in his research, see Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 1296–1299. For detailed numbers of Hungarian Jewish losses, see table 32.1 on p. 1298. See also appendix 4 in this dissertation for a similar table.


\(^3\) Stark (2000), chapter 4. See especially the table on p. 115. See also Tamás Stark, “Kísérlet a zsidó népesség számának behatárolására 1945 és 2000 között”, in Zsidók a mai Magyarországon. Az 1999-ben
highest estimation significantly differs from the accepted figure. It is rather unlikely that as many as 50,000 persons would have been alive but missing after the war. However, we will never be able to know the exact number of losses. I have chosen to use the figures in the statistics, since they allow for a comparison between the number of surviving women and men of different ages in the provinces and the capital. In addition, it is easier to calculate and compare these exact numbers rather than a wide range of estimated numbers.

Another problem which appears when dealing with numbers is the definition of “Jew”. While the number of Jews belonging to a religious denomination is relatively easy to determine, it is fairly difficult to estimate how many Jews were regarded as Jews by the perpetrators. In the numbers presented by the World Jewish Congress, a division between “Israelites” by faith and “non-Israelites” defined as “racial Jews” is made. The number of “Israelites” is of course more precise than the number of “non-Israelites”, who were not registered by any Jewish congregation. This is important to keep in mind when studying the statistics.

Before looking at the data in detail, I will include one last reflection on statistical data. Historian Tomislav Dulic, who has studied local mass killings in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1941–1942, emphasizes the importance of statistics in Holocaust and genocide studies:

> While one has to remain sensitive to the suffering hidden underneath a mass of statistical data and not forget that each number represents a man, woman or child that suffered a terrible fate, quantifications cannot be excluded if they have the prospect of furthering our knowledge of mass killing.4

Even though a focus on numbers may run the risk of trivialization and bluntness, it is our duty to bring statistical data into historical research on mass violence. At the same time it is important to remember, as Dulic points out, that every figure represents a human being. The figures in the following tables represent relatives, friends, and co-citizens of the survivors studied here. However, an analysis of these figures will help to illuminate the questions in focus here, and it is thus essential to include them in the thesis. The numbers from the World Jewish Congress are particularly important, as they show that not only “race”, but also age, gender, and geographical origin affected the Hungarian Jewry’s wartime experiences in general, in contrast to the previous chapters that have demonstrated the impact on the experiences on a micro level. It should also be mentioned that social class is not studied in this chapter, as there is no information on this in the data studied here.

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4 Dulic (2005), p. 17.
In this section, statistics concerning the losses of the Hungarian Jewry will be analyzed from an intersectional perspective. The aim is not to present new data, since these figures are well-known by researchers, but to emphasize the importance of multiple factors. In which ways did gender, age, and geographical location form the outcome of the Hungarian Holocaust in general? What conclusions can be drawn from the figures when looking at these multiple factors? How did gender, age, and geographical origin intersect with each other? The fate of the Trianon Hungary’s Jewry is discussed, and the provinces are compared to the capital. The annexed territories and “non-Israelites defined as Jews” are excluded, since there is no data concerning these groups of people in the sources studied here.

Table 9.1. Distribution of Jewish females and males by age groups in Trianon Hungary in 1941 and 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1946</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>44,190</td>
<td>44,984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>61,759</td>
<td>59,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>64,554</td>
<td>56,386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>38,614</td>
<td>31,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209,198</td>
<td>191,782</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1946</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>50.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The territory of Trianon Hungary included a total number of 400,980 Jews of “Israelite faith” in 1941. The number of remaining Jews in 1946 was 143,624, according to the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress (table 9.1). Hence the losses amount to 257,393 persons, or 64.2 per cent of the pre-war Hungarian Jewish population.

The total number of Jewish women in 1941 was 209,198, and number of Jewish men 191,782, as shown in table 9.1. We can notice that the gender distribution in Hungary before the war was 52.2 per cent female and 47.8 per cent male. In the younger age groups, the distribution almost reaches 50 per cent female and 50 per cent male, while in the age group of 40–60 years and above 60, the share of females is noticeably higher than the share of males. This can be explained by losses during the First World War, and by the fact that women usually live longer (see also table 9.5). After the war, the remaining number of Jewish women was 81,573, while the number of Jewish men was 62,051, thus resulting in 56.8 and 43.2 per cent women and men, respectively. The difference thus clearly increased. Hence it is possible to conclude that relatively more Jewish men than women were killed in Trianon Hungary during the Holocaust. In total numbers, the losses for females were 127,625 (or 61.0 per cent), and 129,731 (or 67.6 per cent) for males. The losses were, however, not evenly distributed between the provinces and the capital. Table 9.2 shows a comparison between these two geographical regions.

Intersections of gender and geographical origin were clearly important to the experiences of the Hungarian Jewish population. It is striking how few Jewish females outside the capital survived the Holocaust. In the provinces, the total number of females was 112,367 before the war, yet only 22,520 (or 20.0 per cent) remained after the war. In Budapest, 59,053 (or 61.0 per cent) of 96,831 females survived. The main reason for this difference is the high number of losses of provincial Jewish females at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the fact that the deportations were stopped before they reached Budapest, as noted by Braham. The corresponding figures for surviving males were 24,604 (or 23.6 per cent) out of 104,140 in the provinces, and 37,447 (or 42.7 per cent) out of 87,642 in the capital. Even here, the proportion of surviving males was significantly higher in Budapest than in the provinces, even though it was lower in comparison to the proportion of surviving females from Budapest.

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6 Trianon Hungary refers, as earlier mentioned, to Hungary within the borders after the First World War, the “small” Hungary. The figures and tables below are based on statistics from HJA, XVIII-A: Zsidó Világkongresszus Magyarországi Tagozata Statisztikai Osztályának Közleményei [The News Bulletin of the Statistical Department of the Hungarian Section of the World Jewish Congress], hereafter Zsidó Világkongresszus. See also Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp.1296–1301, based on the same sources.

7 See also appendix 5–7.

Table 9.2. Distribution of the surviving females and males in the provinces and in Budapest by age groups

**a. Surviving females in absolute numbers and in per cent of the pre-war population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>The provinces</th>
<th>Budapest</th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>4,125</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>6,871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>11,321</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>15,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>5,364</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>22,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>14,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22,520</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>59,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**b. Surviving males in absolute numbers and in per cent of the pre-war population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>The provinces</th>
<th>Budapest</th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>3,441</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>6,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>11,238</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>8,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>8,381</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>12,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>1,544</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>9,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24,604</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>37,447</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


When we look at the intersections of gender and age in the provinces, we see that the largest age group among the survivors was that of 20–40 years of age, numbering 22,559 survivors (11,321 or 35.3 per cent of the females and 11,238 or 36.4 per cent of the males in that age group). These numbers may seem a bit surprising. One would have expected that the discrepancy between female and male survivors would have been even greater, since more women than men were killed upon their arrival to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The relatively small difference in absolute numbers can be explained by the fact that many men lost their lives in the labour forces instead of in the gas chambers. In the age group 40–60, males had a notably higher survival rate (8,381 out of 27,379 = 30.6 per cent) than females (5,364 out of 31,135 = 17.2 per cent). In this age group, fewer men were drafted into the labour service, and in Auschwitz-Birkenau they had a chance of being selected for the workforce. The high numbers of provincial female losses can be explained, as already mentioned, as a result of

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the selection process. Mothers carrying children, and grandmothers with grandchildren, were all gassed directly upon their arrival to the camp. The fact that more men were selected for the workforce can thus be explained by the fact that men did not carry the children, but also by the fact that men were often physically stronger than women. Therefore, the selected “able-bodied” male persons in the camps might have had better chances of surviving than the women who were aged 40–60 years.

Another important piece of information in the data studied here is that the pre-war number of children was significantly higher in the provinces than in the capital (60,132 compared to 29,042). Placed into relative terms, this is about twice as many as the number of children in Budapest. Thus the families from the countryside in the 1930s in general had more children than the middle class families from the capital. Most of these children were deported and gassed to death in Auschwitz. Less than one thousand Jewish children under the age of seven were registered in the provinces in 1946.10 Altogether, only 7,566 out of 60,132 (12.6 per cent) provincial children survived the Holocaust (see also table 9.3). This rate corresponds to that seen in Europe in general. Previous research has shown that children were especially vulnerable during the Holocaust: only ten per cent survived out of the pre-war child population of 1.6 million Jews under the age of sixteen.11

Based on the countryside figures, we can see that survival rates were lowest within the age groups of 0–20 and above the age of sixty.12 Persons aged 20–40 years were more likely to survive than persons from other age groups. The figures for Budapest are nearly the opposite. Those above the age of 40 had greater chances of surviving than did those who were less than forty years old. Furthermore, young persons and children in Budapest were more likely to survive than children and the youth in the provinces (the death toll was 54.6 per cent in Budapest compared to 87.4 per cent in the provinces). These differences can be explained by the deportations, which hit both female and male children and the elderly harder than able-bodied adult persons.

The differences in female and male survival rates in the provinces were smaller than in Budapest. The most remarkable result concerning gender differences in Budapest is that in each age group, the number of surviving females is higher compared to the number of surviving males. In the youngest age group, male losses in absolute numbers are about 1,200 (or 6 per cent) higher than female losses. Of the total number of survivors in Budapest, only 37,447 (or 38.8 per cent) were men, while 59,053 (or 61.2 per cent) were

12 This was also shown by Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 1300.
women (see table 9.4). These figures are again explained by the fact that relatively few Budapest Jews were deported. Deportations would definitely have resulted in relatively higher figures for women in Budapest. Additionally, more male Jews were taken into the forced labour service where many of them died, and it is also possible that more men than women were shot during the violent months of Arrow Cross rule, as noted by Aly and Gerlach. Consequently, many women in Budapest survived due to the fact that the deportations were stopped and that Arrow Cross actions seem to have hit males harder than females, despite the fact that more women than men were taken on the death marches.

Out of the Jewish male population in Budapest, the age groups of 20–40 and 40–60 suffered the highest losses. Initially, men between the ages of twenty and forty were taken into the labour service. Later on, males aged 40–60 were also called up. Another devastating result is that children in Budapest suffered very high death rates (only 45.5 per cent survived). Children in the ghettos lived under very unhealthy circumstances, and were often not as strong as the adults, which resulted in many deaths from malnutrition and disease. Compared to the countryside, however, this is still a relatively low figure. Almost ninety per cent of both female and male children and youngsters in the provinces were killed, as shown in table 9.3. The figures are about the same for persons above the age of sixty: 90.8 per cent of the elderly in the provinces were murdered during the Holocaust, compared to 31.2 per cent of the capital’s older Jewish population.

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Table 9.4. Jewish females by 1000 Jewish males in Hungary 1900–1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Budapest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1,074</td>
<td>1,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1,094</td>
<td>1,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>1,079</td>
<td>1,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>1,576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 9.5. Jewish females by 1000 Jewish males in 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Budapest</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>1,199</td>
<td>1,088</td>
<td>1,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>1,007</td>
<td>1,757</td>
<td>1,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>1,785</td>
<td>1,323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>1,107</td>
<td>1,462</td>
<td>1,413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Dividing the victims into females and males, the data shows that 80.0 per cent of Jewish women from the countryside were killed, compared to 39.0 per cent of the Budapest female Jews. Losses within the male population are slightly different: 76.4 per cent of the provincial male Jews lost their lives, compared to 57.3 per cent of the males from Budapest. Tables 9.4 and 9.5 illustrate the number of females per 1,000 males in Budapest and in the provinces. Braham has remarked on these differences between the capital and the provinces in the various age groups in 1946, and writes that “the male-female ratio of the survivors was considerably better” in the countryside. 14 He is correct in emphasizing the female surplus in the capital, but he has not discussed the obvious surplus of males in the age group 40–60 in the provinces. The most striking figures are found in this age group, where the difference between Budapest and the provinces is exceptionally large. There were 1,785 females per 1,000 males in the age group of 40–60 in Budapest, while the corresponding figure was 640 females per 1,000 males in the provinces. Once again, this result reflects the murders of the provincial Jewish women, especially the elderly, in Auschwitz-Birkenau, while the Budapest Jews were not deported on a large scale. Budapest male losses largely involved casualties from the labour service system.

Finally, it can be stated that the provinces of Trianon Hungary lost 169,383 of its Jewish (“Israelites by faith”) population of 216,507 (78.23 per cent), while Budapest lost 87,973 of 184,473 (47.7 per cent) of its Jewish population. In other words, 47,124 or 32.8 per cent of 143,624 survivors were from the countryside, and 96,500 or 67.2 per cent of the survivors lived in Budapest. Only 27.0 per cent of the female survivors were from the provinces, while 73.0 per cent lived in Budapest. The corresponding figures for male survivors were 39.7 per cent in the countryside, and 60.3 per cent in the capital.

The surviving Jews from Budapest and the larger cities re-established their communities soon after the liberation. In Budapest, the situation was a bit more fortunate than in other places in Hungary. The capital’s synagogues had survived almost intact, as well as its educational and cultural institutions. In the countryside, the number of remaining and/or returning Jews was very small, and the rebuilding of the communities was thus very difficult. However, by the end of 1946, 258 out of 704 congregations (in 1939) had been revitalized. According to statistics, approximately a third of the pre-war congregations were re-established soon after the war, as shown in table 9.6.

Table 9.6. Number of Jewish Congregations in Hungary in 1935 and 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1946</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neolog</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Quo</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HJA, Zsidó Világkongresszus, April 1, 1948, no. 8–9.

There are a few mistakes in the percentages in the table of the losses in Budapest in the News Bulletin of Zsidó Világkongresszus, 1948, no. 10, p. 7. Braham seems to have noticed this and corrects the figures in his book. Nevertheless, he misses one detail. In table 32.2 and in the text on p. 1300 the figure is 52.31 per cent. However, it should be 47.69 per cent (87,973 out of 184,473). See Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 1299–1300.

Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 1305. Within these 263 congregations, fourteen women’s organizations, one youth society, one cooperative credit society, one trade society, and one welfare society were active in 1947. See HJA, XVIII-A, 72.100.3: Excerpt from the Publications of the Statistical Department of the World Jewish Congress, Hungarian Section, p. 23. It is very difficult to estimate the number of Jews living in Hungary today. Geza Komoroczy asserts that the number of Jews in Hungary was about 80,000 in the late 1990s, according to Jewish Community officials and rabbis. Tamás Stark estimates that in the year 2000, somewhere between 64,000 and 118,000 “Jews” lived in Hungary, which indicates that Komoroczy’s figure is fairly correct. See Geza Komoroczy, “Jewish Hungary Today”, in Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints, on-line publication at Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (1997), http://www.jcpa.org/cjc/wp-351-komoroczy.htm (02/10/2006) and Stark (2002), p. 119. See also János Ladányi, “A zsidó népesség térbeni elhelyezkedésének változásai Budapesten 1870 és 2000 között”, in Zsidók a mai Magyarországon (2002) on the Jewish population in Budapest.
Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have looked at the fate of the Hungarian Jewry on a more aggregated level, using statistical data instead of sources based on memory. In which ways did gender, age, and geographical origin influence the devastating outcome of genocidal violence and murder? What conclusions can be drawn from the figures when closely studying them from an intersectional perspective? The losses of “Jews by Israelite faith” within the borders of Trianon Hungary were discussed and presented in tables. Scholars have analyzed these statistics before, but they have only briefly commented on the importance of multiple factors. I argue that the intersections of gender, age, and place should be illuminated in more detail.

The analysis shows that the aspects of gender, age, and geographical origin cannot be studied in isolation from each other. The categories clearly intersect with each other, and the Hungarian Jewish experiences were undoubtedly shaped by all these factors. First of all, geographical place, as stressed by many scholars, was crucial to the fate of Hungarian Jews. Those who lived in the provinces were deported, while those who lived in the capital were less exposed to the systematic annihilation process.

Children and the elderly were the most vulnerable, and suffered the highest casualties within the provinces. The death rates for these age groups exceeded 90 per cent (92.8 for children under the age of fifteen, 90.8 for the elderly over sixty). These individuals, and mothers with children, were killed directly upon arrival to Auschwitz-Birkenau, since they were deemed “unfit” for work during the selection process. They were simply useless in the eyes of the Nazis, as previously stressed by Joan Ringelheim. She has analyzed figures for ghettos in Poland and Theresienstadt, and come to the conclusion that more women than men were present in the ghettos, and that more women were murdered in the death camps.\(^\text{17}\) This was also the case regarding the ghettos in Hungary, as well as the outcome of the deportations, but the special circumstances that led to the halt of these deportations resulted in different death rates for the provinces and the capital, as previously stressed by Braham.\(^\text{18}\)

In Budapest, men in the age group of 20–40 suffered the highest losses: 68.4 per cent compared to the overall losses of 47.7 per cent for the entire Budapest Jewry. This was due to their conscriptions in the labour service. Fewer females were called up to the labour service than males. The death rates for children and the elderly were not as high as in the provinces: 54.6 and 31.2 per cent, respectively.

When it comes to gender, the overall pattern in Trianon Hungary shows that more women than men survived the Holocaust: 39.6 per cent of the women and 32.4 per cent of the men. The rates for female survivors were considerably

\(^{17}\) Ringelheim (1993), pp. 391–400.

higher in the capital than in the provinces, due to halting of the deportations. In the provinces, women were killed in higher numbers in all age groups except 0-20. Why more males than females belonging to this specific age group died is hard to know, but perhaps it has something to do with the fact that young women (persons between 16 and 20 years of age) did not have any children and thus could be selected for work in Auschwitz-Birkenau, while young men in the same age group were most likely drafted to the labour service, where the death rates were relatively high. It should be noted that neglecting females’ work capabilities is usually seen as a negative effect of the gender order, but in this context, it turned into an advantage for the Jewish women in Budapest. Since they were spared from deportation and also from the forced labour service until the Arrow Cross takeover, they could avoid the harsh treatment that for Jewish males so often led to suffering and death. Only during the last months of the war were Jewish women in Budapest targeted.

Consequently, and to conclude this chapter, I would like to draw attention to the aspect of time. Tim Cole reminds us not only of the importance of geography, age, and gender as factors directly affecting Hungarian Holocaust victims, but also the importance of time. There was a change, which took place over time, and which was crucial to Hungarian Jewish experiences. Gender was a highly decisive factor in addition to age before 1944, when most of the Jewish adult males aged 20–40 were called up for labour service. Cole concludes, as previously mentioned, that “the first victims of the Hungarian Holocaust were adult males.” After the occupation, however, the situation changed. The majority of the ghetto inhabitants in the provinces were Jewish women from the age group of 20–40. Children, women with children, and the elderly from the Hungarian provinces were those who were mainly deported and forced to enter the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau. During the deportation, all of these three factors – where you lived, how old you were, and whether you were a man or a woman – were significant.

All in all, the statistical data show that “race” was not solely decisive regarding the outcome of the German Nazis’ and the Hungarian authorities’ persecution of the Hungarian Jewry. Geographical place and the historical context, including both the time aspect and other special circumstances (i.e. Horthy halting the deportations), clearly shaped individual fates and experiences of the Holocaust. Moreover, the outcome of the Holocaust in Hungary undoubtedly depended on gender and age. The presented data has by no means given us new information concerning the number of the losses, but has helped to place the complexity and the importance of studying multiple factors in focus. The complexity of the Hungarian Jewish experiences is thus visible not only in the individual narratives of the survivors, but also in the general patterns of the Holocaust, which has been brought out earlier by many scholars.

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CHAPTER 10
Concluding the Task: Analyzing Experiences of Discrimination and the Holocaust

The general objective of this social historical study has been to increase our understanding of the Hungarian Jewish experiences through an analysis of multiple factors. Although the importance of studying multiple aspects has been highlighted previously by some scholars, earlier studies have often focused on only one or several limited aspects. I argue that it is extremely important to contrast the experiences of women and men, children, adults and the elderly, and to also widen the scope to include different geographical places in Europe. The complexity of the experiences is thus placed in focus.

The focal point of this dissertation was to explore how Jewish survivors remember their experiences of the anti-Jewish laws, the atrocities, and the Holocaust in Hungary during 1920–1945. This central question was analyzed on two levels: how did the informants perceive the discrimination and the persecution they and their fellow-Jews were exposed to, and how did they respond to these events? The results show that the experiences of the Hungarian Jews were determined by many factors, but that gender, age, and social class were particularly important factors in how individuals perceived and responded to events. However, there was a considerable change over the course of time. In the beginning of the period under investigation, differences in how the informants experienced the events were more obvious than by the end of the Second World War. Eventually experiences seemed to have become more similar – it did not matter whether one was female or male, young or old, rich or poor. The aim of the perpetrators was to destroy as many Jews as possible. “Race” was ultimately the most important factor influencing Jewish experiences. However, the war and the fascist Arrow Cross era ended before the goal was reached. The analysis of the Hungarian Jewish losses in chapter 9 demonstrates not only the magnitude of the catastrophe, but also that there were indeed differences in how women and men of different ages from Budapest and from the provinces were affected in general. The additional empirical chapters illustrate that individuals responded in various ways and that they had different ways of coping and surviving. There were, however, similarities in their reactions. Emigration, for instance, was discussed in many families, and was suggested by both women and men of different ages and from different social classes.
The choice of categories was mainly motivated by the research task, but in addition to this, the fundamental importance of gender, age, and social class in human life was also stressed. The specific sources used in this investigation, extensive interviews with survivors from Budapest, have been particularly valuable and useful. It can even be argued that interviews and eyewitness testimonies, in addition to contemporary sources such as letters or diaries, are the only sources which can give such rich and detailed information regarding individual experiences, particularly regarding aspects of gender, age, and social class. Furthermore, the significances of geographical place, civil status, religious orientation, and nationality were also occasionally indicated in the interviews and reports.

In the following, the two sets of questions concerning perception and responses will be summarized. The importance of analyzing multiple factors will be discussed, and the data and analyses will be contrasted against and compared to findings published in previous research.

Perception

What did the informants tell us about the events that occurred during the period of 1920–1945? How did they perceive the treatment to which they and their fellow Jews were exposed? What differences and/or similarities can be found in the way the informants perceived the events and the way in which they were treated? How did gender, age, social class, and/or other factors shape these perceptions? Many scholars have explored similar questions both on a structural and an individual level, but few have systematically examined how these multiple identity-forming factors affected individual Hungarian Jewish experiences in 1920–1945.¹ This study focused not only on experiences during the Holocaust, but also on the interwar period. The continuity of antisemitism and discrimination in Hungarian society, as well as changes taking place over the course of time, have thus become apparent.

The first discriminating law, the Numerus Clausus, was enacted as early as 1920, through the establishment of a quota system in higher education. The law did not differentiate between women and men, or between different age and social groups, yet its effects varied nevertheless. As shown in chapter 4, the Numerus Clausus mainly affected the younger generations. Young adults in the 1920s, 1930s and early 1940s had limited chances of obtaining higher education, as admissions for Jews was restricted to 6 per cent of the total number of students, as pointed out by Mária M. Kovács.² In a previous article by the same author, gender aspects are considered, but only very briefly and

¹ See Molnár (2004); Cole (2003); Aly & Gerlach (2002); Kremer (2000); The Nazis’s Last Victims (1998); Braham (1994), vol. 1 & 2. For research which has accentuated the importance of multiple factors, see Cole (2006).
largely on a structural level in connection to the role of the feminist movement in Hungary. My study demonstrates the impact of the law on an individual level. When it comes to gender, women suffered perhaps even more than men from the effects of the Numerus Clausus. They had gained access to higher education only two decades earlier, and the ratio of Jewish women had been relatively large, at least at the University of Budapest. Moreover, their role as independent, educated individuals was not as stable as the “self-evident” role of the male breadwinner. The same can be said about the lower social classes. Since institutions of higher education during this time were primarily accessible by the upper and middle classes, it is likely that even fewer individuals from the Jewish lower class could obtain access to the universities. Therefore, the Numerus Clausus did not affect all Jews in the same way, but it seemed to have hit the traditionally “weak” groups (women, lower class) the hardest.

Yehuda Don and Randolph L. Braham have studied the effects of the first and second anti-Jewish laws on different social classes and occupational groups. Their findings show that members of the upper classes could more easily retain employment, while members of the lower middle class and the middle class were severely affected by the regulations. Furthermore, Mária M. Kovács has shown that the effects could also differ between the free professions. For example, physicians were more harshly treated by their professional chambers than were lawyers. These authors have also shown that social stratification was strengthened when economic restrictions were introduced – the poor became relatively poorer, while the rich became relatively richer by the end of the 1930s.

However, Don, Braham, and Kovács do not systematically discuss the effects of the laws with regard to multiple factors, and as a result, other important aspects have been disregarded. This study confirms the differences between the social classes, but it also illuminates the importance of gender and age. Jewish adult men were the main victims of the first and second anti-Jewish laws of the late 1930s. Since men were the wage earners, as a consequence of the male breadwinner system, they were also more directly affected by this legislation. Jewish males lost their jobs and hence their incomes when opportunities in the labour market were restricted. This was naturally also the case for many female workers, but primarily only young, unmarried women worked outside the home. But what about those who did not work, mainly married women, children, and the elderly? They also felt the effects of these laws on the family finances, and within the anxious situations of unemployed spouses and fathers,

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3 Kovács (2003), pp. 86–87. Kovács concludes her article by emphasizing the problems of multiple identities when studying emancipation under authoritarian conditions, see p. 90.
6 For female work in Europe between the wars, see Wikander (2006), chapter 3.
even though more indirectly. Age was therefore also of importance in the experiences the Jewish informants recalled.

The third anti-Jewish law had a noticeable impact on the majority of the Hungarian Jews. It defined the “Jew” according to racist policy, and did not allow intermarriage or sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. In practice, less than 25 per cent of Jewish marriages were mixed (according to data from 1937), but the law was humiliating for all Jews, whether they lived in a mixed marriage or not. However, age mattered, since the law primarily affected adults of marital age. Exemptions were made for children who had been baptised before the age of seven and, for example, Olympic champions. In theory, this law made no distinction between social classes, but in practice this could be of importance. Social status and connections could be used to obtain a certificate of exemption.

Theoretically, this “Race Protection Law” affected women and men to the same extent, but the consequences of breaking the law more often fell on men, as indicated in the interviews. Jewish males were prosecuted more frequently for having sexual relations with non-Jewish females than were Jewish females who had relations with non-Jewish males. This was most likely a consequence of the existing gender order and gender ideals, which included the traditional conception that men were more active and experienced in sexual relations. To my knowledge, these aspects have not been highlighted within previous research on the Hungarian anti-Jewish laws.

The labour service system, analyzed in chapter 5, was the first regulation which physically affected the Hungarian Jewish men. Call-up orders were received by thousands of men between the ages of twenty and forty-five. When Hungary joined the Second World War in 1941, the effects of the labour service system became even more evident. The treatment of Jewish workers was more brutal outside the Trianon borders, and conditions were very harsh on the Eastern front and in Yugoslavia. The labour service system has been described in detail by several scholars, who have discussed aspects such as religious orientation (for example the lack of kosher food for Orthodox labour servicemen), social class, and geographical location. However, gender aspects have not been as thoroughly discussed. I argue that the labour service system, as well as the earlier anti-Jewish laws, had a significant impact on the male breadwinner system. The informants recount several cases where in the absence of men, women had to work in order to support their families.

This particular division of labour, with Jewish men called into the labour service and women supporting their families, changed in 1944. In October 1944, the Arrow Cross regime decided to abolish the gender distinction regarding forced labour. Now even women were called up. Males between the

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ages of sixteen and sixty were conscripted, while for women the criterion was sixteen to forty-five years of age, or up to fifty-five for those who could sew. Consequently, treatment of women and men became similar. There were, however, stricter age limits for female forced labour. How can this be interpreted? Earlier research has noted this development, but has not considered the effects many different factors can create. I argue that intersections between gender and age are of main importance here. Men were still seen as strong and capable, and of performing physically demanding tasks. Female physical labour, particularly if the female was elderly, was not as highly valued as that of males, and females who knew how to sew were more valuable to the war industry than those who could not. Considerations like these may have resulted in the lower upper age limits for women in the labour service. Furthermore, since the aim of the authorities was to make use of adult labour, Jewish children and the elderly were left in the ghetto and the Jewish houses. But somebody had to look after the children while their parents were in forced labour, since it would have become problematic for the authorities if hundreds of children were suddenly left without guardians. Grandmothers were now supposed to take care of children, which might help to explain why women over fifty-five were not called up for labour service. In this context, it is also of interest that mothers who had several children were also exempted. These women, as well as the elderly females, were regarded as caretakers – their value as sustainers of the family order was higher than their value as forced labourers.

Small children and the elderly were spared from forced labour, but they were placed in the central ghetto of Pest. The survivors describe the living conditions there as intolerable; overcrowding, diseases, and death were everyday experiences. Single persons especially suffered from overcrowding, since they were forced to sleep in the hallways or in the bathrooms.

Both women and men recount that they were subjected to physical violence, and according to some testimonies, even children, the sick, and the elderly were physically harmed or killed in the last months of the Arrow Cross rule. Female informants refer to sexual harassment and fear of rape more often than men. One detail that has been brought out only very shortly in previous research is that women and children were sometimes spared in the Arrow Cross raids, which often ended in killings by the Danube. According to Aly and Gerlach, mainly males were killed in these executions. Was this a general pattern? Future research using other sources will hopefully illuminate these aspects further.

The interviews, as well as previous research, show that the people who obtained access to protected houses in the International ghetto and could thus escape the labour service system, the city ghetto, and the death marches often

10 This has also been noted in ghettos and in camps in other parts of Europe. See Goldenberg (1998), pp. 332, 336; Goldenberg (2005); Milton (1984), p. 315.
belonged to upper social classes. Families with connections, for example with Swedish companies or Swedish relatives, could obtain protective passports or documents, and obtain permission to move into the International ghetto. When Raoul Wallenberg began his work in the summer of 1944, he had a list of persons who were to receive help first. These persons were often of a high social standing, as also noted by previous research and the interviews used here. During the autumn, the neutral legations differentiated less between individuals seeking help, and the social background of the protected became more diverse. Here, as elsewhere, the primary factor of importance tended to be whether one was Jewish or not.

The last chapter of this study, the quantitative analysis of Jewish losses, provides devastating evidence of the vulnerability of children and the elderly. Although these figures have been known by scholars for some time, they have not been subjected to a detailed, systematic analysis with regard to multiple factors. A comparison between the provinces and the capital shows that in the provinces, few children or elderly survived, due to the deportations taking place in the provinces. Adult men had the highest survival rates in the provinces, since they were in the labour service system, as previously noted by Braham.

Women, children, and the elderly ended up in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Budapest, children and the elderly suffered the highest death rates, since they could not endure hunger and disease in the ghetto as well as adults. However, the losses of children and the elderly in Budapest were not as high as in the provinces. When it comes to adults in the capital, more women than men survived. The reason is the same as that for the figures in the provinces: men were in the forced labour service. The number of casualties was higher there than in Budapest, since the war ended before all of Jews in Budapest could be killed.

It is thus obvious that an analysis of multiple factors brings out the complexity surrounding these experiences. It illuminates significant details and patterns concerning how the Hungarian Jews perceived the events, and why they either survived or died. The informants have given examples of differences between how women and men were treated. Similar discrepancies can also be found between children and the elderly on one hand, and adults on the other. Here an important difference becomes visible when age is intersected with geographical location. In Budapest, adults were treated harshly more often than the youngest and the elderly. Of those from the provinces, children and the elderly were the first to be killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Death rates were, even in Budapest, highest for these age groups. According to the informants, treatment could differ even when it came to social class, both as an effect of the anti-Jewish laws, and because of the higher numbers of Jews from the upper and upper middle classes in the International ghetto.

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12 See, for example, Lajos (2004), p. 220.
13 Only in Braham (1994), vol. 2, pp. 1299–1301, can a short discussion on this be found.
Occasionally the survivors refer to timing and luck as factors which shaped their experiences.\textsuperscript{15} Even though the Jewish experiences followed certain patterns depending on “race”, gender, age, and social class, there could be something more to it. Steven Radi worked for the Red Cross during the last year of the war, and he survived partly because of his position and personal network. But when he was asked what he thought about past events and about his survival, he answered: “My survival? I was lucky. I was lucky I got in [to] this [Red Cross] group. I was lucky because I have [sic] money. I was lucky because I had friends like Wilhelm Doktor and a few others, you know? The others died already. And I was… [It was] pure luck.”\textsuperscript{16} Steven’s perception was that in addition to the factors of strong personal network and money, which were closely connected to his upper class background, luck, too, was on his side. Therefore, timing and “luck”, as unquantifiable as they are, must be mentioned as additional factors that, according to the survivors, shaped Jewish experiences.

The focus on how the informants perceived the events has shown how gender, age, social class, and a number of other factors could affect Jewish experiences in a time of extreme social upheaval. Yet in spite of these differences, the category of “race” became more and more important with time. As already mentioned, during the Arrow Cross regime the experiences of women and men, and of individuals from different age and social groups, became less distinct. Cole has emphasized the aspect of time, and the results of this study also demonstrate that changes over the course of time were crucial.\textsuperscript{17} Besides the fact that the informants testified to crueller treatment of all Jews, it should be stressed that when the situation escalated towards the total destruction of the Hungarian Jewry, the effects of the introduction of the Numerus Clausus and the anti-Jewish laws lost their importance. Although gender, age, and social class had been important factors in how anti-Jewish legislation between the wars was perceived, as well as later on in the Jewish houses and the ghettos, they became less significant elements towards the end.

Responses

What did the informants have to say about the responses of individual Jews and the Jewish community to the events of the period? How did they cope with their situations, and what type of survival strategies did they develop? In which ways can these responses be attributed to gender, age, social class, and/or other factors?

\textsuperscript{15} Dwork has also reflected upon the fact that “luck” sometimes affected Jewish experiences and Jewish lives, see Dwork (1991), p. 258.
\textsuperscript{16} RWA, F2C:22, file 551.
\textsuperscript{17} See Cole (2006), p. 54.
Joan W. Scott has argued, as mentioned in the introduction, that social and national groups often have diverse experiences of wars and catastrophes: “There are differences between women and men, Jewish and German women, different races and ethnic groups, dominant cultures and persecuted minorities.”18 According to the results of this study, this also applies to experiences within a particular group, in this case Hungarian Jews. Individual reactions to discrimination and the other events of Holocaust differed, as did the perceptions of these events. Several factors appearing in the responses were discussed in the empirical chapters, for instance emigration, marriage, hiding, and resistance. The Jewish inhabitants of Budapest developed various types of coping skills and strategies in order to survive the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Although it can be concluded that women and men of different ages and from different social classes sometimes reacted differently, at times similarities within the responses were more obvious. Several empirical examples emphasize this, and sometimes these examples conflict with earlier research. Regarding gendered Jewish reactions, Claudia Koonz and Marion A. Kaplan have argued that German Jewish women were more eager than men to emigrate.19 The interviews and reports studied here show that this was not necessarily the case within Hungarian Jewish families. Both women and men expressed their desire to either leave or stay, and they also had similar arguments. The only clear gendered difference when it comes to emigration, as it appears in the interviews and reports, was that only males provided any patriotic reasons for not emigrating. The reasons behind the differences in the reactions of German Jewry and Hungarian Jewry were, however, not clear from the testimonies.

Another example which shows the difficulty in drawing general conclusions concerning gendered differences in Jewish responses is that of so-called “food talk”. Myrna Goldenberg has argued that Jewish women used conversations about recipes and cooking as a specific gendered coping skill in the camps. She does, however, emphasize the similarities between female and male memories concerning hunger and food: “Sharing their memories of the wonderful meals eaten in better times was a diversion for [both] women and men.”20 She fruitfully analyzes gendered differences in food conversations, and highlights the fact that women’s gendered socialization resulted in conversations about recipes and on how to cook meals, instead of the male way of “only” speaking about good food in general. Goldenberg’s conclusions are partly supported by the findings of this dissertation, but she disregards the importance of age and social class. “Food talk” was, in my opinion, one of the most striking examples of the significance of multiple identity-forming factors in my analysis of the experiences of Holocaust survivors. Goldenberg mentions a woman who could not stand other women talking about food – it only made her hunger worse –

but she pays no attention to the reasons behind this woman’s reaction. Hungarian survivors Lujza Molnár, Judy Cohen, and Aranka Siegal also remember their frustration over the older women’s conversations about cooking and food. Judy exclaims: “Ah, it used to drive us younger girls crazy!” This shows that not all females enjoyed talking about recipes, and that “food talk” cannot be analyzed only through gender. Intersections of gender, age, and civil status can more effectively explain these differences, in addition to personal differences between individuals. Lujza, Aranka, and Judy were unmarried teenagers during the war, and did not have any experience of being in charge of a household. This might partially explain their unwillingness to speak about food. Another aspect worth discussing in this context is social class. Women from the upper class often had hired domestic help in their pre-war lives. Did these women exchange recipes and cook virtual dinners?

I argue that earlier gender-related research has overaccentuated the importance of gender, and disregarded other important aspects in analyzing coping skills such as “food talk” during the Holocaust. My analysis emphasizes not only the gendered socialization, but also the complexity of experiences and the importance of multiple factors. These factors affected the individual’s socialization process into an adolescent, a young woman from the upper class, an elderly lower middle class wife, or whatever one’s position might have been in pre-war society. I agree with Bos’s and Waxman’s notions that previous gender research on the Holocaust can sometimes be rather essentialistic. An emphasis on multiple factors can help us to avoid conclusions that might be interpreted in such a way.

Other responses that appeared in both male and female interviews were hiding and resistance. Both females and males went into hiding, and both sexes participated in resistance activities. However, as previous research has shown, the risks of males getting caught were higher, due to the fact that they most often were circumcised. In spite of this, when it comes to resistance in Budapest it was more likely that males were active “in the field” while females worked with administration. There are exceptions, however. For example, Katalin Lebovitz and gentile Sára Karig actively participated in rescue actions. Another exception was Yehuda Mandel, who acted as a courier despite the fact that he was circumcised. He explained this by the fact that he looked like a peasant and could act like a peasant because of his lower class background. Moreover, it is important to accentuate the fact that age andcivil status were at least as significant as gender – young, unattached adults were undoubtedly overrepresented in the material concerning resistance activities.

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22 Judy Cohen (former Weiszenberg), 2005, interview by the author, Debrecen, 13 May 2005, tape no. 1, side B. See also Siegal (2003), p. 184; Lujza Molnár, 2005, interview by the author, Budapest, 5 May 2003, tape no. 3.
23 Bos (2003), p. 27; Waxman (2003), passim.
When it comes to children’s reactions, my research confirms some of the conclusions drawn by Déborah Dwork. Amidst the fear and danger that children were exposed to, they adapted to the circumstances, sometimes amazingly well. Children continued with their everyday activities in the circumscribed surroundings of Jewish houses and the ghettos. They played with friends, went to classes, played musical instruments, read books, and even enjoyed the crowded apartments. According to the testimonies, children could “read” the reactions of adults. They could sense danger, for example, in the adults’ faces or when the adults spoke Yiddish or German. But as long as children could be together with their families, their perceptions of the world were not falling apart, despite the bombings and the abnormal situation. Child survivors did not highlight the difficulties as often as survivors who were adults in 1944. Somehow, the youthfulness of child survivors seems to have affected their memories in a positive way.

Nechama Tec concludes in her study that “upper-class men seem to have had a harder time coping with the constant daily humiliations than lower-class men.” My investigation supports Tec’s findings: individuals from lower social classes sometimes found it easier to cope with the deteriorating circumstances, since they were more used to hardship, both at home and in the labour service. Women from the lower or lower middle classes who had lived without domestic help before the war found their cooking skills most valuable. Men who were used to physical work coped with forced labour better than those who never had held a spade in their hands.

The significance of social class could thus be twofold. Those who belonged to the upper social classes had better chances obtaining exemptions and help from various instances, due to their financial positions and personal networks, but when the situation became more urgent, they had more difficulties in coping.

Changes in social organization

The main task of this thesis was to increase our understanding of Hungarian Jewish history by studying Jewish experiences. This has also triggered questions concerning social organization. How did gender relations change, both within the family and within society at large, during this period? Or did they perhaps not change at all? What happened to the social structure of the Jewish families? Were there any changes in relationships between the generations? Before concluding this study, I would like to briefly discuss these issues.

Gender scholars have studied the wartime phenomenon of male absence at the “homefront” in depth. During the Second World War, women entered the

---

25 Tec (2003), p. 348. This aspect was also briefly noted in Braham (1994), vol. 1, p. 330.
male spheres of war industries and factories. But persecuted people, in this case Jews, have often been disregarded in these analyses. In Hungary, the situation was special due to the unique labour service system. In Nazi Germany, Jewish men were taken to concentration camps before women. These two examples can be compared to the war situation in general. The gender division of labour became less rigid – women could perform male tasks during times of crisis, in the absence of men. While it is important to indicate that gender mechanisms were similar in the families of persecuted people and in other, non-persecuted families during the war, there were also two important differences. Both Jewish and gentile men were conscripted, but whereas the Hungarian non-Jewish male population participated in the war as soldiers, the Jewish male population was forced to work in labour battalions. They were degraded, humiliated, and killed even off of the battlefield. The other difference lies in the opportunities Jewish women had in the absence of a male breadwinner. Since the Jewish presence within Hungarian workforce was restricted, the women in the Jewish middle families found it difficult to locate employment. Work in factories or working with handicrafts such as sewing became sources of income.

The editors of *Behind the Lines*, a volume which explores gender during the two World Wars, state in their introduction that “while women’s objective situation does change [during war], relationships of domination and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations.” My research has demonstrated that this was exactly what happened in the Jewish families who faced discrimination. It is obvious that anti-Jewish legislation and the atrocities of the Holocaust altered gender relations, but not entirely. When males lost their employment and were forced into the labour service system, females took on new roles in the family. They gained more responsibility because of these changes in the breadwinner system. The separation of the sexes, speaking in Yvonne Hirdman’s terms, became less strict and less legitimate: it was now accepted that women could and did perform male tasks in times of crises.

Despite these changes in the division of labour, the prevailing gender order was partially retained during the crisis. Even though males lost their positions within society at large, they somewhat maintained their position as head of the family. This seems to have been the case at least in those families where men were not drafted into the labour service. Women’s tasks during this period were the same as they had been before the war, but it was now harder to cope with the lack of food, water, and fuel. In spite of the fact that the division of labour was weakened and women entered the “male” sphere of duties, men (those who were still with their families) seem to have remained more fixed in their

---

gender role. None of the informants mention men performing “female” tasks in the interviews or the reports. The silence in the sources concerning men entering the female sphere of responsibilities does not, however, indicate that it did not happen.

Consequently, the hierarchy between the sexes seems to have persisted as long as the males were present. In the absence of men, women had to make the decisions for the families. Changes in the gender order were thus gradual, but not total. The “norm” or the “ideal” gender roles were still on the surface all the same, but in practice, women gained more responsibility. Maintaining the gender roles to a certain extent seems to have served as a survival strategy in itself. Through this maintenance, a feeling of normality could be kept on a symbolic, virtual level, even though the gender order did actually loosen up during this period.

Another important conclusion is that in the end, the principles of social organization and the boundaries of social stratification became blurred. The anti-Jewish legislation resulted in the Jewish middle class becoming partly proletarianized: they lost some of their social status and economic security. Yet they continued to identify themselves as middle class, even though they were deprived of their employment, businesses, and properties. However, wealthy individuals and families with connections could work around the restrictions and live fairly normal lives. For example, when the Numerus Clausus was enacted, the more well-off families could afford to send their children to study at universities abroad. The impact of the anti-Jewish laws was more obvious on Jews from the working and lower social classes. Yehuda Don has shown that the gap in income and wealth increased due to the anti-Jewish laws.28 Social stratification thus became stronger. At the end of 1944, Jews from the lower or lower middle classes were more often placed in the ghetto and/or marched away or killed, while middle and upper middle class Jews gained access to the International ghetto. However, in the end, even these differences diminished. The International ghetto was also exposed to Arrow Cross raids, and people were led to the banks of the Danube and executed there. By this time, the major part of Jewish property was expropriated.

The question of what happened to relationships between the generations is more difficult to answer. Some details have been touched upon, for example, the fact that adults’ work capacities were valued higher by the authorities with respect to forced labour, which led to grandparents taking on increased responsibilities for children who were left without their parents in late 1944. Teenagers who were called up for the labour service were forced to grow up prematurely. They became adults in the eyes of the authorities. Children also undertook increased responsibilities within their families. One example is Ivan Becker, who smuggled food into the Jewish house where he and his mother lived, one

of several examples that indicate a change in generational relations during times of crisis.

During the course of this study, a number of other questions outside the scope of this investigation have emerged. It would be, for example, interesting to study the post-war period, in order to understand how Jewish females and males of different ages coped with their traumatic experiences, and if (and in that case how) experiences of the Holocaust permanently altered the social organization of Jewish families. Earlier research on females and the two World Wars has shown that in the post-war periods, gender subordination returned swiftly back to what it was before the wars.\textsuperscript{29} Was this also the case for Jewish families in general? Furthermore, it would be of great interest to study how religion affected Hungarian Jewish experiences more systematically, as well as the importance of geographical location. It would be justified to examine differences and similarities between the capital and the provinces on a larger scale than has been done in the current study. Yet in order to conduct that type of comparative investigation, other (and perhaps more numerous) sources would be required, for example, the extensive Shoah Foundation interview material. These interviews might also give a broader view of social class than did the interviews with survivors from Budapest. I would also welcome studies on how age, gender, and other identity-forming factors affect the survivors’ post-war narratives. In this study, I have touched upon only some of these aspects. For instance, females seem to speak more often about their feelings, while males often concentrate on the chronological events. Since gender, age, and social class did affect Jewish experiences, it would be interesting to see how different factors intersect on the level of narration as well.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the importance of gender, age, social class and other factors influencing the Hungarian Jewish experiences between 1920 and 1945. It highlights the complexity and diversity of survivors’ experiences, as they were reflected in the accounts. Rozsa Solymosi’s story is a strong example of this complexity. Her experiences were shaped by many factors. According to her testimony, she belonged to the middle class and her husband could keep his business until the German occupation. They had money and clothing, which could be traded for food. She happened to live in a district that came under the protection of the neutral countries. She was young and pretty, which increased her chances of making a good impression and obtaining a job, but her beauty also made her afraid of being harassed. She was saved from the forced labour service by pretending to be pregnant. And she was a woman, which probably saved her and her mother from being shot on the banks of the Danube. However, Rozsa’s brother, husband, father, and uncle were all killed as a consequence of the state-authorized violence against the Jewish minority.

\textsuperscript{29} Higonnet & Higonnet (1987), pp. 34–35.
This study also shows how the importance of the different factors changed over time. In the beginning of the period, the differences in the ways the informants experienced discrimination were more obvious than in late 1944 and early 1945. In the end, it did not always matter whether one was a woman or a man, young or old, rich or poor. The ultimate factor was their Jewishness, as defined by the perpetrators. The complexity of the experiences is not easy to grasp, but an analysis of multiple factors has helped us to increase our understanding of the events through the voices of those who were there.
ABBREVIATIONS

DEGOB  Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság
        (The National Relief Committee for Deportees)
I      Interviewer
HJA    Hungarian Jewish Archive
OSA    Open Society Archive
POW    Prisoner of war
RWA    Raoul Wallenberg Archive
USHMM  United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
UUA    Uppsala University Archives
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APPENDIX

1. Frequently asked questions in the Raoul Wallenberg interview material

Part I: Biographical background

1) What was your full name at birth?
2) Where and what date were you born?
3) What are/were the full names of your father, your mother and your siblings (if any)?
   If you were married during the war, what is/was your husband’s/wife’s full name?

Part II: Social and economic milieu (before March 1944)

4) At what address(es) did you live as a child?
5) What did your father do for a living? What was your mother’s occupation?
   Did your mother work?
6) What was your occupation before and during the war?
7) How would you describe your family’s economic circumstances while growing up?
   How would you describe your family’s standing? (E.g., working class, middle class, or upper class?)
8) How would you describe your family’s religious orientation while growing up?
9) What language did you speak at home? Did you speak any other languages?
10) What type of primary education did you have (i.e. religious or secular)?
    To what level did you pursue your studies before the war? Gymnasium? University?
11) What is your first personal experience of antisemitism? Do you remember you family
    discussing antisemitism at home? Did you discuss it with your friends? What impact
    did antisemitism have on your life? Did your family feel like Hungarians or Jewish?
    Nationalism?
12) Did you have any awareness of events outside Hungary (antisemitism in Germany,
    Czechoslovakia, the outbreak of the war, invasion of Poland, invasion of Russia)?
13) What did you know about the labour service system? Did any family members serve in
    these battalions? Did you ever visit a labour camp? What impact did labour service
    system have on your life?
14) What was the impact of the anti-Jewish legislation on you and your family? Were there
    any problems of getting food during the war years? Did your father’s job change
    during this period? Did you ever think who might be responsible for the changing
    conditions for Jews?
15) Was there ever any thought, hope, or idea about leaving Hungary? Was there any talk
    about Palestine?
16) Do you remember any information or rumours about actions taken against Jews in
    other occupied countries? How did you receive information concerning the war? Did
    you listen to foreign broadcasts? How did you receive information concerning new
    anti-Jewish regulations?
Part III: March 19, 1944 – July 1944
17) Where were you and what were you doing (or working with) when the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944? What impact did the occupation have on your life?
18) Did you wear the yellow star? Did your dwelling change? Were you aware of the existence of a Jewish council?
19) How and where did you spend the spring and summer of 1944? Could you describe a typical/average day during these months? How would you occupy yourself? How and from where did you get food? Clothing? Money? Please describe any memorable incidences/experiences from this time.
20) When did you first hear about the ghettoization and the deportations? What did you hear? Did you know anyone who as affected? How strong were the fears that Budapest would be affected?

Part IV: Rescue and resistance during the autumn of 1944
21) At any time during the German occupation of Hungary did you […] have any protective documents (e.g., schutzpass, gentile papers, etc)? If yes, when, where, how and from who did you obtain them?
22) Did you have contact with any diplomats, Red Cross workers, other rescuers or underground agents during the occupation? If yes, please describe when, where and how you met these people. Please give as many details as possible, such as names, addresses of organizations, etc.

Part V: Raoul Wallenberg
23) When did you first hear of Raoul Wallenberg? What did you hear? What was understood to be Wallenberg’s role or mission in Budapest?
24) Did you ever see or meet him? If yes, when, where and how many times? Please describe all such meetings/sightings in as much detail as possible. What happened? What was said, and in what language? What did Raoul Wallenberg look like? What was he wearing? […] Who was with him?
25) Did you know anyone who worked with Wallenberg?
26) How would Wallenberg organize his activities?
27) Were you formally employed at the legation? If yes, what was your task? Did you receive special papers/protection for working with Wallenberg?

Part VI: October 15, 1944 – January 1945
28) What do you remember about the Szálasi coup?
29) Did your situation change after the Szálasi coup in mid-October 1944? If yes, how?
30) Do you remember the address of the [Jewish house and/or the protected house] in which you lived? What were the approximate dates of your stay? Please describe the living conditions in the house. How many people lived there? How many per room? Were all the occupants Jews? Bombings/shelter? What was the weather like?
31) Did you ever encounter any Arrow Cross men on the streets or did they ever come to your house?
32) Do you know anyone who was forced to march towards the Austrian border?
33) Basically, what could you do to protect yourself? To what do you attribute your survival?
34) Please describe your life during the last weeks of the Soviet siege of Budapest.
35) Please briefly describe what you did or what happened to you immediately after the Soviet liberation of Budapest.

2. List of keywords used for structuring the empirical data

age
anti-Jewish laws
antisemitism
Arrow Cross
assaults
beatings
bombings
brickyards
children
civil status
connections
conversion
curfew
death marches
documents
education
emigration
everyday life
exemptions
expectations
family
feelings
food
gender
geography
ghetto
hiding
hunger
International ghetto
Jewish houses
labour service
love
marriage
menstruation
motherhood
Numerus Clausus
occupation
passing
pregnancy
raids
rape
rescue
resistance
safehouse
shopping
social class
streets
suicide
support
survival strategy
Swedish legation
torture
treatment
trouser inspection
violence
work
yellow star
Zionism
### 3.a. Occupations of Budapest Male Survivors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountant or economist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor or working in the film branch</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book branch</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butcher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter or upholsterer</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chauffeur</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil servant or official</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist, pharmacist or optician</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director or business owner</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer or gardener</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furrier</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horologist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeweller or gold/silversmith</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist or photographer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather artisan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locksmith or toolsmith</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic or technician</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merchant, trading business</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musician or artist</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>38</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tailor or tailors assistant</td>
<td>68</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner</td>
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<td>Waiter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
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<td>University student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other student</td>
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<td>Other occupations</td>
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<td>16.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not given</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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</table>

**Total** 1,082 100.3

Source: HJA, DEGOB (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság), Jegyzőkönyv
## 3.b. Occupations of Budapest Female Survivors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil servant or official</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestics (housekeeper, maid etc.)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free professions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager or business owner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seamstress or tailor</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other occupations</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not given</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>469</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HJA, DEGOB (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság), *Jegyzőkönyv*

Footnote: “Handicrafts” include occupations such as milliner, leather artisan, goldsmith, and furrier. “Other occupations” include i.e. a florist, a book printer, a cosmetologist, a model etc. It should also be noted that there probably were a few more housewives among the fourteen persons whose occupation is not mentioned in the sources.
4. Losses of the Hungarian Jewry in Trianon Hungary and the Annexed Territories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specification</th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
<th>Wartime territory</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>Provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of “Jews” in 1941</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Israelite faith</td>
<td>184,453</td>
<td>216,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Israelites defined as “Jews”</td>
<td>62,350</td>
<td>27,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of “Jews”</td>
<td>246,803</td>
<td>243,818</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Losses prior to German occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
<th>Wartime territory</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour servicemen</td>
<td>12,350</td>
<td>12,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamenets-Podolsk massacre (1941)*</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Újvidék-Novisad massacre (1942)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of losses</td>
<td>15,350</td>
<td>14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jews on March 19, 1944</td>
<td>231,453</td>
<td>229,318</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Losses during German occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
<th>Wartime territory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deported, killed, deceased</td>
<td>105,453</td>
<td>222,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleed abroad</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of losses</td>
<td>107,453</td>
<td>223,318</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Liberated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
<th>Wartime territory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour servicemen</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Budapest</td>
<td>119,000</td>
<td>119,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of liberated</td>
<td>124,000</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned from deportation in 1945</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Jews in Dec 1945</td>
<td>144,000</td>
<td>46,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of losses**              | 102,803        | 197,818           | 300,621   | 268,886   | 569,507   |


** Including the 5,000 who escaped abroad.

Source: HJA, XVIII-A, 72.100.3: Excerpt from the Publications of the Statistical Department of the World Jewish Congress, Hungarian Section, 1947, p. 2. In the original document, the total number of surviving Jews is miscalculated to 256,500. It should be 255,500, resulting in total number of 569,507 losses instead of 568,507 as given in the source. See also Braham (1994), vol. 2, p. 1298.
5. Distribution of the Jews in the provinces and in Budapest by Age Groups and Gender in 1941 and 1946

### a. The provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Women 1941</th>
<th>Men 1941</th>
<th>Total 1941</th>
<th>Women 1946</th>
<th>Men 1946</th>
<th>Total 1946</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>30,010</td>
<td>30,122</td>
<td>60,132</td>
<td>4,125</td>
<td>3,441</td>
<td>7,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>32,038</td>
<td>30,887</td>
<td>62,925</td>
<td>11,321</td>
<td>11,238</td>
<td>22,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>31,135</td>
<td>27,379</td>
<td>58,514</td>
<td>5,364</td>
<td>8,381</td>
<td>13,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>19,149</td>
<td>15,750</td>
<td>34,899</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td>1,544</td>
<td>3,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>112,367</strong></td>
<td><strong>104,140</strong></td>
<td><strong>216,507</strong></td>
<td><strong>22,520</strong></td>
<td><strong>24,604</strong></td>
<td><strong>47,124</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### b. Budapest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Women 1941</th>
<th>Men 1941</th>
<th>Total 1941</th>
<th>Women 1946</th>
<th>Men 1946</th>
<th>Total 1946</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>14,180</td>
<td>14,862</td>
<td>29,042</td>
<td>6,871</td>
<td>6,313</td>
<td>13,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>29,721</td>
<td>28,423</td>
<td>58,144</td>
<td>15,790</td>
<td>8,986</td>
<td>24,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>33,419</td>
<td>29,007</td>
<td>62,426</td>
<td>22,139</td>
<td>12,400</td>
<td>34,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>19,465*</td>
<td>15,305</td>
<td>34,770</td>
<td>14,253</td>
<td>9,748</td>
<td>24,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96,831</strong></td>
<td><strong>87,642</strong></td>
<td><strong>184,473</strong></td>
<td><strong>59,053</strong></td>
<td><strong>37,447</strong></td>
<td><strong>96,500</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* According to the original document the number of females in the age group 60 and older in Budapest is mistakenly 10,465. The correct figure is 19,465, as given in the table (19,465+15,305=34,770).


6. Distribution of surviving Jewish Females and Males in the provinces and the capital in 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The provinces</th>
<th>Budapest</th>
<th>Trianon Hungary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>22,520</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>24,604</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>47,124</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.8</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

### 7. Losses of the Jews in Trianon Hungary

#### a. The Provinces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Losses in absolute numbers</th>
<th>Losses in each age group in per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>25,885</td>
<td>26,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>20,717</td>
<td>19,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>25,771</td>
<td>18,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>17,439</td>
<td>14,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>89,847</strong></td>
<td><strong>79,536</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### b. Budapest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Losses in absolute numbers</th>
<th>Losses in each age group in per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–20</td>
<td>7,309</td>
<td>8,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–40</td>
<td>13,931</td>
<td>19,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–60</td>
<td>11,280</td>
<td>16,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–</td>
<td>5,212</td>
<td>5,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>37,778</strong></td>
<td><strong>50,195</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<th>Index Term</th>
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<td>xi, 24, 169, 187f</td>
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<td>air raids</td>
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<td>Allies</td>
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<td>Aly, Götz</td>
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<td>124, 127, 130</td>
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<td>breadwinner ideal</td>
<td>13f, 17, 19, 53, 72, 76, 92, 171; system 12f, 36, 93, 109f, 119, 171, 189f, 233f, 241</td>
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<td>brickyards</td>
<td>133, 135, 143, 162f, 175f, 181</td>
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<td>Budapest</td>
<td>xi, 3f, 6ff, 13f, 16, 21, 28, 30-36, 38, 51f, 57, 69, 71, 75f, 78f, 90f, 94, 99f, 104, 106-109, 111ff, 116f, 124, 127-132, 135-139, 141, 144-168, 182, 185, 188ff 192-197, 199-217, 222-229, 231ff, 236-239, 243</td>
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<td>bystanders</td>
<td>43, 49, 178</td>
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<td>clothes</td>
<td>24, 65, 97, 106-109, 111, 114, 151, 167, 200f, 210, 212f</td>
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<td>123, 148, 162; camps; 22, 41, 97, 139, 167, 180, 200, 241</td>
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<td>16, 70, 72, 79, 91f, 107, 110, 116, 120, 147, 158, 181, 190, 206, 234f, 242</td>
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