



Dr. Háberman Zoltán, PhD

**Magyarországi Holokauszt túlélők Izraelben. Az *Új Kelet* folyóirat
társadalom-történeti elemzése**

**Hungarian Holocaust Survivors in Israel. Socio-Historical Analysis
of *Új Kelet* (New Orient)**

ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány egy mélyebb értelmezést ad a magyarul beszélő Holokauszt túlélők izraeli életéről az *Új Kelet* c. újság abból az időszakból származó számainak segítségével, amikor a lap olvasottsága csúcspontján állt. Az újságot körülbelül 20.000 példányban terjesztették naponta a Holokauszt utáni évtizedekben. Az olyan ikonikus szerkesztők, mint Tomi Lapid, Kishont Ferenc, Gárdos Károly (-DOS) és Kasztner Rezső sokat tettek a modern Izrael államának létrejöttéért, megalakulásáért. Nagyon ritka a társadalomtörténet diskurzusában tárgyalt Soá - túlélők post-holokauszt életéről szóló kutatás. Az *Új Kelet* egy olyan híd volt, amely a túlélők Holokauszt előtti és utáni életét kötötte össze. Sokan használták ezt az újságot az izraeli társadalomba való integrálódás kiindulópontjaként.

ABSTRACT

The current study wishes to provide a deeper understanding of the Hungarian-speaking Holocaust survivors in Israel through the analysis of its staff and readership of the *Új Kelet* (New Orient) newspaper at its heyday. Approximately 20.000 copies of the newspaper were published daily decades after the Shoah. Its iconic figures such as Tomi Lapid, Ferenc Kishont, Károly Gárdos (-DOS), Rezső Kasztner contributed to the creation and establishment of the modern state of Israel. Very few researches exist in the discourse of social history on the post-Holocaust lives of the Shoah survivors. *Új Kelet* was the bridge between the pre-Holocaust and the post-Holocaust lives of the survivors. Many of them used this paper as a springboard for the integration into the Israeli society.

Háberman Zoltán, PhD egyetemi docens, az Országos Rabbiképző – Zsidó Egyetem Szociális Munka és Társadalomtudomány tanszékének vezetője. Tudományos doktori fokozatát 2012-ben szerezte. Fő kutatási területe a judaizmus társadalometikai vonatkozásainak vizsgálata mind az elméletben, mint a mindennapi gyakorlatban, de foglalkozik a zsidó baloldali ellenállási mozgalom történetével a Holokauszt idején, valamint a magyar ajkú Holokauszt túlélők sorsával a modern kori Izraelben. Az OR-ZSE-n kívül oktat az ELTE-n is, valamint vendégelőadóként tanított a hollandiai Hanze Egyetemen, az ottani szociális munka tanszék felkérésére.

Zoltan Haberman, PhD associate professor and the head of the Social Work and Sociology Department at the Jewish Theological Seminary – University of Jewish Studies in Budapest. In his dissertation (2012) he focuses on the immanent aspects of social ethics in Jewish tradition. His main interests also include the history of the Jewish resistance movement during the Holocaust and the fate of the Hungarian speaking Holocaust survivors in the modern State of Israel. Beside the JTS – UJS he is the lecturer of the Eotvos Lorand University of Budapest, and as a guest lecturer he taught in the Hanze University in the Netherlands.



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The present paper can be separated into two distinct units, the first being a theoretical discussion, the second a more practical one. The first part is a brief overview of the various discourses apparent in the Holocaust narrative where I endeavour to proceed from the meta-narrative of the Holocaust to the timeliness of a personal conception of history that is based on micro- and oral history. This is how I will attempt to explain why I examine the newspaper *Új Kelet*¹ from a more personal, socio-historical point of view and not from the traditionally accepted historical, quantitative scientific perspective. In the first part I will outline Alexander's approach to trauma, at the same time expanding the theoretical frameworks. In my study of people traumatized by the Holocaust I will attempt to render the social and cultural aspects of my research more intelligible by looking at how social constructs inform both the researcher and the researched subject. The second larger unit moves onto the detailed socio-historical analysis of the *Új Kelet* narrative in the hopes of shedding more light on certain social phenomena.

Holocaust Narratives

Rosenfeld² gives a good summary of the numerous attacks Holocaust's canonized memory has had to face. 70 years after Auschwitz, Jewish and non-Jewish people alike question the justification and legitimacy of remembering itself, and the various forms of this remembrance. There are those who would lessen it, blur it or even deny it. We can envisage the struggle against the diverse forms Holocaust remembrance as if they appeared on a palette from one extreme to another. For instance, committed Jews detect the neglect of positive Jewish values in remembering the Holocaust, and there are those who oppose the moral self-absolution of the State of Israel presenting itself as a victim of

¹ *Új Kelet* [New Orient].] is a Zionist Jewish newspaper written in Hungarian, published initially in Kolozsvár (Cluj Napoca) from 1918 onwards, then in Israel.

² Alvin Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).



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the Holocaust, or those who view Holocaust remembrance as an excessive self-advocacy originating from the power position of Jewish people. And finally, there are those who feel that other, non-Jewish genocides are being overshadowed by the abundance of Holocaust remembrance, and those who believe that the Holocaust did not happen the way we think it did, there were not as many victims, and anyway, everyone suffered during the war. We could create a long list ending with extremist heads of Muslim states who out right deny the Holocaust, and the openly racist views of Neo-Nazi groups.

More and more voices in these heated debates call our attention to the importance of returning to the survivors and their memoirs. In the beginning, research focusing on the perpetrators' point of view was more widespread but later on, research focusing on victims gained ground as well. However, separating the two might feel a bit forced, thus, redefining some rigid and overused topics can prove to be useful. Individual human stories and their micro-historical presentation have become the favoured task of most researchers when they are working on or teaching Holocaust remembrance. Great, symbolical representational commemorations, monumental statues and museums are increasingly neglected because they appear to be emptied-out of meaning and therefore disappointing. Mnemo-political strategies and national identity politics that enforce the claim for exclusiveness have also lost their support. It seems that the time for locality and individual narratives has come. Refreshing examples from the internet include pages where micro-narratives are being processed in contemporary historical settings with photographs and documents, such as Centropa.³ Abandoning mnemo-political conflicts does not necessarily mean giving up, it rather signals that communities' and grass-roots organizations' honest communication have become more intimate. A good

³ "Centropa," *Megőrzött emlékek interaktív könyvtára* [Interactive library of preserved memories], accessed August 5, 2016, www.centropa.hu



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example for this is the Yellow-star Houses project⁴ or the Facebook group, “A Holokauszt és a családom” [“The Holocaust and My Family”]. When Rosenfeld wrote about the “end of the Holocaust”, he might have meant that after 70 years Holocaust remembrance, its interpretation, narrative and reading seem to be changing. However, it would not be appropriate to uncritically accept the exclusivity of micro-narratives and testimonies. Naturally, we cannot discount historians’, scholars’ and philosophers’ role in researching the general, more abstract phenomena of collective memory. At the same time, the various layers of personal memory, traditions and knowledge amassed by historians can be treated simultaneously and are legitimised as separately existing fields.⁵ I would like to call attention to the fact that there have been strengthening and weakening processes in post-Holocaust remembrance in the past 70 years, and it seems identity, traditions and the various segments of cult have moved into the forefront. One of the reasons for this is that history-writing itself and the questions of what constitutes proper scholarship – independent of Holocaust remembrance – are being continuously reconsidered. Postmodern story-writing, oral history and micro-biographies have become almost mainstream by today. One of the major factors in the changing processes of remembering is the changing of current or long-term political, power or economic interests. Another influential circumstance is the fact that the number of living witnesses are continuously diminishing. If more people are concerned in our closer environment or live among us as survivors; individuals, some of whom can be our friends, relatives, well-known people or even our enemies, all of this influences our remembering. Survivors’ guilt, shame, psychological problems, meaningful silence or even their presence itself render the act of remembering more intense and acute. Those who speak

⁴ “Csillagos házak, 1944-2014 [Yellow-star Houses Project, 1944-2014],” accessed August 5, 2016, www.csillagoshazak.hu

⁵ Gábor Gyáni, *Az elveszített múlt* [The Past We Can Lose] (Budapest: Nyitott Könyvműhely Kiadó, 2010).



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out as witnesses, victims or as humiliated people in sad, ashamed voices make remembering and historical research extremely difficult. Talking about questions of the Holocaust in a clear manner and researching these issues independent of emotions is only possible if we distance ourselves from the events and if there is practically no-one who could tell their own story. Unfortunately, today there are hardly any living survivors, meaning that Holocaust research has also changed significantly. This is also to say that several disparate effects come into play as we temporally move away from the Holocaust. On the one hand, 70 years after the event personal stories and eyewitness accounts are considered as rare treasures, and consequently, gain significance. On the other hand, the emotional intensity of the researched topic diminishes, that is, the emotional baggage does not interfere with historical or any other scholarly discipline's research any more.

The last 70 years have not passed without intense and unsettling emotions and debates. I do not intend to give a detailed analysis of these debates; I merely wanted to show that we really are talking about a passionate struggle of constantly changing, newer and newer scientific views, criticisms and refutations. During the past period of time, most of the intellectually decisive survivors, such as Kertész, Lévi, Wiesel, Améry and Heller have recounted the story of the Holocaust as a symbolic and mythical narrative; as an event that is unexplainable and incomprehensible in rational terms, the symbol of which is Auschwitz, as well as Mount Sinai. They emphasized the Holocaust's ethical and moral message for the world, rejecting positivist historians who would emphasize the significance of the perpetrators' motivations in "grave-robbing" and their overall calculation of possible gains (Aly Götz). These positivist historians speak primarily



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against the mystification of the Holocaust.⁶ There were debates about Hanna Arendt's theories on the Jewish Councils' collaboration and the "banality of evil", which have since lost their relevance, although at the time, after the Eichmann trial, they were considered to be exciting and unsettling views. However, by today they have come to be viewed as rough and oversimplified, possibly leading to negative misinterpretations. The members of the Jewish Council were also victims of the Nazi killing machinery; they were not heroes but fallible human beings who were consciously intimidated and abused in cruel ways. There were no Jewish Councils in many Soviet-ruled territories and yet, Jews were still massacred, and on many occasions in more cruel ways than in Poland where there were no collaborating Jewish Councils everywhere either. Unjust accusations that rendered Jewish Councils into scapegoats also originate from false premises. Unfortunately, Bauman also contributed to the prevalence of this viewpoint but facts are contradictory, too. The banality of evil is an interesting notion and it has the capacity to explain a few things but not too many. There is an intense debate between the intentionalists (Goldhagen and Dawidowitz), the functionalist-structuralists (Hilberg and Bauman) and others as to whether the plan and implementation of the Jewish population's massacre came from above, from Hitler and the leadership or from below, from the lower classes of the German population. By today, the controversy has obviously been synthesised and has become somewhat outworn. Bauman cites modernity as the explanation for the Holocaust, and Goldhagen cites the sadistic tendencies inherent in Germans and German society. Today, both of these viewpoints appear as exaggerations.

⁶ The most important among these in Hungary are Aly Götz, Christian Gerlach, Gábor Kádár, Zoltán Vági and Krisztián Ungváry.



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Of course, I have not mentioned socio-psychological and other discourses from among the vast list of literature as arguments around concepts such as sites of memory, museums, places of memory and representations of the Holocaust fill volumes and volumes of books. However, it has to be noted that while scientific and philosophical debates on Holocaust remembrance have remained within intellectual circles, there has been a popularization process of Holocaust remembrance. The graphic novel, *Maus* was still largely restricted to intellectual elites, as well as Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). On the other hand, the fact that the Washington Holocaust Museum's opening in 1993 coincided with the release of Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, which changed and legitimately canonized the Holocaust in popular culture can be considered a huge breakthrough. This was further reinforced by the release of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*) in 1997 which received a number of academy and other awards. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin was inaugurated in 2005. The fact that the Holocaust has become part and parcel of popular culture is also signalled by the release of Quentin Tarantino's, who is in a way the symbol of American popular culture, *Inglourious Basterds* to worldwide acclaim in 2009. Apart from the aesthetic considerations and other assessments, I merely wanted to point out that after 70 years the Holocaust has become an integral part of our civilization's collective consciousness and has seceded from real historical events. The "end of the Holocaust" signals for me that this event that happened 70 years ago has, on the one hand, become an unavoidable symbol of Western civilization with a considerable socio-ethical bearing but not exactly in the same way Heller and Kertész had hoped for or thought. The Holocaust has become the genocide of genocides but in a simplified form, as a conflict of Jews and Nazis, good and evil, perpetrators and victims, each acting according to its proper function with the appropriate message, as a myth or a meta-narrative is supposed to be. On the other hand, there is also the story of the researchers who investigate eye witness accounts and



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documents, inherently closer to reality but reaching much narrower audiences. This is the reason why the Holocaust is becoming more and more universal and has become the linguistic synonym of all sorts of horrible ethnic cleansings, massacres and the murder of innocent people. More and more people demand that Jewish people should not monopolize the term Holocaust. We are at the beginning of a process which will eventually become very similar to Jesus's or Moses's metaphorical story. There is an abyss between the reality of ordinary people and the Grand Narrative. As usual, historical research remains in the midst of those interested, and the Grand Narrative goes on its way

The Holocaust and Social Construction

Several researchers have undertaken the investigation of post-Holocaust Israeli society's various segments. Using different disciplines, Mann⁷ relies on modernity and Tel-Aviv's Jewish urban space in her investigation of contemporary social phenomena. Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I Waxman⁸ look at Holocaust remembrance and identity from the point of view of contemporary social and cultural patterns in relation to Israel and the diaspora. Zertal⁹ makes use of the terminology of power, and the provocative and controversial Pappa¹⁰ calls forth a rather more traditional discipline of history. The theoretical framework of this study is based on Jeffrey C. Alexander's notion of cultural sociology, prevalent in Hungary as well. Within this, I based my research on his most relevant work, *Trauma*.¹¹ It was Alexander who introduced the concept and theory of "cultural

⁷ Barbara E. Mann, *A Place in History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁸ Uzi Rebhun and Chaim I Waxman (Eds), *Jews in Israel* (Hannover & London: Brandeis University Press, 2004).

⁹ Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power* (Berkley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Ilan Papp, *The Idea of Israel* (London & New York: Verso, 2014).

¹¹ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).



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sociology” as opposed to classic theories of the “sociology of culture”. For Alexander, the concept of culture gained significance starting from the 90s. The recounting and various codes of trauma narratives are the results of collective cultural processes. This way, trauma is also a social construction. Thus, in my study I rely on Alexander and consider the language apparent in contemporary media as a retelling of a coded story. We recount trauma as if we were telling a story which is more a question of certain cultures than the result of oppressive systems, acknowledging at the same time that this latter also contributes to the formation of trauma. Following Durkheim, Alexander considered culture both as a classificatory system that sets up hierarchies and both as a realistic social practice, a deterministic, yet malleable system. Alexander essentially interprets narratives and codes while using we instead of I, signalling that for him, trauma is not individual but collective. In the centre of Alexander’s Durkheimian cultural theory in the 90s, we can find modern societies’ collective emotions and thoughts, those cultural representations or “collective notions” through whose everyday maintenance and use society’s members render modern society’s restrictive institutions meaningful. He formulates the idea that trauma is not about “who did what to me” but rather about “who are the people who did this to us”. This, of course, can be true for the Holocaust trauma but also for any other collective abuse carried out by other discriminating groups. Power and politics can, for instance, also traumatize a person and it is also true that it is individuals who suffer, but ideologies and the collective consciousness presuppose some sort of societal, cultural construction. The most significant innovation of Alexander’s theory is that – as opposed to Bourdieu’s, Foucault’s or Stuart Hall’s theories raising similar questions – he considers the cultural forms that feed the above collective notions independent from the ruling economic-social-ideological structures.



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Of course, when I say this, I abstract away from language and linguistic expression and use these terms in a symbolical sense. The newspaper articles and texts constitute the telling of a story and this is where I am always looking for the subtext, trying to interpret it and to further develop the texts' symbolic meaning beyond themselves. According to Alexander, those meaning-assigning and interpreting cultural practices through which participants render their lives' fundamental limits and possibilities meaningful and acceptable, are feeding from such cultural codes which are just as objective as any other societal fact that is more material than culture. There can be wars and catastrophes with mass deaths and suffering but if there is no collective narrative that would organize it all into a trauma, then these events will not become traumas while suffering and loss have indeed occurred. These autonomous cultural codes which represent the universal values of societal solidarity are reproduced in society's consciousness independently of any dominant economic and ideological determination, forming at the same time active participants' widely accepted beliefs parallel to those same determinations.

Interpreting *Új Kelet* from a Cultural-sociological Point of View

Ari Shavit¹², journalist and writer was born and still resides in Israel. His historical nonfiction novel describing the newly-born Israel's heroic efforts and enormous successes in the first decade gained international notoriety. He paints a graphic socio-historical picture of Israel in a good literary style, too. He unravels the lives of four very

¹² Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2013). Shavit served in the parachute regiment of the army and studied philosophy at the Hebrew University. In the 1980s he worked for *Koteret Rashit*, a progressive weekly magazine. At the beginning of the 90s he was co-president of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. In 1995, he joined the leftist liberal paper, *Haaretz* where he is today the leader of the political column and a member of the editorial board. Parallel to this, he is working as a leading commentator at the public service television and he is also a frequent guest in American political tv shows; today he is one of the best-know experts of the Middle East. The reputed Israeli journalist set out to give an overview of the history of the "promised land" in a sizeable book (496 pages), its journey through victories and tragedies from Biblical times to today, with an emphasis on the period from the foundation of the state in 1948 to today.



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different Holocaust survivors, their journey to Israel and their fate thereafter. Then, he introduces the typical life of Holocaust survivors in Israel through the first decade of the history of a small town called Bizaron¹³, built close to Tel Aviv. “Within a decade [following its foundation in 1948] Israel’s population tripled. [...] The decisive victory in the 1948 war gave birth to the nation and the decisive victory in the 1956 Sinai campaign has stabilized it. [...] The energy was unceasing. Wherever one went there was demolition and destruction. In accordance with a national master plan devised by the government’s leading architects and civil engineers in 1950 [...] [i]n addition to the new villages, thirty new towns were founded. [...] A popular conscription army that performed many non-military duties – such as teaching its new soldiers Hebrew – became a powerful melting pot of the new society. A state-run education system tripled in size within a decade [and] public hospitals and public health clinics provided advanced medical care to most Israelis.”¹⁴ “In summer everyone gathers around the square blue cart of the iceman who wins the children’s heart with merry squirts of ice water. Those lucky enough to have a bathtub at home fill it on Thursdays and throw a carp in to make gefilte fish for Shabbat. And every summer evening the immigrants sit on their balconies to read *Maariv* or the Labor Party’s *Davar* or the Hungarian-language *Uj Kelet*. At night the Russians drink vodka [...]”¹⁵ “Although they are only in their thirties and forties, almost every parent in the housing estate is bereft of a father or mother, of a family that is no more. Almost every child in the housing estate knows that his or her parents have a past that one should not ask about. The Bizaron housing estate lives its life under a silent mountain of death.”¹⁶ By the end of the 1950s – following the

¹³ Bizaron was a quickly established housing estate for new immigrants, a so-called shikun.

¹⁴ This is a narrative of Israel’s first decade following its foundation in 1948, reconstructed by me based and quoted from Shavit’s *My Promised Land*, 181, 185, 194.

¹⁵ Shavit, 204.

¹⁶ Shavit, 202.



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Holocaust, the foundation of the Jewish state and the uprising in 1956 – the number of Hungarian-speaking Jews in Israel was about a hundred thousand according to estimates. The *Új Kelet* newspaper, which was originally founded in Transylvania by Zionist Jewish intellectuals in 1918, started being regularly published in Israel as of 1948. During this time, it was published in about ten or twenty thousand copies daily. Compared to the Hungarian-language newspapers of the Jewish diaspora, *Új Kelet* was a quite liberal newspaper, its operation dependant on market demands. At this time, it was impossible to operate such a newspaper in Hungary because it was imperative to follow communist ideological doctrines. *Új Élet* [New Life], a Hungarian Jewish denominational newspaper was, for instance, a heavily censored paper, forced into an ideologically limited position and representing one-sided messages. It was Péter György¹⁷ who attempted to retrace¹⁸ what happened to Holocaust survivors who stayed behind in Hungary and who were eventually absorbed into the new system. “As it was the case in the Soviet Union, in the Rákosi regime as well (based on political philosophy and practice, that is, communism and Stalinism) world history was present in every sentence and space, in every denunciation and every forced or voluntary confession. It was not merely tyranny; it was wanting a new world.”¹⁹ The common element that tied Holocaust survivors together in Hungary, Israel and North-America was the “wanting of a new world”. In order to process their traumas they needed a new ideology with which they could build their future. This is how Ágnes Heller writes about it: “I was a Zionist for two years, which can be understood as psychodrama. As young Zionists, we marched on the street, singing and screaming Hebrew songs. We were finally ourselves, openly,

¹⁷ Péter György, *Az ismeretlen nyelv* [The Unknown Language] (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 2016).

¹⁸ “Still, history lives in memory – as Aleida Assmann says it: from individual experience to public performance.” (György, 31. All the English translations of the excerpts from this book appear in my translation – Kata Gyuris.)

¹⁹ György, 30.



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without fear. In this psychodrama, we forgot about all our tensions. The shock had passed: I could finally sing the national anthem. It was with the Zionists' help that I finally managed to get rid of some of the depressing memories and I felt no reason not to stay in Hungary, especially since I love the Hungarian language best – I don't even speak Hebrew."²⁰

Új Kelet was read by people from the most various groups – religious people and left-wing atheists, urbanites and kibbutz dwellers, young and old people, people coming from all parts of Hungary's historical territory, supporters of right- and left-wing parties. Israeli society was also characterized by versatility and within that, *Új Kelet* embodied these various people's desires and interests, providing them with a common denominator. *Új Kelet* created such a platform where Jewish people from among the Hungarian diasporas in Ukraine, Slovakia, Serbia, Transylvania, Budapest and other urban or rural places; people with different socio-economic backgrounds; Orthodox, Neolog, atheist, Zionist, socialist (or any combination thereof) Jews on various levels of assimilation could connect with one another. On the other hand, Holocaust was also a common fate, a common trauma but there was general silence and repression up until the Eichmann trial in 1961. The versatility was further reinforced by the fact that each person's experience of the Holocaust was an individual story; there were differences among those who survived in concentration camps or ghettos or in labour service, those who were beaten and humiliated, or survived the horror by hiding or using Christian documents or creating fake Shutzpasses or those who helped the resistance. Aside from this, there was a consensus as well in that a new home country needs to be built; a country must be created for the Jewish population.

²⁰ Ágnes Heller and János Kőbányai, *Bicikliző majom* [Monkey on a Bicycle] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 1998). All the English translations of the excerpts from this book appear in my translation – K. Gy.



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One of the reasons for *Új Kelet*'s success is that the paper managed to keep its independence. Talented, ambitious young people who wished to be integrated into Israeli life (such as Tamás Lampel-Tomi Lapid who later became Israel's Deputy Prime Minister) published their writings in it, as well as people who wished to preserve the Hungarian language and culture along with their Hebrew-Jewish commitment. There were those traumatized people who never wanted to speak or remember in Hungarian again; they only focused on the future. This is also a coping mechanism. Those who looked down on or opposed the reading of *Új Kelet* mainly came from among this group of people. There was certainly some sort of a contradiction between preserving the values of the Hungarian language and culture and the ideology of a Zionist Hebrew-speaking home country. The type of Jewish person they wished to construct was a Hebrew-speaking, proud Israeli national who cannot speak in any other language. This ideology was part of the Israeli dream. Many claimed that old galut (diaspora) reflections were the problem that led to the Holocaust. The accusation that *Új Kelet* was a newspaper for people who did not speak Hebrew is, of course, groundless. Although there really were immigrants who had trouble learning Hebrew, the readership of *Új Kelet* was much larger than that. Hungarian-speaking Jews were fluent in several languages and it was not extraordinary that they were conversant in three or four languages. Many of them read Hebrew newspapers as well.

***Új Kelet* In Between Ideologies**

Michael Marton, the son of Ernő Marton, the founding editor-in-chief of *Új Kelet* gave me an interview in November 2015. Michael Marton, who is in his 80s today, was also the editor-in-chief of the newspaper for a while. As a young man, Michael had access to the editorial office of *Új Kelet* in the 50s and 60s and told me the following story.



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There was general panic among the editorial staff when Joel Teitelbaum, the great Hasidic Rabi announced that it was no longer allowed to read *Új Kelet*. As an antecedent, it must be mentioned in order to understand the story that Teitelbaum was obviously an anti-Zionist, who, after moving to Szatmár County, was referred to as the Szatmár Rebbe and held great authority there. Dezső Schön²¹ had previously written about the history of Hasidic Rabbi dynasties, among others the Teitelbaums, at the request of Ernő Marton. His writings were published in parts in *Új Kelet* when it was still based in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) and they later appeared in a book format as well. In the 50s and 60s, according to the estimates, 20% of *Új Kelet*'s readers were deeply religious and would accept the Rabbi's authority. The editors were understandably worried: What happens if the paper's readership and published copies diminish by 20%? The whole enterprise could fail. However, they were surprised to see that in the months that followed Teitelbaum's announcement, not fewer but more people bought the paper. What could have been the reason for this? How was it possible that despite the excommunication of the Rabbi more copies of the paper were sold? The explanation was that since the large majority of readers were poor, most copies went from one person to another, being read by several people. Despite Teitelbaum's prohibition, they still wanted to read the paper but they had to keep it a secret so they could not circulate a single copy any more, one person could only read one paper so that no-one else saw what he was doing. People were so attached to the newspaper that they were willing to take the risk of reading it in secret.

The content of *Új Kelet* was not much different from that of an average daily paper. Readers could read about news in internal and foreign politics, all related to Israel in the

²¹ He later became the editor-in-chief of *Új Kelet* in Israel. His most important work is: Dezső Schön, *Istenkeresők a Kárpátok alatt* [God-seekers Under the Carpathians] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 1997).



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language of the Galut; cultural, literary and scientific articles, program offers, film and theatre reviews, advertisements, etc. If we look at the articles published in *Új Kelet*, there are only a few Holocaust reminiscences, and even if there are some, at the end of them we also find what renders all of it meaningful: state building and the ethos of a new and old home for Jewish people. After the horrors of the Holocaust, people had to face many difficulties in the new Jewish state, usually more than they had had to in their old home. Still, many of them were happy to be alive. *Új Kelet* can also be described as a middle class newspaper. It did not mean to be avantgard or pioneering in any way but it was not too traditionalistic either. It reflected contemporary Israel's social norms and values. One of Tamás Lampel's (Tomi Lapid's) stories illustrates the paper's style and middle class values quite well. Lapid, who was an influential figure of the spirit of the age and held the same values that *Új Kelet* also represented did not make it a secret that he considered the newspaper as a springboard. He rose rapidly from one position to another. Later, he joined the similarly mainstream *Maariv*, a Hebrew-language newspaper with a much higher number of copies. He considered this a huge step forward and eventually went onto become a successful tv personality and politician. He was also the editor-in-chief of the first Hebrew women's magazine; he even chose the name of the magazine: "At" (the female "You" in Hebrew). He talks about it in such a way: "The way I pictured the ideal reader for the magazine – around 35, a university graduate, mother of two, husband is a soldier, she wants to buy a new refrigerator and wants to go to the cinema or the theatre at least once a week."²²

²² At the time of the writing of this article, the original, English-language edition of Yair Lapid's *Memories After My Death* where the quotation is from was not available to me, therefore, for the purposes of this paper I use the Hungarian edition: Jáir Lapid, *Síron túli emlékeim [Memories After My Death]* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2012, 167.) My English translation – K. Gy.



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He found great strength in his faith in the future, that his children would lead their lives as Israeli citizens in a free Jewish state. The second generation did not even learn to speak Hungarian, thus, with the ever-narrowing circle of Holocaust survivors, *Új Kelet's* readership diminished in proportion.

An interesting article praises Hungary in the April 4, 1960 number with the following title: "The fifteenth birthday of today's Hungary". The author of the article does not only consider Hungary's liberation from under German and Hungarian Nazi rule as a cause for celebration but also believes that Hungary in 1960 is a better place compared to Horthy's oppressive regime before the Shoah. Let us not forget that at this time there still existed diplomatic relations between the two countries. Six days after the birth of the Jewish state, on May 21, 1948, Hungary acknowledged the independent State of Israel, then, they agreed on initiating diplomatic relations. After the six-day war in 1967 Hungary terminated diplomatic relations following the orders of the Soviet Union. Thus, 15 years after the Holocaust, Hungary is welcome and judged in a favourable light by the Hungarian-speaking Israeli public. Up until the 1960s, one could even get their hands on some copies of *Új Kelet* through the Israeli embassy in Hungary. The above-mentioned article would consider it a joy-killer to emphasise the negative aspects of the communist system, it rather speaks in the voice of hope and trust. I believe that this is further reinforced by the fact that for Hungarian survivors of the Holocaust, the positive judgment of Hungarian culture and that of Hungarian people was still important, even after the horrors of the Holocaust. It was their spiritual need to believe that despite the destruction, their old lives had meaning, they had happy childhoods and happy family lives. Jewish people took considerable part in the development of the Hungarian language and culture, in bettering pre-Shoah society. Starting from the 19th century, Jews began assimilating rapidly and became part of almost all segments of Hungarian society. They mainly became successful in the fields of culture, economy and science.



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They wanted to believe that not everyone was a murderer and that there were happy parts of their lives with happy memories where they could find strength. They had schoolmates and friends. Not everyone hated them and not everyone wanted them to die. Their lives before the Holocaust were beautiful and full, and reading *Új Kelet* helped the traumatized survivors to really experience the continuity of their self-identity.

To sum up: according to psychological research, it is generally true of traumatized people, especially of Holocaust survivors, that in order to process their traumas, they need to find strength in their past. *Új Kelet* provided the bridge for Holocaust survivors that could join their intact world before the horrors of the Holocaust to their new, post-Holocaust broken lives. *Új Kelet*, through the Hungarian language and the occasional reports on Hungary, conjured up for its readers their pre-trauma lives but at the same time, as the embodiment of a normal and calculable life, linked them with their present as well by providing everyday news about their new homeland. Evoking past memories from their old homes was a way to process trauma and to lead them into the reality of the here and now. It can be seen from the numbers published during the first 25 years of *Új Kelet* that these people merely wanted to lead a normal life. There were some who wanted to be done with the past and never look back but many of them needed – even despite expectations and pressure coming from society – to maintain ties to their pre-trauma selves, based on which they could build their own and their descendants' future little by little.

The Generation of Destruction and Resurrection



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By 2015, the original newspaper practically disappeared, although they have been trying to modernise it in various online and print formats, based on different editorial principles. Those who knew, read and liked this medium were sorry to acknowledge that a period had ended. Among enterprises restarting with similar names, there may be some that are innovative but *Új Kelet* is the base, the embodiment and common denominator of a generation in a special historical time and place. Seventy years after the Holocaust, it is natural that the generation which kept the paper alive as its readers and intellectual creators, can no longer carry forward the values that were present in the paper. *Új Kelet* was the paper of those who survived the Holocaust, and within that, those who chose Israel as their new homeland.

They undertook Zionism quite naturally, that is, the task of creating a Jewish homeland where they can live proudly as Jewish people. They disagreed with those who accused them of “going to death camps as animals go to the slaughterhouse”. They were there, they knew what had happened. They also knew that many resisted as much as it was possible, and they did not accept unjust accusations. It was, however, impossible to process the trauma, the shame and the immeasurable grief they lived through. On the other hand, building the Jewish homeland and the struggle that came with it, all the hard work, the fights and sacrifices was some sort of a cure or at least relief for them. The world in which they lived fell completely apart and was destroyed by the Nazis, and in our case, by their Hungarian henchmen. It was impossible to bring back the world before the Holocaust so they were attempting to build a new one.

They became successful and they fought for and created a country which was built on the age-old pillars of the Jewish faith and tradition. The facts that a country was founded again and a language was resurrected after not being in existence or use for two thousand years are unprecedented in history. They became participants and creators of



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a miracle they had been waiting for two thousand years. They obviously knew and loved the Hebrew language. Who would claim that Ephraim Kishon or Tomi Lapid did not speak Hebrew? They spoke many languages, knew many cultures from Yiddish to Romanian, from Biblical Hebrew to Serbian and Slovakian, since they all grew up in multicultural environments. The Jewish population living on Hungary's historical territory had been an organic part of Hungarian intellectual and economic life up until the Holocaust. Modernization was unimaginable for Hungary without the achievements of its Jewish population. However, as of the 1920s, there was a visible fracture and Holocaust's cruel history ruined everything. The surviving Jews in Israel tried to maintain the old traditions at least among themselves but they did not intend to pass them on. They wanted to raise their children to be Hebrew-speaking Israelis. Even if the name of the newspaper lives on in some form, the ethos that *Új Kelet* meant cannot be brought back: that generation whose members were Holocaust survivors in Hungary, and who found a cure for the traumas suffered due to the cruel massacre of their communities in their struggle for Israel, is gone by now.

Who were these people? Let us have a look at a few examples and mention a few names.

Ervin Galili Gemeiner was born in 1922 in the Garam (Hron) Valley in Slovakia. He was a member of the Makkabi Hatzair since childhood, and one of the leaders of the Betár movement. He was cited to court in 1940 with accusations of luring Hungarian nationals to immigrate. Between 1940 and 1942, he wrote for the *Képes Családi Lapok* [*Family Papers with Pictures*], published in Budapest with Jenő Lévai as its editor-in-chief. He did labour service in Mauthausen and Günskirchen. In 1949, he made an Aliyah. He started working for *Új Kelet* in 1954 and settled in Safed. He founded the Martyrs' Synagogue in Safed and became its magistrate. For more than four years, he regularly published reports in *Maariv*, as well as *Izraeli Kurír*, a *Hét Tükre*, the Canadian paper, *Menora* or the



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New York-based *Figyelő*. A significant part of his writings is research on the Hungarian Holocaust and its remembrance. Ervin Gemeiner published his collected articles as a private publication in Safed in 1984 with the title *The Generation of Destruction and Resurrection*. I quote the following lines from Ervin Galili Gemeiner, which he originally published with the title “A világ erkölcsi alapja születésnapjára (sávuoti elmélkedések) [For the birthday of the moral base of world (meditations during Shavout)]” in the May 27, 1982 number of *A Hét Tükre* [*The Mirror of the Week*]. These are typical words, both from a linguistic and an ideological point of view:

“But we, faithful to the spirit of the Declaration on Mount Sinai, to Moses’s and the Prophets’ teachings, will keep sowing the seeds on the world’s roads until love for mankind, the olive branch of peace sprouts from it, the way Hillel said in the Torah: the principle of “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. This teaching is the secret to our people’s thousand-year standing and the mission of its future.”²³

He was also editor of an anthology created by 63 Hungarian-speaking Israeli writers and public figures: *We are Witnesses!* was published privately on the 25th anniversary of the Shoah. If we look at the authors, we can see a clear picture of people who all embodied the generation of *Új Kelet*. Among the authors of the anthology we can find Jenő Frenkel (chief Rabbi of Szeged after the retirement of Immánuel Löw), Lea Fürst (Ottó Komoly’s daughter), Sándor Gervai (the grandson of Slomó Granzfried, the author of *Kicur Sulchan Aruch*), László Gonda (teacher, historian), Károly Gárdos DOS (world famous political caricaturist), Imre Heller (Bernát Heller’s son), Jesurun (Szabó) Eljahu (writer, fighter for the illegal Palestinian Stern Group), Tom Lapid (Tamás Lampel, Minister of Justice,

²³ Galili Gemeiner, Ervin, “A világ erkölcsi alapja születésnapjára (sávuoti elmélkedések) [For the birthday of the moral base of world (meditations during Shavout)],” *A Hét Tükre* May 27, 1982. My translation from the Hungarian original – K. Gy.



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Deputy Prime Minister), Ernő Marton (founder-editor of *Új Kelet*, former deputy mayor of Kolozsvár), Joel Pálgi (Emil Nussbacher, parachutist partisan, IDF major, CEO of ELAL), Jozsef Schaffer (sociologist, university teacher), Béla Vágó (historian, university teacher), Márta Aczél (opera singer), Oszi Auslander (David Aszael, high school principal, director of Merkaz Lechinuch Dati, a religious education centre), Rafael Ben-Shalom (Friedel) (Israeli ambassador in several countries), Slomo-Jákov Grosz (the head of Agudat Jisrael in Transylvania, representative of multiple knessets), Lea Schnapp (painter, writer), dr. Valéria Stark (doctor, Nordau prize-winning author), Blanka Tauber (Dizengoff prize-winning painter) and the list goes on...

Ernő Marton's and Richard Crossman's Argument. Hitchcock's Film

Ernő Marton (1896, Dicsőszentmárton – 1960, Jerusalem) was the editor-in-chief of *Új Kelet*, member of the Zionist World Congress' Executive Committee, delegate of the Romanian parliament's Jewish Party and deputy mayor of Kolozsvár. The newspaper was published in Transylvania from 1918, and then, in Israel as of 1948. *Új Kelet* is regarded as the greatest Hungarian-language intellectual and cultural Jewish newspaper after the Holocaust. Ernő Marton and indirectly the *Új Kelet* generation as well played a primordial role in the foundation of the State of Israel. Perhaps this story is not known for many so it is worthwhile evoking it.

Directly after the Holocaust in 1946, the USA and Great-Britain created a mixed Anglo-American Committee in order to investigate and report on the situation in Palestine: on the question of Arab and Jewish nationalistic endeavours and the position of Jews after the Holocaust. They were to propose suggestions for the settling of the situation in their report. The Committee had six American and six British members, among others Richard Crossman, a member of the British Labour Party. The committee members conducted interviews, among others with several Holocaust survivors, and they also investigated



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several locations in Europe and in Palestine as well. Richard Crossman initially supported the Arab cause and believed that the ultimate goal should be to create a state with an Arab majority and a Jewish minority. Ernő Marton was one of the biggest influences on Crossman who eventually encouraged him to reconsider his position. Since the Committee's initial suggestion (which was unfavourable to the Jewish population) was not accepted either by the Arabs or the Jews, the decision was referred to UN jurisdiction. Marton first met Crossman in Vienna in 1946. The Jewish Agency and the Jewish World Congress asked Marton to report on the situation of Jewish people to the Committee. He was interrogated in Vienna at the American headquarters about the situation of Hungarian and Romanian Jews. The Palestinian press even reported about the details of the interrogation, The Committee asked quite a number of questions from Marton, and one of the most curious interrogators was Richard Crossman. The head of the Committee was the American federal judge, Joseph Hutcheson. Marton thought Crossman's name was familiar but he could not place it. After the interview, both Hutcheson and Crossman shook Marton's hand approvingly but Crossman asked for another meeting since he was deeply unsettled by Marton's report. They met in the Sacher Hotel, again in Vienna, this being the headquarters of the invading British army at the time. Marton finally remembered where he had heard Crossman's name: during the war, he was the announcer and editor of a German-language anti-Nazi propaganda broadcast in the London radio. Marton, along with many other German-speaking people listened to this broadcast during the war whenever they could. Marton thanked Crossman since these broadcasts always provided a little hope and comfort in those terrible times. Crossman also thanked Marton for his kind words and told him that at the time, he had no idea what horrible things were being done to Jewish people...He later found out about the horrors of the Holocaust since he was among the first British officers to enter the death camp at Dachau. He also actively participated in the making of



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a British documentary about the horrors of the concentration camps, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. This film can be found on the internet today. The Committee thought that Marton's report was so important that at the request of Hutcheson, he had to hand it in on paper as well. The next day, Marton brought a 92-page document to the Committee, which he had dictated to several typists over the previous night. The Committee asked Crossman to translate the text, which he did conscientiously and much of text ended up in the final report. Marton articulated a strong statement according to which Hitlerism did not disappear with the death of Hitler, which is why there was a need for a Jewish state. Unfortunately, after seventy years, Marton's vision seems to have been proved right. He tried to convince Crossman about the necessity of a Jewish state because he thought that only the existence of the State of Israel could heal the wounds caused by the Holocaust. However, Crossman foresaw the great conflict between Arabs and Jews, already present, and for this reason, he was hesitant about creating a Jewish state. He interrogated Marton about his relationship with the Arabs and Marton seemed to envision peaceful cohabitation since the teaching "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" had been the secret for Jewish people's thousand-year endurance and the mission of the future. Later on, Crossman also joined the Zionist cause, partially influenced by Chaim Weizman, the first prime minister of Israel. Ernő Marton embodied the fate of this generation: the enthusiasm and desire of people who had immigrated after the trauma of the Holocaust to a new homeland, first to Palestine, then to Israel. This is what *Új Kelet* also symbolised.