

# INTERPRETING THE SO-CALLED TABOO OF THE SHOAH UNDER THE KÁDÁR REGIME IN HUNGARY

*Professional article*

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*Abstract: This paper focuses on the various receptions of the film called Ghetto publicly screened first in 1975 in Hungary. It aims to interpret to the ways in which themes brought up by the film, such as the Shoah or the Jewish ghetto, were recognized on the one hand by politics and professionals, and on the other, by Jewish communities. Further this paper attempts to touch upon the taboo of silence enveloping Jews and the issue of Jewishness under communism.*

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*Key Words:* memory, Jew, Hungary, Kádár regime, communism, taboo, Jewish ghetto, Vergangenheitsbewältigung

THE FILM CALLED *GETTÓ* (GHETTO) WAS screened on January 24, 2012 at the Israeli Cultural Institute in Budapest. As the flyer said “Gábor Oláh’s work, done in 1974, focuses on the history of Budapest’s ghetto constructed in 1944. The film is going to be screened for the occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Israeli Cultural Institute. Following the screening the floor will be open for discussion with the director.” Later in an interview the director, Gábor Oláh explains that, “[w]ell, this film was born at the cost of a battle or a fight and it managed to break a then-unbroken silence. (...) When the film’s first public screening ended our phones started ringing and they did not stop until dawn.”<sup>1</sup> He also adds that there was a lively reaction to the film from the younger generations’ part. Although Oláh was not there according to some

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1 The interview was conducted by the author on February 9, 2012.

witnesses accounts young people gathered at Dohány street<sup>2</sup> on the following day and “those who had watched the film were showing the others where the wall of the ghetto stood once.”

The film is a documentary based on interviews in which the interview subjects recall their past and talk about their experiences under Nazi persecution including the anti-Jew laws; the yellow star, as the visible stigma on the Jewish population; the country’s German occupation and the far-right’s rise to power; the deportations and the construction of the ghetto; and finally the liberation of the ghetto and the demolition of the ghetto wall.<sup>3</sup> Thus the film follows a chronological order and for each episode invokes and draws on the memory of survivors. Oláh put advertisements to *Új Élet* („New Life”), that is a Jewish periodical, founded as a biweekly, in November 1945, which were saying that “[a] documentary will be made partly on the countryside’s mainly on Budapest’s ghetto-life. We kindly ask those who could help the work of the artists with personal testimonies (maybe with material memories, photos) please send a letter to the address of the Jewish Museum (1075– Budapest, Síp street 12.). In this letter please write down your name and address, as well as in a few sentences the memories you can recall. The applicants will be invited for a longer discussion later.”<sup>4</sup> In the end approximately ten interviewees were shared their experiences invoking memories and traumas which might have been successfully repressed for a long time. The film guided the viewer through the events which culminated in the end to the construction of the ghetto and parallel with this to deportations and mass killing, and in each stage, the interviewees gave voice to and interpreted the events. This kind of personalization of the storyline – and in accordance with it, the incorporation of everyday subject-matters which might evoke empathy and make the story consumable – was one of the main guiding principles for Oláh who has still been grateful for the interviewees that they managed to “overcome shyness” and “let themselves be involved in the project and in an honest and straightforward way give their testimonies”. On both occasions, following the film screening at the Israeli Cultural Institute and in the interview I conducted with Oláh he mentioned not only the loud welcome of the film by the younger generations to counteract, as he says, a “then-unbroken silence” but also

2 This is where the *The Great Synagogue* is located. Dohány street is one of the streets that enclosed the ghetto.

3 Anti-Jewish laws: 1920 – numerus clausus on the percentage of Jews in higher education, 1938 – the so-called I. Jewish law limited the percentage of Jews on religious grounds in business and intellectual sphere, 1939 – II. Jewish law limited the percentage of Jews on racial grounds in the industrial and business sector and in the intellectual sphere, 1941 – III. Jewish law banned mixed marriages, 1942 – IV. Jewish law prohibited Jews from buying agricultural properties and bound them to sell their lands; German occupation of Hungary: March 19, 1944; liberation of the Jewish ghetto: January 18, 1945.

58 | 4 *Új Élet* 29 (February 15, 1974).

the attempts that either under the veil of professionalism or behind close doors<sup>5</sup> aimed at preventing the director from successfully broadcasting the film on TV in 1975.

What has been interested me since I first saw the film is its reception. More precisely I intended to look beyond the interpretation of the director and explore the ways in which the Jewish communities<sup>6</sup> and the professional-political circles reacted upon both its content and visual images in 1975, following its first public screening.

How was it possible that despite the fact that the assertion of Jewish identity and the expression of anti-semitic views became a taboo under communism – being aware that it was the harshest from 1948 till the end of the 1960ies – the film was produced under the auspices of the TV Documentary Department and broadcasted by the party-controlled TV in prime time, that was 21:45, Friday, Januar 17, 1975? Why did the film not echo silence but on the basis of the warm response as Oláh explained, rather provided the occasion for a Jewish community revival? What is the relationship between silence and violence, further what does the “taboo of silence” mean in this context and what kind of role it plays in the life or a given community? Is silence what is not said because it need not be said or is it what is not said because it cannot be said? I intend to unfold these questions in the following.

First I will provide the socio-historical context of the subject matter and take a closer look at how the communist regime shaped and controlled the existence of the Jewish population. Then on the grounds of this knowledge I will discuss on the one hand the reactions of the political and professional reception, and on the other, reflections on the film on behalf of the Jewish community.

In Hungary there were no considerable political conflicts which would have triggered, – as they did in Russia, Poland, the Baltic states, Romania or in Czechoslovakia after the first world – the formation of autonomous Jewish political organizations. The Hungarian political elite, let it be of Jewish or of non-Jewish origin, supported the emancipation and integration of the Jews as well as fought against the off and on arising waves of antisemitism. That is to say that the rather tolerant political environment did not encourage or necessitate the emergence of various ethnic-religious groups who would have competed with each other for the support

5 The night before it went on TV, as Oláh explains, the film rolls were put in front of the studio room and the following day they discovered that a „roll of voice” and a „roll of images” were missing. Luckily those two rolls did not belong together and somehow they managed to eliminate the problem.

6 Hereby I would like to note that I am aware that I generalize in cases I write ‘Jewish community’. This paper also wishes to emphasise that the Jewish population was not homogenous at all in Hungary and I use ‘Jewish community’ as a synonym for ‘Jewish population’.

of the Jewish population and therefore, for “self-marketing purposes”, would have provided an identity different from the others. As a consequence of the rather quick assimilation into the Hungarian society no secular and autonomous Jewish culture came into existence. Although in most of the political debates and political decision-making processes Jewish politicians followed the rules of mainstream politics, still there were issues<sup>7</sup> which forced them to pave their own way and develop a specific understanding of how they perceive their future of the Hungarian Jewish population (Kovács A. 2003; Győri Szabó 2009).

A new, younger generation of Jew stepped on the stage of politics in the 1880's which appeared to be more successful in terms of applying the tools of modern politics in order to win the support of the Hungarian political elite and to represent the interests of the Jewish people. However the politics which was based on the ideas of emancipation and liberalism and managed to be the dominant force of the Hungarian politics as such slowly and surely started to lose significance and validity. Thus after the first world war it became nothing but a marginal stream in the field of rapidly changing power relations (Kovács M. 1997.; Kovács A. 2003; Mendelsohn 1983).

I would not like to get into details of what happened in the interwar period neither analyse the consequences of the Hungarian political decisions and other relevant social processes that lead to the destruction of thousands of Jews.<sup>8</sup> However I would rather like to focus on the post-1945 period, that is also more relevant from this paper's point of view, and see the forces that are either driving or blocking movements in the formation of Jewish social life as well as explore the ways in which the experience of the Shoah is remembered.

Approximately 200.000<sup>9</sup> Jew survived the Shoah. (Stark, 1995.) Nearly the entire Jewish population of the countryside perished and those were more likely to survive in Budapest who were better integrated in the majority society and

7 These issues were the following: the separation of the neolog and orthodox Judaism; the emergence of antisemitism; the reception of the Jewish denomination. For instance the reaction of the Hungarian Jewish politicians on the emerging antisemitism from the 1880's (1882–83: Tiszaeszlár Affair) was „disciplined” and moderate while the liberal, non Jewish MPs of the Parliament expressed their objection in public. However, in „backstage”, the state-recognized organization of the neolog stream of Judaism made significant arrangements to counterbalance the hatred targeting the Jews, such as hiring Károly Eötvös, country-wide famous politician-lawyer, to represent the Jews in the affair (Kovács A. 2003, 6).

8 For further reading see for example: Stark Tamás, *Zsidóság a vészorszakban és a felszabadulás után, 1939–1955.* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 1995); Randolph L. Braham, *The Destruction of the Hungarian Jewry: a documentary account*, 2 volumes. (New York: Pro Arte, 1963); Karsai László, *Holokauszt.* (Budapest: Pannonica, 2001) or websites with Holocaust bibliography: <http://www.magyarholokauszt.hu/mh011131.html>; <http://www.emlekezem.hu/bibliografia/>

60 | 9 There is no official number of the dead: it could be between 60.000 and 450.000 (Karsai 1994).

thus had more chance to get fake documents or shelter. As a matter of fact the post-war Jewish population was demographically urban, secular, middle-class and well-educated (Kovács A. 2003). However the Jews were said to be “destined to assimilate” (Karády 1985, quoted by Kovács A. 2003), the idea of an autonomous Jewish politics which could then critically review the discriminative laws or raise the problem of responsibility and the ideology of Zionism became appealing for a significant number of Jews. All the more other burning issues, such as the loss of material possessions, the sudden impoverishment of people, the huge number of orphans and broken families were providing new tasks for the Jewish community. Thus on the one hand the infrastructure of a self-maintaining, independent Jewish community was developing and gaining more and more influence within the Hungarian Jewish public life, on the other, communism was becoming more powerful and to the year 1949 political pluralism ceased to exist. This proved to be fateful also for the recently born Jewish institutions since as the leading ideologists of the communist party made it clear in the beginning: “[T]here are two ways of solving the Jewish question in Hungary: a reactionist and a progressive. (...) Zionism’s ambition to restore the rotten national consciousness of the Hungarian Jews goes against the Hungarian national development and therefore reactionist. (...) The progressive way of solving the Jewish question leads to the complete assimilation of Jews.” (Molnár 1946., quoted by Kovács A. 2003) That is to say that by the time the communist party established its monopol situation in all spheres of life, that is around the year 1949, the Jewish political institutions lost their autonomy and went back on the same track which is the cooperation with the dominant power forces in exchange for some benefits.

Simultaneously with the destruction of parliamentary democracy and with the abolition of both political parties and the freedom of speech one could have witnessed a growing pressure on religious communions with the aim of suspending the operation of their institutions and cutting their social influence. More specifically the communist regime nationalized religious schools, confiscated religious property, propagated atheism in schools and arrested as well as accused with treason and conspiracy those religious leaders – for example: Catholic Cardinal József Mindszenty and Protestant Bishop Lajos Ordass – who attempted to resist. The Jewish religious communion was not an exception to the communist politics either: the agreement between the communist party and the Jewish communion came to an end on December 7, 1948 (Csorba 1990). The contracting parties agreed upon the nationalization of schools, optional religious education and the merge of the neolog and orthodox streams of Judaism by 1950. Since then the leadership of the community was under the direction of the „National Representation of Hungarian Israelites” (operated under the guidance of the Department of Religious Affairs, an agency of the Ministry of the Interior), while religious affairs were handled by

two rabbinical committees—one Neolog and one Orthodox; the chairman of each committee was recognized as chief rabbi of the respective religious trend.<sup>10</sup> I also have to mention here the Rabbinical Seminary – the one and only seminary in Eastern Europe – which was considered as an autonomous and separate institution from the Jewish leadership and managed to preserve its distinctness and progressive thinking as well as its prestige as being one of the most significant centers of Jewish intellectual life in Eastern Europe (Kovács A. 2003; Győri Szabó 2009).

Furthermore Jewish identity was kept registered, the demonstration of secular Jewish identity and Zionism were used as false allegation against people and there was an effort to limit the number of Jews in higher positions. (Kovács A., 2003) While the ex-zionist and orthodox Jews perceived the regime as inherently antisemitic, those who did not follow the Jewish traditions or religion considered it as “terrible” but not as “terrible” as the one preceded it. Thus the dilemma became for the Jewish leadership how to manoeuvre in a political space that is unipolar on the one hand but multipolar on the other hand by the various Jewish interests. As it turned out by the mid-50ies, not only the majority of the Jewish population got alienated from Jewish politics<sup>11</sup> and deprived it from its legitimacy but also Jewish politics lost its alliances and evolved into an enclave in Hungarian politics (Kovács A. 2003,).

After the Revolution of 1956<sup>12</sup>, whose reception was not unanimous among the Jews<sup>13</sup>, according to some estimates 100–200.000 Jews were in Hungary (Győri Szabó 2009, 284). The demographical change was due to the fact that Jews once living in the countryside either emigrated mostly for Israel or other parts of the free world or moved to Budapest and the religious Jews from younger generations of the middle-class left the country too. Nevertheless under a milder communist leadership by János Kádár<sup>14</sup> the National Representation of Hungarian Israelites, were led by Endre Sós (1957–1966) and Géza Seifert (1966–1976) (Győri Szabó, 2009).

10 [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

11 The communist party decided in 1951 to resettle the former „ruling classes” to inhospitable places of the Hungarian Great Plain. The Jews were in panic too and sought for the protection of the Jewish leadership which, apart from a few times, offered its assistance to the party and left its community defenseless.

12 23 October 1956 – 10 November 1956: revolution in Hungary against the communist dictatorship led by Mátyás Rákosi.

13 The orthodox Jews welcomed the revolution perceiving it as a liberation from an atheistic dictatorship as well as saw the chance of leaving the country while the secular Jews were afraid of a regime change which might have brought back antisemitism and fascism to the political scene.

14 János Kádár was a communist leader and a General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Party from 1956 till 1988.

Considering the fact that the Jewish community could only have been defined in religious terms it excluded immediately the majority of the Hungarian Jews being secular. The National Representation of Hungarian Israelites lacked further social support due to its anti-zionist and anti-Israelian attitude, severing the community from contact with communities in the West and in Israel, as a result of which the organization became an insignificant, invisible and isolated entity on the map of Hungarian politics. However the communist state “offered its help” in fighting against antisemitism it laid down rigid conditions for doing so, among which the most important was that Jewish organizations could only operate on religious grounds. In other words, assimilation and identification with the Hungarian nation, that is the acceptance of the communist regime and its programme, form the right to protection from antisemitism. Hereby I would only like to mention – as I did the same with the Shoah – the Eichmann trial in 1961 and the eight-day war between the Arabs and Israel state in 1967, as two events which influenced and severed the relations between Jews and non-Jews in Hungary and rather focus on the issue of the compensation of victims of Nazi persecution under the Kádár regime. On the basis of the Reparation Agreement between Israel and West Germany, signed in 1952, West Germany was to pay for the slave labour and persecution under the Shoah as well as for the property confiscated by the Nazis. The Hungarian Jews were not involved in the compensation process. Neither did they receive any compensation when West Germany enacted a law to provide compensation and restitution for Holocaust survivors disregarding nationality. Alone in the Soviet block, Hungary appealed to the West German Constitutional Court and after a few years of dispute and ignorance in 1971 the Hungarian party received 100 Million DM: 21300 “living person”, 28500 heir, 600 victims of medical experiments and 18000 victims of property confiscation (Győri Szabó 2009).

As it seems like between 1956 and 1989 the gap between the official Jewish political institutions and the Jewish community was yawning. Alternative voice could only make a difference in Jewish politics from “outside” that is from outside of the official Jewish institutional framework. However the communist regime regarded the Jews as an entity and “Jewish issues” were always on the agenda, it was required from the utterly dependent Jewish leadership not to mention it in public. This pure collaboration did not bring any benefits to the Jews but paralyzed both the community and its so-called leadership when in 1989 the communist regime collapsed (Kovács A. 2003; Győri Szabó 2009).

The film was screened in the year 1975: in the peak of the compensation process in which period there was dependency and isolation but due to the governments newly imposed, more liberal internal policy there was more space for the Jewish communities to manoeuvre. First I will look at the political and professional reception of the film. The Documentary Department of the TV as Dezső Rad-

ványi, former member of the secret police force then the head of the Department, described it was an *atelier* which “generates competition and creates a state of constant excitement stemming from the fact that we would like to outshine previous years’ works”.<sup>15</sup> “The idea of making a film for the anniversary of the liberation of the ghetto” – he continues – “was requested by Gábor Oláh. (...) We made the decision that both the editor and the cameraman should come from a younger generation so they can interpret and film the horrifying past events likewise.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, in 1975 it made a little but appreciative echo, it was “moderate, nice and warning”.<sup>17</sup> As Radványi emphasised that the film was made to celebrate the liberation of the ghetto so were critiques underpinned the legitimacy of this interpretation by bringing up in their texts war stories deprived from any Jewish connotation: “A friend of mine, K. Kostas has been peacefully living in Hungary for decades. He is introverted in the daytime, does not talk too much, but at night-time he makes assaults, shouts and imitates gunfire. What pain and sorrow could have this 65 years old Greek gone through who is suffering from nightmares and it is impossible to wake him up from them even three decades after the war?”<sup>18</sup> Focusing on the ghetto would have represented the persecution of Jews, the attempt to make them invisible and not worth living and it could also have become a visual image invoking information about „what happened?” along a continuous stream of images. Instead of it the momentum of liberation gains significance. Liberation of the ghetto in this context becomes the metaphor of liberation from fascism and a fight for “world peace”. This metaphorical understanding “conveniently forgots entirely to mention the Jewish and other racial victims of Nazi persecution” – writes Mary Fulbrook in her analysis of German national identity after the Shoah (Fulbrook 1999. 94), claiming that in that complex, antagonistic post-war power struggle between East and West Germany both parts sought to “anchor new partial identities in differing reinterpretations of selected aspects of a common past” (Fulbrook 1999). That is to say that while East Germany was founded upon the defeat of “imperialist-monopolcapitalist fascism”, West Germany fell into a “collective amnesia” regarding its past which was followed later by the sense of “collective guilt”.

I would argue that regarding the professional-political reception of the film there was a very similar underlying mechanism which brought success but only if the film stayed within the context of “liberation”. Other alternative

15 “Az élet nyújtja a példát. Látogatás a tévé dokumentumfilm osztályán,” *Filmvilág*, February 15, 1975: 29–30.

16 Ibid.

17 “Gettó. Egy történelmi dokumentumfilmről,” *Filmvilág*, February 15, 1975: 32.

64 18 Ibid.: 31.

ways of making sense of the film were not understood or accepted and thus were quickly marginalized in public by politics. Considering the fact that the Getto failed to get on the list of competing films at the Documentary Film Festival at Miskolc, 1976, a year after its first public TV screening may harmonize with the above. It suggests that the meanings attached to it were not unanimously accepted and having been deprived of the context, which would have been in this case that it had not been screened on the day the Budapest ghetto was liberated, could have led to different interpretations. With a varying emphasis it might have given voice to the silenced Jewish communal life or would have made available for popular historical consciousness certain themes and topics, such as the Nazi period and the experience of the Jewish persecutions.

“The Hungarian Television was broadcasting a long documentary film on the life in the ghetto. There were images about undernourished children and crowds of people tediously walking on the streets of the ghetto. According to the official data 100.000 Jew got behind the walls of the ghetto in 1944.”<sup>19</sup> This short report was written in one of the issues of *Új Kelet* (New East), a Zionist Jewish political newspaper in Hungarian language. It was first issued in 1918 in Cluj, Romania, then following the Hungarian annexation of Cluj in 1940, the paper was banned and revived in Tel-Aviv in 1948. Following this piece of text I assumed that the film was well-received within the Jewish community, however following my research I could hardly discover any signs of talking about this subject-matter. I conducted a research on the two most popular Jewish papers and looked through all the issues between 1974 and 1976 and I found barely nothing worth putting down in relation to the reception of the Ghetto. Besides *Új Kelet* the other paper was the already mentioned *Új Élet* which was from 1945 until 1951 the “*A magyar zsidóság lapja*” (the paper of the Hungarian Jews), dealing with actual political and communal affairs, and from 1951 until 1989 “*A magyar izraeliták lapja*” (the paper of the Hungarian Israelites), carrying only religious connotations and being only concerned with the internal affairs of the Jewish religious community of Hungary (Győri Szabó 2009, 303; The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe; Scheiber 1993).

However what I did find in these papers was that they were dealing in a vast amount of articles with the past, especially with the experience of the Shoah and were attempting to incorporate those memories to communal life, establish a relationship to them and transfer them to various modes of representation.<sup>20</sup> Budapest

19 “A gettó-felszabadulás évfordulója a magyar televízióban,” *Új Kelet* 8064 (January, 1975).

20 In addition to that apart from the period of 1948–1960, there was a significant number (and from the mid 1970ies an increasing number) of books published each year under the topic of the Shoah. This statement is based upon my research on the rich bibliography of a website dealing with the education of the Holocaust: [www.emlekezem.hu](http://www.emlekezem.hu). While in 1945–1946, each year more than 20

was described as “a kind of ghetto: a sinful government, a sinful period of history, a sinful regime which exposed hundreds and hundreds of people to death”<sup>21</sup> which was freed from its guilt by the Soviet Army, however, “even if claim that January 18, 1945 – at least symbolically – the year of the liberation of the ghetto we shall not forget that special hardship which those suffered from who survived in that ghetto – in a narrower sense.”<sup>22</sup> Articles talked about the “photo documents, literary representations and material possessions”<sup>23</sup> which prove that “the furnace of unbearable pains”<sup>24</sup> was the segregated area in the heart of Budapest where “mummies were waiting nothing but the complete destruction”<sup>25</sup>. Besides invitations to commemorations and then summaries on them, there were short stories and testimonies written in various styles and recalling differing episodes of time. There was even one emphasising that “there is a very low inclination to remember ourselves those moments which brought some laugh to people’s faces.”<sup>26</sup> Then the author tells the story of a man, a member of the Arrow Cross Party<sup>27</sup>, who was chasing and wanted the shoot down a Jew but out of a sudden his pair of trousers got torn off and everyone could see that he was not wearing an underwear. As if happy forgetting “can only arrange itself under the optative mood for happy memory” (Ricoeur 2006, 505).

Thus I would argue that the theme of the Shoah was partly considered as a taboo. The striking absence of ‘the Jew’ from public media or from officially recognized history books (Kovács A. 2003; Győri Szabó 2009; György 2011) meant on the other hand, a rather powerful presence of these issues within the Jewish community. As we have seen in relation to the compensation of the victims, besides religious questions Jewish circles were allowed to discuss the memories of Nazi persecution, the Shoah (Győri Szabó 2009, 337). However the texts in *Új Kelet* and *Új Élet* suggest that their treatment of the memorialization and commemoration of the events was more than a one-time effort but constituted an essential element of communal existence: restored the capacity of acting as a community and drew a horizon for future achievements. Regarding the latter, at the 30-year anniversary of the liberation of the ghetto in the message of the Director of the Bu-

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books got published approaching the Holocaust from various perspectives, after almost a decade of silence from the 1960ies onwards one could witness a slow but sure increase. In the year 1975 I counted 13 books and 6 of them were personal recollections of the past.

21 “Szabadság és kényér,” *Új Élet* 30 (January 15, 1975).

22 Ibid.

23 *Új Élet* 29 (June 15, 1974).

24 “Szabadság és kényér,” *Új Élet* 30 (January 15, 1975).

25 Ibid.

26 Bálint Lajos, “Menekülések,” *Új Élet* 29 (February 15, 1974).

27 National Socialist Party led by Ferenc Szálasi and was on the Hungarian government between October 15, 1944 and March 28, 1945.

dapest Rabbinate, László Salgó, envisions a community which is not only founded upon terrible memories of past experiences but on cooperation, power of will and future aspirations for a better world.<sup>28</sup>

What I would like to suggest with the above is that the lack of archived documents on the film's reception could profoundly be attributed to the fact that the Jewish community was already conscious about the Shoah. In the global space of memory politics the memory of the Shoah has been playing a decisive role: through socio-historical processes it became detached from a particular historical event and became a central tragedy of humanity in modern time. Considering the memorialization of the event, besides an obsessive attention attached to the it, since the 1960es, that produced standardized relations based upon and defined by the Western Jewish Holocaust narrative and stimulated an unprecedented universalization of moral and political responsibility (Alexander 2002), communities have started to produce their own interpretation of it for symbolic or financial recognition. In our case personal recollections of the past were not only discussed in family circles<sup>29</sup> but shared with the wider public through printed media which created reading publics and constituted as well as defined a Jewish community.<sup>30</sup> However controlled the official public sphere was for Jewish subject-matters, the appearance and operation of memories in the alternative Jewish public space created a vivid and stimulating environment in which the film could only have resonated with and not produced memories.

This paper would also argue, being aware of its own limitations, that the contemporary usage of the so-called taboo is unprecise and is a mistification of the Kádár regime. Mistification in the sense that it veils under the idea of compromise the various ways in which relations of domination and relations of resistance were still in a dialectical game under communism. Further, I would add that "silence" has become a topos, an aesthetic attachment of the Kádár regime which tends to overlook the details, but mediate political interests and produce hegemony while obstructing *our* coming to term with the past.

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29 As Oláh writes in his memoir: Oláh Gábor, *Ígéret* (Budapest: Tevan Kiadó, 2003)

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