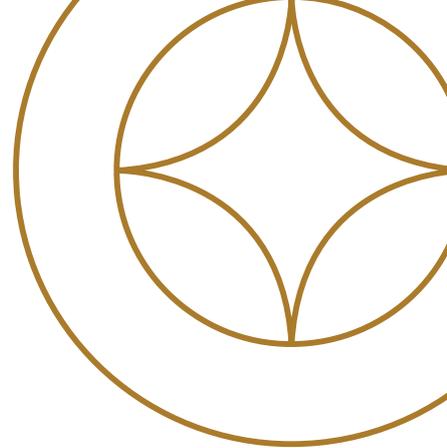


# Coming back - coming home?

## The Emigration Dilemmas of Hungarian Jews, 1945-1949

27 October 2022 (Hungarian-English international conference)

Presentations: 25 min



### PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

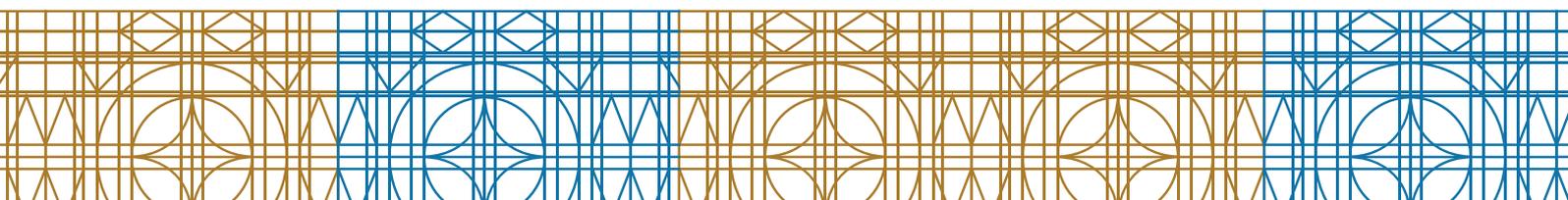
9:30 - 9:35 Welcome speech: **Dr. András Zima** (HDKE Director)

#### SECTION I. CHAIR: ATTILA JAKAB

- 9:35 - 10:00 **Attila Novák** (Senior Research Fellow, Molnár Tamás Research Institute, NKE - Ignác Goldziher Institute for Jewish History and Culture): ***Commitment and reality. A snapshot of the (group) Jewish emigration from Hungary (1945-1946)***
- 10:00 - 10:25 **Kinga Frojimovics** (historian and archivist, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, Vienna, Austria): ***The dilemmas of Jews on their aliyah from Hungary in the second half of the 1940s***
- 10:25 - 10:50 **Ágnes Kelemen** (Historian, Masaryk Institute and Archives, Czech Academy of Sciences): ***Emigrant past and staying at home***
- 10:50 - 11:15 Discussion, comments
- 11:15 - 11:30 Break

#### SECTION II. CHAIR: KINGA FROJIMOVICS

- 11:30 - 11:55 **András Szécsényi** (Historian, Historical Archives of the State Security Services, Scientific Department): ***The return dilemmas, possibilities and return routes of Hungarian Jews deported to Bergen-Belsen after liberation***
- 11:55 - 12:20 **Eva Fried** (former Dep HoD of the Swedish IHRA-delegation): ***A reluctantly transferred Hungarian heritage***
- 12:20 - 12:45 **Alice Freifeld** (Associate Professor Emerita, University of Florida, Gainesville, Department of History): ***Returnees on the edge***
- 12:45 - 13:10 Discussion, comments
- 13:10 - 14:30 Lunch break



## SECTION III. CHAIR: ATTILA NOVÁK

- 14:30 - 14:55 **Levente Olosz** (historian, HDKE – Clio Institut): *The Hungarian Jerida. Emigration back from Israel to Hungary between 1949 and 1954*
- 14:55 - 15:45 **Viktória Bányai** (Senior Research Fellow, Minority Studies Researcher, ELTE) - **Rita Horváth** (literary scholar, historian, Holocaust researcher): *Purim-Spiels after the Shoah: traditional form with topical content*
- 15:45 - 16:00 Discussion, comments
- 16:00 **Closing speech: Attila Jakab**

### *Coming back - coming home?*

#### **The Emigration Dilemmas of Hungarian Jews, 1945-1949**

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##### **Attila Novák:**

###### ***Commitment and reality.***

###### ***A snapshot of the (group) Jewish emigration from Hungary (1945-1946)***

Abstract: In the spring of 1946, the Budapest State Police detained Hungarian Jews who, using false identity cards and - on several occasions - accepting financial compensation from certain emigrants, accompanied transports by rail to Austria. The transports were made up of Jews who had survived the Holocaust and wanted to leave Hungary. The police interrogations clearly outlined a world where (Zionist) ideological commitment, the desire to flee at all costs and the need to leave for economic reasons were all present, but where these dimensions often conflicted with one another.

Based on the case of Géza Homonai, the lecture attempts to outline the historical possibilities of the part of Hungarian Jewry that chose to leave after the Shoah, and to sketch the socio-political background that accompanied this uncommon historical movement.

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##### **Kinga Frojimovics:**

###### ***The dilemmas of Jews on their aliyah from Hungary***

###### ***in the second half of the 1940s***

Abstract: The Jews, labour service people, labour camp and concentration camp survivors who returned to Hungary at the end of the war or after liberation were mainly waiting for their family members who had been deported elsewhere to return to their former homes, but whose fate during the war they had no reliable information about. Many people have spent years trying to find out what happened to the members of their family during the Holocaust, based on correspondence with various authorities and the often-conflicting accounts of returning survivors. In a precarious situation, survivors made fragile, uncertain, and frequently changed plans on how and where to continue their lives. In my presentation, I will present the dilemmas and emigration strategies of survivors who emigrated to Israel in the second half of the 1940s, based on family legacies, memories and various testimonies.

**Kelemen Ágnes:**

*Emigrant past and staying at home*

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Abstract: It is apparently a contradiction that such a group of Hungarian „remnant Jewry” chose to stay in Hungary who held great potential for emigration (knowledge of foreign languages, internationally practicable profession, connections): intellectuals who had lived in emigration before the Shoah. The politically motivated return of those who believed in building socialism played a role in this. However, the majority of this group had returned during WWII and survived the Shoah in Hungary. Thus, after 1945 they stayed rather than returned. This was due to the new possibilities for their professional fulfillment. They previously left because of legislative and societal manifestations of antisemitism during the Horthy-era, which fact provided them with a new kind of capital in a short timeframe (1945-49): political reliability. The thus obtainable professional fulfillment could counterweigh arguments for a second emigration.

**András Szécsényi:**

*The return dilemmas, possibilities and return routes of Hungarian Jews deported to Bergen-Belsen after liberation*

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Abstract: My lecture aims to present the strategies, dilemmas and return routes of the 15,000 Hungarian Jews deported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in the months following the liberation of the camp (15 April 1945). In the first part of the presentation, I will briefly outline the main events of the liberation and evacuation of the camp.

In the main part of the lecture I will present the constraints and individual strategies within which the dilemma of return or emigration can be examined. In this context, I will describe the main places where the Hungarian Jews of Belsen were sent in the spring and summer of 1945: the sanatorium camps in Sweden, the DP (displaced persons) camps in Germany and Terezín (Theresienstadt). Following the above, I will describe, through individual examples, how, in this “semi-freedom”, individual intentions and strategies, as well as external constraints, led them to decide to return to their former homeland or to seek a new one. Finally, I will describe the main routes of return for the majority and the main circumstances of the journey.

**Eva Fried:**

*A reluctantly transferred Hungarian heritage*

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Abstract: As a child I thought the war took place ages ago, long before I was born. Eventually I realized that the war ended only eight years before my birth. My eldest brother was born two years after the war. My mother was 25 and highly pregnant when entering her new country, Sweden. My parents met in Germany in 1946. Soon after their marriage they found out that my mother’s two sisters had been brought by the Red Cross to Sweden from Bergen Belsen. So, they went to Sweden.

My parents spoke Hungarian to each other. They told me and my brothers “Do not bother to learn Hungarian”. I was maybe something like 14 when I went on the subway together with my mother. Opposite our seats sat a couple speaking Hungarian. After a while my mother turns to me and says, in Swedish: Let’s move, I cannot stand listening to them”. When we had moved to another seat I turned to my mother “I do not understand this, you talk Hungarian all the time, with your sisters and with many of your friends”. Her answer was shortly: “That is something else”.

I was a terribly curious child, I loved to listen to my mother’s telephone conversations in Hungarian and when there were Hungarian speaking guests in the house. This in combination with the fact that a Hungarian elderly Jewish lady looked after me afternoons for a couple of years contributed to my growing Hungarian skills.

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**Alice Freifeld:**  
*Returns on the edge*

Abstract: This talk will focus on the conundrum of returning Hungarian Jews to Cluj, Romania. They ate, danced and found romance—and found what they found of their old lives. Betrayed by the Hungarians in wartime, now double minorities in Romania, this paper will follow their attempts to restart their lives, but then crossed the border to Hungary, collected false papers in Budapest or Vienna, and proceeded to the displaced persons camps in West Germany.

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**Levente Olosz:**  
*The Hungarian jerida.*  
*Emigration back from Israel to Hungary between 1949 and 1954*

Abstract: In the three years following the founding of the Jewish state, the population doubled thanks to mass immigration, but the difficulties of economic, social and cultural integration led to a parallel exodus (jerida). The process had reached its peak in 1953, when more people left the country than arrived. The phenomenon also affected Hungarian Jews, most of them heading for the West, but many wanted to return to the Hungarian People's Republic. And the amnesty decree issued in 1950 offered the possibility of return for those who had left Hungary illegally in the years following the war. In my presentation, I will explain the motivations behind return migration to Hungary and the details of the process of return migration. I will briefly outline the diplomatic wrangling and the press controversies surrounding the return of the emigrants. For both countries, the decision of individuals was a matter of prestige, and every effort was made to convince doubters of the importance of staying or returning. Those who finally decided to "return home" found themselves caught up in the propaganda machine of the state socialist dictatorship: they were made to see that the "Western" model of life represented by Israel had failed, while socialist countries offered ideal conditions for people to prosper and ultimately be happy. My research is based on Hungarian and Israeli diplomatic documents, press sources and personal writings (letters, memoirs).

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**Viktória Bányai - Rita Horváth:**  
*Purim-Spiels after the Shoah: traditional form with topical content*

Abstract: Our presentation will focus on the Purim performances of the years following the Holocaust. In communities where there were a sufficient number of surviving children, comic sketches and plays were performed to revive earlier customs. As we will show in the presentation, the different aspirations, visions and values of many different community strategies - reintegration, dissimilation, following religious tradition, leftist Zionism, etc. - were reflected in the composition of the festive programmes and the choice of the plays performed.

The presentations were embedded in the Jewish tradition, yet responded directly to contemporary events, reflecting the experience and interpretation of each community about the persecution and the social processes that followed. The rewritings of the origin story of the feast, the Book of Esther, have highlighted or obscured sensitive issues such as the punishment of war criminals.

