COMMUNITY BUILDING AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE MOISHE HOUSE / DOR HADASH COMMUNITY IN BUDAPEST

By
Noémi Karsay

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Nationalism
Jewish Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor András Kovács

Budapest, Hungary
2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Most of all, I would like to thank the entire community of Dor Hadash for accepting me unconditionally and helping me find my way to Judaism and to a living tradition. They are an amazing community of people and I feel lucky and happy to be part of them.
I would especially like to thank the nine people whom I interviewed for taking the time to do the interviews and for opening up to me. It was an honor to listen to them talk about their lives and they made the period of thesis writing unforgettable, something I loved from beginning to end.

I would like to thank my supervisor, András Kovács for his support and encouragement throughout my entire year at CEU.

I would like to thank Elizabeth Frank who helped me find my way to Jewish Studies.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my friends and family for their love and support, especially my parents and my sister, as well as Anna, Imola, Zsófi, Kati, Eszter, Marcell, Andris, and Andris.

And finally I would like to thank Castro Bistro for the endless undisturbed hours I spent there writing this thesis and for their unlimited supply of coffee and soda water.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The present thesis is about the history and the members of the Dor Hadash community in Budapest, currently housed in Moishe House. I interviewed the congregation's rabbi and eight of its members for my research. My interviewees were born between 1979 and 1991, they all belong to the generation who grew up around the fall of Communism and experienced the new era as teenagers and young adults. This radically sets them apart from the generation of their parents and grandparents who partially or completely abandoned Jewish tradition because of the trauma of the Shoah and the Communist regime's restriction of religious activity. Despite the often lacking Jewish traditions in their families, or very often exactly as a result of these, many young individuals of this new generation, including my interviewees made a choice, the choice of returning to Jewish tradition and they dove headfirst into the newly emerging options that sprung up after 1990.

Some of them attended Jewish kindergartens, elementary and high schools, such as the Sándor Scheiber Gimnázium and the Lauder Yavne Jewish Community School and Kindergarten. They spent their summers in the Szarvas youth camp, went on birthright trips to Israel. They were avid readers of Pilpul and Judapest, online Jewish publications that lived their heyday in the first part of the 2000s. They participated in Jewish festivals, concerts, lectures, and panel discussions organized by first and foremost Marom. Many of them started learning Hebrew and embraced tradition with the enthusiasm of the neophytes. They began a search for a community and they became members of various synagogues around Budapest, including the Dohány, Nagy Fuvaros, Frankel, Szim Salom, Bet Salom congregations over the years.

My interviewees come from very diverse family backgrounds, some of them have Jewish family ties, while others do not, they have huge differences in Jewishness, orthodoxy and belief, and they have constructed very different Jewish identities for themselves. They have one thing in common: after a long period of searching for but never really finding a community that would embody what Jewishness and Judaism means to them they decided to create one of their own. This congregation was named Dor Hadash, meaning 'new generation' in Hebrew.

The evolution of this community went parallel to the individual identity construction processes of its members and one cannot be analyzed without the other. In the first part of my thesis I will explore the reasons why Dor Hadash was created, the niches and failures of the mainstream Budapest Jewish community and how Dor Hadash has found ways to fill those niches and offer viable alternatives. It is exactly these features of the congregation which grew out of opposition that make Dor Hadash a unique and refreshing addition in Hungarian Jewish religious life: a liberal and democratic grassroots organization committed to egalitarianism and breathing new life into tradition, not only reviving it but also reinterpreting it.

In the second part of my thesis the individual identity strategies of eight members will be elucidated demonstrating how the Jewish identities of this young generation who grew up after the collapse of Communism are radically different from their parents' and grandparents' as they are first and foremost chosen, voluntaristic, as well as flexible and fluid. This part of the thesis is also meant to show how by being members of Dor Hadash these individuals have acquired positive Jewish identities that are no longer based on trauma or on anti-Semitism.

The aim of my thesis is to prove how the revival on the institutional level and the new Jewish identities on the individual level mutually reinforce each other in Dor Hadash. In my thesis I will attempt to analyze on the one hand what Dor Hadash offers to its members and

why and how this is different from the mainstream Budapest Jewish congregations, on the other hand I will examine the motives of the members for first choosing Jewishness, second, choosing the particular community of Dor Hadash. My hypothesis is that the reasons for choosing this particular community can be biographically explained. That is they all had some kind of an identity crisis in their lives the answer to which was first Jewishness, second, the Dor Hadash community.

JEWISH IDENTITIES IN A POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE

In order to understand the newly emerging Jewish identities following the collapse of Communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe, one needs to trace back the evolution of Jewish identities to the 19th century emancipation process. As the status of Jews as a nation within a nation was no longer tenable within the new nation-states, Jews across Europe were granted equal rights as individual citizens of the countries they lived in, while their collective identity was redefined and reduced to the sphere of religion, which was considered a private matter.[1] According to this assimilatory contract in return for civil rights Jews were required to assimilate to majority societies, a process that many Jews willingly accepted, proudly thinking of themselves as loyal Hungarian citizens of the Jewish religion, for example. The assimilation resulting from emancipation process was also reinforced by the loosening of traditions and a general opening ensuing from the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah.

Religion was also losing its importance due to two major trends happening parallel to one another: the emergence of Zionism and the rise of anti-Semitism. Zionism was expressedly not a religious movement, while in the eye of the anti-Semite being Jewish was

[1] Jonathan Webber, "Jews and Judaism in contemporary Europe: Religion or ethnic group?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 1997): 264.

more of an ethnic category than a religious one. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 also disregarded religious affiliation.

Following the Holocaust, which in retrospect not only proved the failure of assimilation[2], but further reinforced ethnic categories, religious practice became a highly restricted activity in countries under Communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe. Assimilation and passing was the logical identity strategy for the majority of Jews.

The collapse of Communism and the change of systems in 1989-90 brought about a revival in all areas of civil society, including the Jewish community. Contemporary identities, including Jewish identities needed to be redefined and new options emerged. As Jonathan Webber argues, the traditional dilemma of choosing between assimilation and retaining Jewish specificity in majority society became obsolete, so did the dichotomization of religion vs. ethnicity as new categories were born and identities became much more fluid and flexible composites.[3] Religion has become a voluntary activity, a matter of choice.

The general drift away from religion is reflected by the growing importance of Jewish culture in the past two decades. Being Jewish today means primarily "the identification with Jewish culture".[4] The boom of Jewish-themed festivals, events, music, theater, film, websites, organizations, language classes, Jewish studies departments, cultural centers, museums provide a vast array of cultural products individuals can choose from, which means that Jews today have the possibility to "voluntaristically partake in and consume those commodified cultural products that happen to appeal."[5] While religion is still an option on the menu, many authors, including Webber, argue that Jewishness is replacing Judaism and the sources of Jewishness are no longer restricted to the synagogue and the yeshiva. This change in the primary area of Jewish public life brought about an increase in "Jewish sporting, recreational,

[2] Ibid., 266.
[3] Ibid., 271.
[4] Jonathan Webber, "Notes Towards the Definition of 'Jewish Culture' in Contemporary Europe," in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 317.
[5] Ibid., 320.

philanthropic, political, and cultural associations and private societies, the principal Jewish raison d'être of which was the creation of a social framework for the exclusive recruitment if Jews rather than the pursuit of specifically Jewish aims or cultural goals."[6] This tendency is also exemplified by the Moishe House initiative, the main purpose of which is to provide young Jews between 20-30 with meaningful Jewish experiences in a private home shared by a couple of individuals. Being the setting of a variety of events ranging from film screenings to hatha yoga session, from clothes swap parties to kabbalat Shabbat services these homes become the hubs of small Jewish communities. Whether or not Jewish ritual is part of this is in large part the choice of the residents and the members of the community. Thus, today's Jews, as Webber puts it, are "to a great extent self-made cultural bricoleurs, constructing their Jewishness […] as they go."[7]

This is not to say that religion is excluded from this composite, but Judaism has become a matter of choice, and not only the preservation of tradition in the first place, but also the particular elements of this tradition. This phenomenon is elucidated by Herbert J. Gans in his theory about symbolic ethnicity and religiosity where he explains:

> more people look for easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity, for ways that do not conflict with other ways of life. As a result, they refrain from ethnic behavior that requires an arduous or time-consuming commitment either to a culture that must be practiced constantly, or to organizations that demand active membership. […] They are free to look for ways of expressing that identity which suits them best, thus opening up the possibility of voluntary, diverse, or individualistic ethnicity.[8]

The composite identities resulting from this way of identification which András Kovács refers to as "Judaism a la carte"[9] include both ethnic and religious elements, demonstrating that ethnic revival and religious revival are happening simultaneously when

[6] Ibid., 322.
[7] Ibid., 323.
[8] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Culture in America," in *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Reisman* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 203.
[9] András Kovács, "Jewish Groups and Identity Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary," in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 239.

individuals are arbitrarily mixing those elements of either one of them that appeal to them. The perception that religion is on the decline Charles S. Liebmann explains with the natural decline of the observant in number since most of them constitute the oldest age group.

However, various surveys show that the youngest generation, the generation who grew up around the fall of Communism often decides to return to tradition and integrate religion into their lives in significant numbers. The biggest challenge for this generation is the missing generations, the parents and grandparents in the chain of tradition. In the absence of a living tradition these young Jews often have to construct a Jewish identity literally from scratch. This and the general socio-political atmosphere after the change of system are the reasons why after decades of silence Jewish ritual and religious practice is not merely revived but also redefined by the younger generations who are most willing to do this. The resulting identities in effect will by highly voluntaristic, chosen, and fluid, flexible.

The very definition of who is considered a Jew is also changing: while ethnic and Halachic definitions remain relevant in many communities, more and more people are willing to be less strict: "large numbers of Jews are prepared to accept others as Jews if they so identify themselves."[10]

What follows from this and from the fact that Jewish identity is more and more based on Jewishness rather than Judaism is that non-Jews are also participating in growing numbers. Many authors point out that one unexpected development of the ongoing revivals, be they ethnic, cultural or religious, has been the "close interaction"[11] between Jews and non-Jews. Non-Jews today are both consumers and producers of Jewish culture, sharing what Diana Pinto calls Jewish Space. Ruth Ellen Gruber has written extensively on the phenomenon which she calls virtual Jewishness. This relatively new trend manifests in a variety of forms from attending Jewish festivals to wearing Star of David necklaces, from

[10] Charles S. Liebman, "Jewish Identity in Transition: Transformation or Attenuation?," in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 345.
[11] Webber, "Notes Towards the Definition of 'Jewish Culture' in Contemporary Europe," 322.

attending synagogues to sending one's children to Jewish schools.[12] While the most surprising about this is the appearance of virtual Jewishness in countries with very small or basically nonexistent Jewish populations, nonetheless the same thing is also happening in Budapest which has a substantially bigger Jewish community. The abundance of Jewish-themed events offered around the year constantly provide opportunities for non-Jews to join in and the Moishe House / Dor Hadash community, the subject of this thesis, welcomes and accepts its members irrespectively of their background, religion, and ethnicity.

The question is what these fluid boundaries will do to Jewishness and Judaism in the long run. Liebmann is especially pessimistic about the transmission of Jewish heritage in the future and he warns against further weakening an already thinning Jewish culture, as he argues: "over the long run the absence of boundaries not only renders the maintenance or construction of a community impossible, but also undermines efforts to inject meaning or substance into one's Jewishness."[13] He illustrates the difference between thick and thin Jewish identities with the example of a Passover Seder:

> I can imagine the difference between a Jew whose Jewish culture is thick and a Jew whose Jewish culture is thin. Both may sit down to the Passover *Seder*. For one, however, the *Seder* evokes a plethora of associations. The anticipation of the holiday and the elaborate preparations. The reading of the *Hagadah* and the rescue of the Jews from Egypt. The *midrashic* references and the stories one has heard or hears, especially from those, seated at the table, who are knowledgeable in Jewish sources. The songs one sings at the meal and the memories it evokes of one's childhood, of learning and then the "four questions", of hiding the *afikoman*, and of receiving a gift. The family sitting down together, even the family squabbles so often associated with annual family meals. This is a particularly apt example of thick culture. The *Seder*, when coupled with other holiday celebrations, other rituals, other public and private events, each of which evoke their own layers of meaning and associated memories, render Judaism or Jewishness the major part of one's life space. […] For the Jew whose culture is thin, these memories and associations are absent. The *Seder* becomes a meal, a family gathering, and little more.[14]

[12] Ruth Ellen Gruber, "A Virtual Jewish World," in *Jewish Studies at the Central European University, 1999-2001* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002), 3.
[13] Liebman, "Jewish Identity in Transition: Transformation or Attenuation?," 345.
[14] Ibid., 346-7.

Liebman warns that fluid boundaries render "the transmission of Jewish heritage from one generation to the other […] highly problematic, [and] undermine[s] the efforts to strengthen and assure the continuity of the Jewish people."[15] While the recent blurring of boundaries between Jew and non-Jew is undoubtedly one explanation for the thinning Jewish culture, the often missing parental and grandparental generation in the chain of transmission is the other. However, in this respect there is not much difference, other than birth, between a non-Jew and a Jew whose family completely lost touch with Jewish tradition.

Not everyone is as pessimistic as Liebman, though, Gruber takes a more positive and admiring tone as she compares the situation two decades ago with what we have today. She considers it a great achievement that Jews are now willing to affirm Jewishness, any form of which is an improvement compared to the decades of silence. Those "last Jews"[16] who decided to affirm their Jewishness with the fall of the regimes had to learn pretty much everything on their own: "in addition to the rituals and customs, they had to teach themselves even the memories that had been stolen by war, Shoah, fear and communist suppression."[17] Compared to no living tradition the fact that these people "at their own volition, and often on their own terms […] lead open, free, and functioning Jewish lives, on a variety of levels of involvement, affiliation, orthodoxy, and belief"[18] is positive in itself, argues Gruber.

[15] Ibid., 349-50.
[16] Ruth Ellen Gruber, *To Begin Again: Jewish Life in Central- and Eastern Europe Since the Fall of Communism in 1989* ([Vienna: Centropa, 2009), 14.
[17] Ibid., 144.
[18] Ibid., 147.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE YOUNGER GENERATION'S IDENTITY STRATEGIES IN EASTERN EUROPE

Research about new Jewish identities and especially about the younger generation's identity strategies in the post-Communist period is growing. The question of Polish Jewish identities has been explored extensively by Claire Rosenson and Marius Gudonis. Both authors use qualitative research method, semi-structured interviews, but their analyses significantly differ from each other. However, both of them agree that the traditional dualistic framework of describing Jewish identities in terms of ethnicity and religion seems no longer adequate to analyze the current situation, as "people's actual identities […] are not always characterized by clear religious or ethnic inclinations."[19]

Gudonis offers an alternative framework consisting of four types of identities: Orthodox, symbolic, cultural, and cosmopolitan, the last three of which are not mutually exclusive and often overlap[20]. Gudonis's interpretation of symbolic Jewishness corresponds to Gans's definition, it can mean wearing a Star of David, learning Hebrew, attending synagogue on high holidays, refraining from eating pork. Cultural identity entails an "intense interest in all things Jewish"[21] and consuming the above mentioned cultural products abounding these days. Cosmopolitan refers to liberal values, as Gudonis explains, "Jewishness makes a person more sensitive to various injustices and intolerances."[22]

Gudonis also points at the de-ethnicization of Jewish identities, arguing that common ancestry, inherited culture and blood ties are becoming less important, while individual choice is determinant: "the fact that an identity is chosen freely is in itself sufficient to make

[19] Marius Gudonis, "Particularizing the Universal: New Polish Jewish Identities and a New Framework of Analysis," in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 245.
[20] Ibid., 248.
[21] Ibid., 247.
[22] Ibid., 248.

it authentic."[23] Religion is just as inadequate according to Gudonis to describe identities: while almost all interviewees maintain some form of religiosity, it alone cannot account for their identity strategy.[24] He therefore expands the dualistic ethnic-religious framework by introducing four dimensions: communal, cultural, ethical, and emotional. Exhibiting only one these results in a thin identity, all four of them in a thick one.

Rosenson offers a different approach towards new Polish Jewish identities by shifting the focus of her study from the boundaries of ethnic groups to "major areas of conflict within groups."[25] She argues that resolving the conflicts arising from contested issues leads to identity construction and the evolution of group identity.[26]

IDENTITY STRATEGIES OF HUNGARIAN JEWS

The evolution of identity strategies of Hungarian Jews follows the trends discussed above. Hungarian Jews embraced the social contract of assimilation and welcomed the "cultural magyarisation"[27] process: they became loyal Hungarian citizens of the Jewish faith. The Hungarian Jewish community split into two major trends, Orthodox and Neolog. As a result of the post-WWI treaties which dramatically redefined the country's borders Hungary lost two thirds of its territory, those parts of the country where the Orthodox lived[28], making Neolog the dominant trend. The new borders reshaped not only the Jewish community, but

[23] Ibid., 250.
[24] Ibid., 251.
[25] Claire A. Rosenson, "Polish Jewish Institutions in Transition: Personalities over Process," in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest: Central European University Press, n.d.), 263.
[26] Ibid., 266.
[27] Leonard Mars, "Is There a Religious Revival among Hungarian Jews Today?," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 2 (May 2001): 229.
[28] András Kovács, "Religiosity, Praxis, and Tradition in Contemporary Hungarian Jewry," in *Jewry Between Tradition and Secularism: Europe and Israel Compared* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 44.

Hungarian society, as well: as the country became more homogeneous ethnically, "Jews were now seen as aliens, no longer required to boost the Magyar numbers."[29]

The Shoah also had catastrophic consequences: the traditional segment of Hungarian Jewry living in the countryside was completely annihilated as a result, while "the majority of survivors who belonged to the more urbanized, assimilated, middle-class strata were concentrated in Budapest."[30] Emigration following the Shoah and the revolution of 1956 further decreased the number of observants.

Communism like in other countries in Eastern Europe practically made any religious activity impossible in Hungary, which lead to massive assimilation and passing. As Kovács's 1999-2000 survey shows, the older age groups, the grandparent and parent generations of today's young Hungarian Jews have partially or completely abandoned Jewish tradition and religious observance practically diminished.[31] This dramatic break in the chain of transmission of Jewishness left the majority of the new, younger generations, those who grew up and were born around the disintegration and the collapse of the Communist regime without any kind of living tradition that they could connect to.

The change of system brought a resurgence and renewal in the Jewish community in Hungary which affected all areas of Jewish life, from education to culture and religion. Since 90% of Hungary's Jewish population is concentrated in Budapest, the recent renewal trends primarily affect the capital, as well.

New, privately funded Jewish schools appeared beside the already existing Anna Frank Gimnázium (renamed to Sándor Scheiber Gimnázium in 1998[32]) which is supported by the Budapest Jewish community. The American Foundation School in Wessélenyi utca offers a more Orthodox religious education and "applies the Halachic definition of Jewish status to

[29] Mars, "Is There a Religious Revival among Hungarian Jews Today?," 229.
[30] Kovács, "Religiosity, Praxis, and Tradition in Contemporary Hungarian Jewry," 44.
[31] Ibid., 47.
[32] Leonard Mars, "Cultural Aid and Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Hungary.," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15, no. 1 (January 2000): 88.

its pupils,"[33] while the Lauder Yavne Jewish Community School and Kindergarten is a "secular, Jewish day school which does not officially record the religious identity of its pupils," [34] as a result a large proportion of its student body consists of non-Jews.

New religious options also appeared which catered to the need of Jews who chose to recover their Jewish heritage. As part of the worldwide Chabad-Lubavitch the Budapest branch was founded in 1989[35]. Szim Salom, a Reform community was established in 1994[36] and is lead by a woman rabbi, Katalin Kelemen. Dor Hadash, an independent egalitarian congregation, the subject of the present thesis, is on its way to become part of Masorti Europe. Neolog, however, still remains the dominant trend in Hungary.

Zionist organizations, mostly youth groups such as Habonim Dror and Hashomer Hatsair also provided new venues of public life for Hungarian Jews, as well as a new identity strategy that is based on the existence of the State of Israel and is further fostered by the Szarvas youth camp funded by the Joint and the Lauder Foundation, as well as birthright trips and the Israeli Cultural Institute which opened in 2010[37].

On the cultural scene the Bálint Jewish Community Center, open since 1994[38], offers cultural, recreational activities while it is also home to the Beit Orim Reform congregation. Over the years Marom has also grown from a small grassroots initiative to a hugely successful organization running among other projects Bánkitó Festival in the summer and Negyed6Negyed7 Festival around Hanukkah.

While authors disagree on the kind of revival that has been happening since the demise of Communism, whether it is cultural, ethnic or religious, or a mixture of these, they nonetheless agree that there has been a rebirth in the Jewish community which offers new

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] "Chabad-Lubavitch in Hungary", n.d., http://zsido.com/szoveg/English/42.
[36] "Sim Shalom Progressive Jewish Congregation Budapest Hungary", n.d., http://www.sim-shalom.org/.
[37] "Israeli Cultural Institute", n.d., http://izraelikultura.hu/en.
[38] "Bálintház", n.d., http://balinthaz.hu.

forms of Jewishness for Hungarian Jews. Richárd Papp and Kata Zsófia Vincze conducted anthropological researches on the congregation of the Bethlen Tér Synagogue and the baal teshuva phenomenon in the Budapest Jewish community respectively. Leonard Mars on the other hand argues that the revival is neither religious, nor ethnic, but "a burgeoning manifestation of cultural ethnicity"[39] instead, which makes it possible for Hungarian Jews to "come out of the closet."[40]

András Kovács's 1999-2000 sociological survey of 2015 individuals offers a wider perspective analyzing the presence of religious-cultural traditions across three generations of Hungarian Jews. The results show that there are sharp differences between childhood and current family practices. The older age groups continue the gradual abandonment of tradition in their current families. Detachment from tradition is especially strong in the case of the middle-aged, those who were born during Communism between 1954 and 1974: they already had very little religious tradition in their parental families, those who survived the Shoah.[41]

The complete lack of tradition in this middle generation, the parents of today's young Jews accounts for the break in the chain of transmission and in lieu of a living tradition young Jews are left to rediscover and learn Jewishness on their own. The number of rediscoverers is the highest among the young age groups and they have clearly reversed the erosion trends of their parents' generation.[42]

Mars argues that the eagerness of the young often infects the parents, as well: "parental ignorance of Judaism and Jewishness has resulted in a situation where the junior generation teaches its seniors the essentials of yiddishkeit."[43] While this is undoubtedly an existing phenomenon, the majority of the parents however, remain relatively unaffected by

[39] Mars, "Is There a Religious Revival among Hungarian Jews Today?," 235.
[40] Ibid., 234.
[41] Kovács, "Jewish Groups and Identity Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary," 227.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Mars, "Cultural Aid and Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Hungary.," 94.

the children's enthusiastic affirmation of Jewishness and they do not follow their reviving kids, which is confirmed by the results of Kovács's survey.[44]

While a return to religion is evident among the young, this is still a relatively small group, whereas the majority of rediscoverers choose more symbolic forms of preserving tradition, the reason why Kovács argues that the ongoing revival has been for the most part ethnic, closer to Gans's concept of symbolic Jewishness, rather than religious.[45] The newly emerging Jewish identities of this generation are quite strong, however, as Kovács points out, these identities are acquired identities, constructs, as this post-Communist generation grew up without tradition and "15% of them were already adults when they discovered that they were Jews."[46] What really differentiates this generation from the previous ones is the conscious choice they made as young adults to return to Jewishness: these voluntary Jews "could have gone further down on the road of total assimilation, but they took the option to return."[47]

It is important to point out, however, that this resurgence among the young does not mean the adoption of all religious practices.[48] The revival of this new generation is characterized by the selection and affirmation of certain elements of the Jewish tradition which will become the basis of a symbolic ethnic identity. The most important motive behind the resurgence of ethnicity among young Jews, and one that fundamentally differentiates them from their parents is the intention to "cast off the stigmatized identity of the older generations."[49] This new form of ethnic identity therefore is neither the continuation, nor the alternative of assimilation, in the sense that it radically breaks with previous identity strategies as it is neither based on the trauma of the Shoah, nor on the stigmatization resulting from anti-Semitism.

[44] Kovács, "Religiosity, Praxis, and Tradition in Contemporary Hungarian Jewry," 47.
[45] András Kovács, *A másik szeme. Zsidók és antiszemiták a háború utáni Magyarországon.* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2008), 165.
[46] Kovács, "Religiosity, Praxis, and Tradition in Contemporary Hungarian Jewry," 48.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

While these processes are happening simultaneously in other countries around Eastern Europe, what really sets Hungarian Jewry apart is its mere size: it is one of the largest Jewish populations in Europe, numbering between 80-140,000 Jews[50]. While in the relatively small Jewish communities of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland "revival movements seem unable to prevent the gradual disappearance of the Jewish Diaspora, [I]n Hungary, however, they are strong enough to slow down or even counterbalance the process of attrition at the margins"[51], argues Kovács.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The original objective of my thesis was to explore the different identity strategies of the younger generation of Jews by interviewing random individuals from the larger Jewish community in Budapest. I conducted about 10 semi-structured narrative interviews, selecting my interviewees with snowball method. Even so, I kept bumping into the problem of representativeness, especially in the face of time and length limitations of my thesis.

However, as I became a member and active participant of the Moishe House / Dor Hadash community in Budapest after a while I naturally began to ponder the possibility of making it the subject of my research. I had qualms and doubts this time, as well, but they were of different sorts. My personal involvement in the life of this community presented two dilemmas. One was objectivity. Debating myself on whether I would be able to research a community that I am also a member of with the impartial eye of a social scientist I eventually decided I would. Even though my reasons for becoming part of this community were entirely personal, the time I had spent as a member of the group was relatively short, thus I was not yet so embedded in the community that my personal relationships, loyalties and bias would

[50] Kovács, "Jewish Groups and Identity Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary," 238.
[51] Ibid., 239.

cloud my judgment. My second dilemma was of an ethical nature. Because of my role as a member I had access to information that a researcher would not necessarily have. I resolved this dilemma by only including data in my thesis that was available for me as a researcher during the period of my research, and ignoring information that I acquired as a result of my membership.

While this narrowing and altering of my original subject did not really change my choice of research methodology, using the narrative interview technique, it however, modified my research questions. I was still going to explore the identity strategies of my interviewees and examine how Jewishness was present in their lives. However, given the unique nature of this specific community, namely that a very large proportion of its members are non-Jews, my questions and hypotheses had to be somewhat altered.

Since direct questions would have yielded partial, superficial or biased answers, in order to uncover the real underlying motives for choosing one identity strategy over the other and choosing this specific community asking the interviewees only about the community was not enough. Narrative interviews on the other hand proved helpful in uncovering these motives.

Éva Kovács and Júlia Vajda's *Mutatkozás* heavily influenced my choice of methodology and during my research I used Gabriele Rosenthal's narrative interview method as explained by Kovács and Vajda. The technique is based on the supposition that a person's life history can function as the vehicle for individual identity. In light of major life events we are constantly propelled to reevaluate our past and present and who we are by reconstructing our life history so that it forms a coherent whole, the basis of our identity.[52] While we do this over and over during our lives, the interview situation gives a special opportunity for the interviewees to construct their life history. Even though a narrative interview cannot provide

[52] Éva Kovács and Júlia Vajda, *Mutatkozás. Zsidó Identitás Történetek*. (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002), 18.

us with an objective truth about the world, the resulting narrative can nonetheless give us insight into both the individual identity construction process and the surrounding society.[53]

It is important that the interviewees are instructed to give an account of their life in a way which allows them to find a thread along which they can construct their life history on their own. This is why they are told at the beginning of the interview to tell the interviewer their life story, beyond which point the interviewer is not allowed to interrupt, ask questions or help the interviewees formulate their narration. It is only when the interviewees come to the end of their main narration that the interviewer is allowed to formulate questions about parts of the main narration that need further elucidation. The goal here again is the construction of narrative, therefore questions like when?, how?, why? are not helpful, it is best instead to ask the interviewees to elaborate on certain aspects of the main narration.

As for the setting, my interviews were conducted either in the interviewees' homes, in Moishe House or in two popular cafes of the Jewish district, Sirály and Castro Bistro, both of which function as "second living rooms" for my interviewees.

The interviews vary in length from 90 to 240 minutes.

They were conducted between April 13 and April 30, 2011.

I changed the names of the interviewees, except for the rabbi, who is referred to as "the rabbi" throughout the thesis.

[53] Ibid., 27.

CHAPTER 1

INSTITUTIONAL ASPECT OF THE BUDAPEST REVIVAL: ANALYSIS OF THE MOISHE HOUSE / DOR HADASH COMMUNITY IN BUDAPEST

This part of my thesis is meant to demonstrate how the Jewish revival following the collapse of Communism in Hungary produced new forms of Jewishness on the institutional level. The evolution of this congregation went parallel to the individual identity construction processes of its members and one cannot be analyzed without the other. This part of the thesis examines the history of the Dor Hadash community, the reasons and need for its existence, its institutional framework, its relationship towards Jewish tradition, its mission, and the various issues that are central in its everyday operation, such as membership, conversion, as well as areas of conflict.

It is important to see that Dor Hadash came to life as a result of a growing feeling in these young individuals that there are serious problems with the religious options offered to them by the mainstream Budapest Jewish community. There is a very strong critical attitude within Dor Hadash and various features and the shape the congregation eventually took, which make it outstanding and unique, were born out of opposition and were motivated by the need to create an alternative. Examining the problem areas of other congregations and Jewish schools as perceived by them, such as MAZSIHISZ, generational gap, the interpretation of tradition and liturgy, the definition of who is a Jew, and knowledge of Judaism, is important in understanding how Dor Hadash fills a niche within the larger Budapest Jewish community.

MAZSIHISZ

First and foremost Dor Hadash is characterized by a very strong anti-establishment stance and from the very beginning it consciously set itself apart from institutionalized

Hungarian Jewry. The most important criticism against MAZSIHISZ, the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities is that it failed to adopt important democratic values of the post-Communist era.

According to Dor Hadash's 21-year-old soon-to-be rabbi, the most disturbing problem is that the MAZSIHISZ administration discovered the system's flaw, namely that it is fully state-funded, and they deliberately exploit it. For lack of transparency, it is impossible to trace where the annual 4-5 billion HUF state funds are going. Moreover, there is a significant discrepancy between the size of the infrastructure supported from these state funds and the actual size of congregations, that is, the number of Jews who are engaged in religious life in any form. As the rabbi argues, it is a luxury that MAZSIHISZ finances an

> infrastructure which includes the amount of congregations and a theological seminary that were designed for a community which numbered 500,000 Neolog Jews in pre-WWI Hungary, to cater for the needs of today's 100,000 out of which about 10-20,000, by the most optimistic estimates, preserve tradition in any way, the majority going to synagogue once or twice a year, while the number of people who attend services on a weekly basis is very very small, between 600-1000.[54]

GENERATIONAL GAP

The majority of those who do attend synagogue on a regular basis belong to the oldest age group. Therefore another common experience for my interviewees was the appalling generational gap. This corresponds to Kovács's survey: because of the complete abandonment of tradition by older age groups, especially the parents of this young generation, the active members in most congregations belong to the 75+ age group, which leaves the few but enthusiastic young rediscoverers isolated within the community. This general feeling of not being able to fit in is echoed by the words of Dor Hadash's rabbi: "It is a very defining moment for a young person, when they are alone from their age-group in a

[54] Rabbi, "Interview", April 23, 2011, 8.

community where the majority is way older, and not only middle-aged but really old."[55] This experience propelled most of my interviewees to go on a search for a community, wandering from congregation to congregation around Budapest, never quite finding what they were looking for.

KNOWLEDGE OF JUDAISM AND HEBREW

What follows from the broken chain of tradition is the general lack of knowledge of Judaism and Hebrew among most generations of Hungarian Jews: "Up until the time of our grandparents Jews learned Hebrew and transmitted traditions from one generation to the next, whereas now we have a situation where nobody knows anything."[56]

While Jewish schools make the study of Judaism and Hebrew mandatory for their students, only a tiny fraction of their student bodies are genuinely interested in these subjects, for the majority they are an unnecessary hassle. Since today's young Jews rarely have the possibility of learning tradition at home and despite formal Jewish education their knowledge is less than satisfactory, synagogues would be the next logical place where they could gain this knowledge. Most synagogues however, do not cater for such needs; in effect, the small but enthusiastic group of young Jews who do decide to embrace tradition have difficulties finding a community which designates teaching tradition as part of its mission.

TRADITION INTERPRETATION AND LITURGY

The interpretation of tradition itself in various Jewish congregations and schools in Budapest also left many of the Dor Hadash founders with a sense of discontent and the feeling that they want something else. While some of my interviewees complain of hypocritical and outdated tradition interpretations in Neolog and Orthodox communities,

[55] Ibid., 1.
[56] Ibid., 4.

others had problems with Reform congregations claiming they are unable to provide a religious life that is fulfilling enough.

The general experience of young people who do decide to go to a synagogue is characterized by disillusionment and an unwillingness to identify with a tradition that they cannot connect to. As the rabbi explains,

> Many people leave the synagogues with the feeling that this a horrible thing and it has no place in their lives. Because they sing the psalms like an opera singer, with Ashkenazi pronunciation, to tunes that are not enjoyable, and on top of all this the rabbi delivers a speech full of supernatural idiotism, which takes everything the Torah says verbatim, as if it was a history book. What we end up with is a museal thing.[57]

Instead of a living tradition that is adapted to 21st century needs, many places, including Jewish schools, offer on the other hand a "diluted form of orthodoxy"[58], adhering to certain rules that given the contemporary situation are obsolete, while ignoring others that should be respected. Lauder's tradition of Friday afternoon Kiddush is a good example for this: "When the Shabbat is still somewhere over India, we do Kiddush in Lauder, we say the Saturday blessing over tref grape juice, we don't wash our hands, we say the *ha-motzi* over the *challah*, and the whole thing is tref from beginning to end. Yet they don't let girls wear *tallit* and recite the Kiddush. I found this outrageous."[59] However, the rabbi adds, the relationship towards tradition has changed over the years in Lauder which still offers the best quality of Jewish education out of all Jewish schools, as well as a alternative model of new Jewish identities, since its student body is very diverse ranging from Halachic Jews to non-Jews.

[57] Ibid., 6.
[58] Ibid., 4.
[59] Ibid., 5.

HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY

All of the above does not mean that my interviewees had no positive experiences in existing congregations, they did, which will be elaborated in the second part of the thesis. Nonetheless they still felt the need for a community which reflects how they relate to tradition, a community that is independent, democratic and egalitarian. Therefore Dor Hadash was established as an alternative to the above needs and gaps in institutionalized Hungarian Jewry. While its official history begins in 2007, Marom's earlier initiatives serve as an important precursor to Dor Hadash and they are a recurrent theme in many of the interviews.

These accounts also shed light on how closely intertwined these three organizations are. Marom, Dor Hadash and Moishe House have worked in close interaction with each other over the years and while these organizational overlaps naturally generate conflicts from time to time, for the most part they make for a successful and self-sufficient enterprise that is based on mutual support and the shared objective of breathing new life into Jewish tradition that can meet the demands of young rediscoverers.

MAROM AND SIRÁLY

Marom was founded in 2001 as a student group and grew into a leading Jewish cultural organization by 2005 organizing concerts, festivals, panel discussions and workshops for young Jews. Since 2006 its headquarter has been Sirály, a Jewish cultural center in the heart of Budapest's Jewish district. Marom's mission is to engage young Jews in rediscovering their roots and to reinvent and recreate Jewish culture and tradition by promoting an open, pluralistic and diverse image of Judaism and alternative ways to interpret it.[60]

[60] "Marom Egyesület - Marom Organisation", n.d., http://www.marom.hu/en/home/aboutus.

Sirály is a recurrent setting in my interviewees' lives: it is the place where friendships were born, a place full of memories, of concerts, late night conversations after Friday night services, theater performances, as well as the place where many of them have volunteered at events over the years. It is no wonder it became the setting for many of my interviews.

These early Marom events represent important turning points in the lives of many interviewees. While for some they offered a refreshing alternative to the synagogue congregations they belonged to at the time, for others they were the very first encounters with Jewish tradition. András, currently Marom's volunteer coordinator and one of the Moishe House residents, reminisces about his first Hagesher (back then called Jew Wave) concert organized by Marom in 2003 which was also his first positive encounter with Jewishness: "I remember the feeling, it was such a shock to me to see that Jewishness could be a cool thing, not some lame and tedious community center program where we stuff our faces with matzo wearing paper kippas. But there were these slim, bespectacled, young intellectuals rapping in Hebrew on stage."[61]

Marom events were often organized around major Jewish holidays like today, however, back in 2005 they attracted far fewer people,

> It was like a club, a little wider than a circle of friends but not so wide that everyone wouldn't know everyone. We would organize a Tu Bisvath barbecue party with a DJ in the courtyard of an old house and there were altogether about twenty of us. It was a completely different Marom, everything was in incubator phase, very small, this was well before Bánkitó, Negyed6Negyed7 and Dor Hadash.[62]

Within Marom, which was and still is primarily a cultural organization, a handful of people started attending synagogues together and after a while they began to hold kiddushes on Friday nights at each other's apartments around 2004-5.

[61] András, "Interview", April 24, 2011, 2.
[62] Ibid., 5.

DOR HADASH: A NEW GENERATION

By 2007 some people had left the group, others joined, the kiddushes had evolved into regular kabbalat Shabbats and the initiative acquired a name, Dor Hadash, meaning new generation in Hebrew, symbolizing this young generation's need to create a community that reflects their own image of Judaism and offers to its members a kind of livable form of Jewishness, something even those could connect to who had not received any kind of tradition from home.

These beginning steps of the community were characterized by a great deal of improvisation, always adjusting to the circumstances. As Mina, a current Moishe House resident recalls, the biggest challenge was always finding a place for the community, "for a long time we were a homeless congregation wandering from one place to the other, gathering in each other's living rooms, empty flats in the Jewish district, whatever we could find."[63] It was, however, the sense of creating something of their own, a living community, that propelled everyone to contribute in some way, either by bringing challah and wine for the Kiddush, or just by their presence signaling that what they were doing was important for them. Mina adds, "We sometimes cooked together when there was a kitchen, but we always had challah and wine. And after Shabbat we would hang out and talk, or we would go over to Sirály together."[64]

Somebody found a temporary home for Dor Hadash at Klauzál tér, then another tiny apartment in Kazinczy utca that was empty. "That was spring 2008. I remember we had a decent kitchen there and we took turns cooking for the community. To solve the problem of kashrut we decided we would only cook vegetarian,"[65] a tradition that prevails in Dor Hadash even today.

[63] Mina, "Interview", April 26, 2011, 3.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

These Friday nights differed significantly from today's services in the number of regular attendants, too. There were about ten people who constituted Dor Hadash back then, not all of them Halachically Jewish, some of them not even Jewish. Halachic definitions no longer seemed tenable: "There were so few of us that we soon ran into the problem of who to count into the minyen. Not even caring about who was Halachically Jewish we were often less than ten."[66] This is what eventually paved the way towards the congregation's present-day mission to be egalitarian and count everyone in the minyen, irrespectively of gender and Jewish family ties or the lack thereof. Even so, there were times when despite counting everyone without requiring any kind of Jewish background, let alone Halachic, there were still not enough people for a minyen, remembers Mina: "One time I prayed alone with one other girl, while the others were playing on the computer, reading a book, smoking, or were on the phone."[67] For high holidays, though, the turnout was always great: "Marom Seders were always running on full house, there were beer benches packed with people. We started cooking very late, around 6, we made hummus and matzo ball soup, dinner started around midnight and we stayed there talking and playing music well into the night,"[68] adds Rebeka, another current Moishe House resident.

Other important features of Dor Hadash also developed during these first formative years of its existence. As an effort to make Friday night services more enjoyable the aspiring rabbi of Dor Hadash, back then still a high school student, incorporated for the first time in Hungary Shlomo Carlebach's catchy tunes into liturgy, making music and collective singing an integral and very much loved part of the Dor Hadash kabbalat Shabbat.[69] "The Lecha Dodi tune that we introduced back then became so wildly popular that there is always a group of

[66] Ibid., 4.
[67] Ibid., 23.
[68] Rebeka, "Interview", April 22, 2011, 8.
[69] Rabbi, "Interview," 13.

people demanding that we sing only that even today," [70] recalls the rabbi. Over the years a number of members have taken turns playing the guitar. These days the congregation has a professional guitarist to play the popular tunes of Friday night psalms.

It was also during the time the community spent in the Klauzál tér and Kazinczy utca apartments that a circular arrangement instead of sitting in rows became the modus operandi for Shabbat. Similar alterations proposed by the rabbi became part of the ritual: for example certain prayers require that a person stand up facing Jerusalem while reciting the prayer, other times when facing South-East is not mandatory the rabbi proposed turning inwards so that people face each other while standing in a circle instead of facing Jerusalem which was often blocked by a windowless wall.[71] It was also in this period when the community decided that the language of the liturgy would be modern Hebrew.

The winter of 2008-9 went down in Dor Hadash history as an almost catastrophic crisis, the whole initiative came to a nadir and it nearly ceased to exist: "We had been kicked out of all the places, we had nowhere to go. Then we got a room from Bethlen Synagogue's Oneg Shabbat Club in Szinva utca, it was so tiny and there were so few of us. It was really sad. I remember as the five of us were walking from Szinva utca to Jelen after Shabbat, it was very sad," remembers Mina. "We agreed that we would only do high holidays from then on and when we find a new place we would revive ourselves. But for months on end we didn't have Shabbats and everybody went to other synagogues and we only met in Sirály."[72]

MOISHE HOUSE / DOR HADASH

Fortunately the congregation survived those couple of months on the brink of dissolution and was eventually saved by a very simple, yet very successful idea: Moishe House. Moishe House is an international, California-based initiative whose aim is to provide

[70] Ibid., 14.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Mina, "Interview," 22.

meaningful Jewish experiences for young adults in their twenties. Generally 3-5 residents move in together to create a home which becomes the center of a vibrant Jewish community. The residents receive rent subsidy and a portion of their budget from external organizations, while the rest of their costs are covered on a voluntary basis by the members of the community. Moishe House residents are required to host 3-7 events a month in their home where they generally live for minimum 1 year. At present there are 36 houses in 13 countries worldwide engaging more than 40,000 attendees each year.[73]

In the spring of 2009 Mina, Rebeka and Sára decided to apply to Moishe House to open a house in Budapest. While for Rebeka the endeavor seemed like a great opportunity to finally move out of her parents' house, Mina saw it as the rescue plan for her struggling community: "It was our secret desire with Sára that Moishe House would be the home of Dor Hadash."[74] The application process involved submitting mini-essays, together with a video about the residents and a Skype interview with Moishe House coordinators in Oakland, CA. After their application was approved the girls started apartment-hunting and settled on the third apartment they came across which is situated in the heart of the Jewish district in Király utca, only a couple of blocks away from Sirály. They furnished the apartment with Marom's help and with various treasures found during a garbage throwaway day in the summer.[75] In September 2009 the Budapest Moishe House opened its doors and the first to enter was the Dor Hadash community with its old members and lots of newfound enthusiasm.

In addition to sentimental reasons, Dor Hadash also came in handy for the residents who had the responsibility to organize seven programs each month: Friday night services already ticked off four of them, which makes the Budapest Moishe House one of the most religious ones in the world, although religious programs are not a requirement. While during the application process they brainstormed various program ideas for the House such as yoga

[73] "Moishe House", n.d., http://www.moishehouse.org/.
[74] Mina, "Interview," 22.
[75] Rebeka, "Interview," 4.

classes and social justice programs, the rest of the events beside Shabbats usually include film screenings organized jointly with eco-minded youth group, Yachad, clothes swap parties, kippah-making workshops, exhibits, a Hungarian history workshop taught by one of the residents, as well as Saturday morning Shaharit services once a month.

The residents receive funding from major Jewish charities through Moishe House based on the number of programs they organize. The Budapest House with its seven programs belongs to the mid-range category which means they get $500 rent subsidy and an additional $375 for their program budget. In return for the funding the residents are required to participate in a monthly hour-long Skype conference with Moishe House's International Houses coordinator, Kevin Sherman, during which they discuss that month's programs, future plans, as well as how the residents are doing. They are also required to upload program photos on the Moishe House website and send their invoices to the coordinator. The day-to-day responsibilities of Moishe House residents include distributing tasks between each other, organizing events, cooking when nobody from the community offers to do so, and cleaning up after Shabbat. They also have to advertise the programs on the Moishe House mailing list and Facebook group but almost two years after its opening they say the kabbalat Shabbat is mostly self-propelling, people know about it, without advertisements and Facebook invites.[76]

This word-of-mouth marketing strategy has been successful since the opening of the House. Although initially the resuscitated Dor Hadash supplied regular attendants to the programs, as the news of the House's opening spread over Budapest new people started coming to Shabbat. Just one month after opening the congregation already had a substantial membership; the problem of having at least ten people for a minyen became nonexistent.

During the following months Dor Hadash kept growing in size, recruiting new members every week and especially around major Jewish holidays like Pesach which can

[76] Ibid., 11.

attract as many as 60 guests, while over the summer Bánkitó Festival offered another opportunity for the community to open up to more than hundred people who are interested in Jewish culture and tradition but have been to Moishe House. Dor Hadash and its enthusiastic supporter and visiting rabbi from Stockholm, David Lazar held kabbalat Shabbat, Shaharit and Havdalah services at Marom's hugely successful summer festival, establishing yet another tradition in which Marom and Dor Hadash could work in close interaction with each other.

The winter of 2010 brought major changes for both Moishe House and Dor Hadash. As Sára, one of the residents had to move out because of her age (residents cannot be more than 30), Rebeka and Mina asked András, who had already been working at Marom for years, to join them as a new resident.

Parallel to the personal changes institutional developments also took place in December 2010. Dor Hadash had matured into an independent organization of its own and the time came to officially separate it from its parent organization, Marom and establishing it officially as an association. Marom would still continue to organize cultural programs organized around major Jewish holidays attracting greater number of people from the larger Jewish and non-Jewish Budapest community, while Dor Hadash was designated for more serious, exclusively religious programs involving fewer attendant. Nonetheless there are still overlaps between the two organizations, such as Bánkitó, as well as Marom's Negyed6Negyed7 Hanukkah festival during which there is a daily candle lighting ceremony each evening performed by Dor Hadash's rabbi in Sirály.

Establishing Dor Hadash as an official organization was motivated by the intention to attract more people and be more open, "so that Dor Hadash can grow bigger than a circle of friends,"[77] explains the rabbi. During Moishe House's almost two-year existence various

[77] Rabbi, "Interview," 16.

people have visited the House, some of them stuck around, others left. These days Shabbat services have at least 20-30 regular attendants and the additional occasional newcomers. As a result of the growth and the high fluctuation of membership the ratio of old members and newcomers have changed drastically: the people who had been there since the very beginning have now become a minority within the community. "There are so many new faces now, so it's harder for the old ones but we have to be open because the goal is to grow,"[78] argues Klára, who has been part of Dor Hadash since its Kazinczy period. Despite the shifting balance within membership Mirjam, who has been a member since Moishe House's 2010 wildly popular Seder, points out that fitting in for a newcomer is still not easy: "The older members constitute a closely knit group and it takes a long long time for us, newcomers to become part of that small inner circle."[79] Rebeka also adds that while it should be the Moishe House residents' responsibility to help newcomers feel part of the community, they do not always have the time or the capacity to do this, especially in the face of high fluctuation: "So many people come and go that for me to remember someone's face and name they have to return at least three or four times."[80]

Besides fluctuation, the motivation for coming to Moishe House also varies greatly among members and visitors, as Rebeka explains:

> Some people come for the company, to be with their friends. Others come for the food. There are those who come here to pray or to discover their Jewish roots here because they didn't have any tradition in the family. Some Jews come here solely for tradition and learning, but they don't believe in God. It is easier for them to come here because this is an open, non-judgmental, learning community. You can come here if you're non-Jewish. And people come. And they learn. And they ask questions.[81]

The motivation also has changed over time, as Mina ponders: "In the beginning people came for the dinner, but now it's the other way around, some people come only for the

[78] Klára, "Interview", April 28, 2011, 17.
[79] Mirjam, "Interview", April 27, 2011, 2.
[80] Rebeka, "Interview," 10.
[81] Ibid.

kabbalat Shabbat and leave before dinner, because that hour-an-a-half-long prayer is important to them."[82]

Looking back on years past the older members often reminisce with pride and joy about how their perseverance and commitment to the community have come to fruition. Talking about the many friendships and loves that were born in Dor Hadash Mina adds, "It is great to see that people come here and they have a great time, they find friends here, there even have been a couple of love stories over the years."[83]While the relationships begin in the often overcrowded Király utca apartment, after a while they extend outside the walls of Moishe House, as Áron, a relatively new member, points out, "We often go out together to have dinner or go to theater, many of us are also members of the Democracy Workshop and Yachad at the Israeli Cultural Institute. Most of my current circle of friends I got to know through Moishe House."[84] Manó, who first visited Moishe House on the kabbalat Shabbat this New Year's Eve, also adds that the Moishe House soon spread over to the other nights of the week when he goes barhopping around the Jewish district with new Moishe House friends.[85]

The real boom of Dor Hadash came over 2010-2011 winter with the appearance of people who belonged to various other Budapest congregations, Chabad, Bethlen, Vasvári, Nagy Fuvaros. The rabbi calls the appearance of these enthusiastic "synagogue tourists" the sure tell sign that Dor Hadash has grown into a recognized congregation in Budapest Jewish religious life:

> A couple of months ago they appeared. They start in synagogue A, then they go over to B, then C, then D, and this is what they do all Friday night. I think this is a great thing, that these young people take a little from everything, they try Chabad, Neolog places, Orthodox places, and Moishe House. Their appearance was the first sign that we are an acknowledged community.[86]

[82] Mina, "Interview," 20.
[83] Ibid., 19.
[84] Áron, "Interview", April 14, 2011, 5.
[85] Manó, "Interview", April 13, 2011, 14.
[86] Rabbi, "Interview," 23.

The reasons for Moishe House / Dor Hadash's success and appeal lie in many of its features which are in stark contrast to what the mainstream Budapest Jewish community can offer for young Jews. These include organizational, institutional aspects, alternative tradition interpretation, ritual and liturgy, Masorti affiliation, the rabbi, and a whole spectrum of new and highly individualistic Jewish identities that have evolved parallel to the community which are fluid, flexible, voluntary, and positive. In the following section these features which set Dor Hadash apart from the rest of Budapest's congregations will be elucidated in detail.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Dor Hadash has managed to keep its distance from MAZSIHISZ and stay independent over the years. It is not part of the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, something which will probably change when Dor Hadash's young rabbi becomes an ordained rabbi and the congregation outgrows Moishe House and will need a real synagogue. However, for the time being Dor Hadash, just like Marom is not affiliated with MAZSIHISZ.

The organization is financially supported by its own members in the form of a monthly 1000HUF contribution, while Moishe House also receives external funding from various American Jewish foundations but the long-term goal is to be entirely self-financed and self-sufficient, as the rabbi explains: "It is important to raise awareness among our members that it is our own responsibility to make Dor Hadash work, we shouldn't depend on American support. It's our responsibility and not the Rothschilds'."[87]

Since its official foundation in December 2010 many people from the community have become official members or elected board members of the organization. General meetings are open to any members and they are encouraged to participate and voice their

[87] Ibid., 21.

opinion about questions on the agenda, which often leads to lengthy debates. The five board members and the president of the organization have more frequent meetings. Despite the institutional changes members claim Dor Hadash has managed to keep its informal tone: "There is an almost invisible organizational structure and it is intentionally very informal. We only have assembly meetings when necessary."[88]

One of the secrets to Dor Hadash is that it is a grassroots organization, very much like Marom. Members are involved and devoted to their community because it is something they brought to life, have nurtured over the years and seen grow into a successful initiative, as Klára says, "It's ours, we built this community from the ground up, the way we wanted it."[89] András, who is involved in both Marom and Dor Hadash, adds, "I've been doing this for years and it works for me. You get together with your friends, brainstorm what you want, what's good for you, and you do it, you make it happen, and you don't melt into the established system."[90]

This sense of individualism and the importance of choice fundamentally differentiate the young, post-Communist generation from the older ones: Jewishness for them is not only something one can choose but something one can tailor to their own needs: "We took in our hands the control over our religious life and we created a universe of our own for ourselves, we built everything ourselves from the ground up. And the average age in Dor Hadash is 25 years, which is a completely new situation in Hungary."[91]

[88] András, "Interview," 8.
[89] Klára, "Interview," 17.
[90] András, "Interview," 7.
[91] Rabbi, "Interview," 16.

THE RABBI

There were various leading figures in religious matters within Dor Hadash over the years, such as Marom's current director, as well as one of the old members who by now has seceded from the community. Since the congregation moved to Moishe House these responsibilities were gradually taken over by Dor Hadash's young, soon-to-be rabbi who had also been part of the group since its early days. He is the "heart and soul" of the community, which is echoed over and over again in all of the interviews, as Mina says, "Our success story is in large part due to him. One without the other wouldn't be enough, but it's more him than Moishe House."[92] The rabbi, who is simultaneously a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary as well as at Eötvös Loránd University's Hebraic Studies Program, has earned the respect and admiration of the members of Dor Hadash with his extensive knowledge and his desire to transmit that to the congregation, as Mirjam recalls: "He really wants to transmit tradition, he is always happy if we ask questions. He is always warm-hearted and welcoming. You just know that it's important for him personally."[93] Manó also adds: "He is somebody with an indisputable knowledge but still does this with an attitude that implies that he is one of us, refusing any kind of horrible hierarchy that is so emphatic in other communities."[94]

It is also apparent from the rabbi's interview that Dor Hadash, as well as becoming a rabbi are his passion project:

> When I decided to be a rabbi it was very important for me that I become a Hungarian rabbi, it was precisely this huge vacuum in Hungarian Jewish life that propelled me to become a rabbi. I think that if somebody wants to do this professionally and well they need a kind of passion or even an obsession to do it and I think I have this. I really cannot think of anything else that would be more important for me than that there be a livable form of Jewishness in Hungary. Of course if somebody asks me why I want to become a rabbi I can always describe how horrible the current situation is in Hungary,

[92] Mina, "Interview," 24.
[93] Mirjam, "Interview," 10.
[94] Manó, "Interview," 8.

> but that doesn't necessarily mean I should be a rabbi. You also need a kind of obsession that you cannot really explain, it's just there. [95]

Functioning as the rabbi of this new and young community has been a formative part of his education, something which has been Marom's mission, too: "Dor Hadash and our rabbi? It's a match made in heaven! It's always been Marom's goal to become the practice ground for the next generation. And we are his education,"[96] explains András.

TRADITION AND RITUAL

LITURGY

Dor Hadash is also unique in the Budapest scene because of its tradition interpretation and its liturgical framework. Both of these reflect the rabbi's personal views and his relationship towards tradition, as well as the special characteristics of the congregation, most importantly the fact that members come from diverse backgrounds with huge differences in Jewishness, orthodoxy and belief.

Even though outsiders frequently criticize Dor Hadash for its alternative ways and especially because of its treatment of certain prayers, the rabbi strongly asserts the need for scrutiny over texts especially in the case of Shaharit services held on the first Saturday morning of each month:

> There are certain parts of these prayers that are horrible and I cannot tolerate them. I find reciting passages where we thank God for not being born a non-Jew or a woman especially absurd in a community like Dor Hadash. I think it is very important that when people recite these prayers they understand what they're saying and that they can identify with it. Therefore these parts of the liturgy, especially the morning prayers, are heavily altered in Dor Hadash.[97]

[95] Rabbi, "Interview," 3-10.
[96] András, "Interview," 8.
[97] Rabbi, "Interview," 12.

Dávid, an aspiring convert, always fights off critics of Dor Hadash by arguing that if people pray from their heart then it should not be a problem if these prayers are altered: "Many people disapprove of our rabbi changing the text of prayers, but does it really hurt anyone if we think it's important to remember our women ancestors in prayer in addition to the men?"[98]

MUSIC AND COLLECTIVE SINGING

Music and collective singing have also become unique Dor Hadash traits and one of the most appealing aspects of liturgy for young Jews and non-Jews searching for Jewishness. The rabbi's influence is indubitable in these areas, too. The tunes are enjoyable, easy to learn and rarely become boring as he always teaches new ones to the congregation. His voice has made a great impression on all of my interviewees, they often stress how the rabbi's beautiful voice makes everyone want to join in. "He is amazingly great at this. He always sings in a register that is in the range of most people's voice, he also does it on a volume that doesn't dominate the community but can still be a point of reference for everyone,"[99] explains András who is also a member of Dor Hadash's new choir called Király 34 (Moishe House's address). The popularity of collective singing in Dor Hadash also reflects a void other Budapest congregations did not fill for the members. Dávid who often goes to other synagogues especially dislikes how old cantors sing as if they were opera singers and the congregations remain silent listeners. He also adds how important he finds the preference of modern Hebrew over Ashkenazi pronunciation,[100] something which makes it easier for some people to join in, while for others who do not read Hebrew Dor Hadash has created a special photocopied siddur with the text of the kabbalat Shabbat service written in transliterated

[98] Dávid, "Interview", April 30, 2011, 12.
[99] András, "Interview," 12.
[100] Dávid, "Interview," 7.

Hebrew. Others also find bilingual siddurs helpful, simultaneously reading both Hebrew and English.

D'VAR TORAH

The discussion of weekly Torah portions became a regular part of Friday evenings in Moishe House around January 2010.[101] Members are encouraged to take turns presenting to the community the summary of the current week's parsha and relevant rabbinical commentaries, after which the rabbi also adds his own comments. Arising from the fact that members have very different beliefs and opinions, opposing views often clash during these discussions but Dor Hadash's very liberal attitude allows for these to peacefully coexist without leading to tension.

KASHRUT

The question of kashrut comes up over and over again on occasion of major holidays and assembly meetings, as well as with the appearance of visiting Masorti rabbis. While Dor Hadash's own rabbi and several members would welcome a kosher kitchen, the general consensus is that Moishe House is not kosher firstly because none of its residents keep kashrut, secondly because the majority of the congregation has no desire to do so either: "Honestly, people couldn't care less about it. I think it's enough that we don't have dairy and meat together on the table," argues Klára, in fact Shabbat dinners are always vegetarian and when the residents buy meat for their own consumption they stay away from pork.[102]

Cooking and communal eating, however, constitute an important tradition in Dor Hadash. It is also a kind of initiation or bonding experience for newer members: if they have cooked dinner for the whole community at least once, they are one step in towards the inner

[101] Rebeka, "Interview," 8.
[102] Mina, "Interview," 11.

circle Mirjam had a hard time becoming part of. It is also during dinner that discussions begin which usually end in one of the bars in the Jewish district.

JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Jewish holidays as formative communal experiences provide further opportunities for Dor Hadash members to bond with each other and to rediscover and reconnect to Jewish tradition. Over the years Dor Hadash, faithful to its mission of breathing new life into tradition by reinventing, reinterpreting it, has tailored almost all holidays to the demands of its very young, diverse, 21st century, learning community. It also reflects the need for this generation to express their Jewishness is individualistic and self-made forms.

Sukkot is an especially positive Dor Hadash experience for most of the interviewees. The week-long holiday is organized in Kőleves Kert, an open-air bar in Kazinczy utca just down the street from Moishe House, where the community builds and decorates a spacious sukkah where they gather every evening to recite prayers and have dinner together. On Simchat Torah the congregation gathers in Moishe House and they walk over to Kőleves Kert with Dor Hadash's Torah scroll where they dance and sing with the Torah while regular Kőleves Kert guests smile at them as they drink their wine spritzers. Girls, of course, are allowed to read from the Torah in Dor Hadash: "I read from the Torah, too, and I could also put on a tallit. That was really good. Girls can do everything in Dor Hadash, that's very important for me,"[103] confesses Mirjam.

Hanukkah, as mentioned above, is jointly organized with Marom as part of Negyed6Negyed7 Festival and candle-lightings take place in Sirály.

Tu Bishvat Seder is another popular communal experience for Dor Hadash members, as it attracts little more people than kabbalat Shabbat services keeping the atmosphere still very homely. Sitting around a table packed with heaps of fruits and reciting prayers after each

[103] Mirjam, "Interview," 13.

glass of wine offers another opportunity for people to bond, as well as to learn Jewish tradition.

Purim is also traditionally organized in cooperation with Marom in one of the mid-sized venues in Budapest. For 2011's Purim Marom invited British band, Oi Va Voi to give a concert in Gödör, while Dor Hadash's rabbi and members read aloud the Book of Esther. The audience could follow the Hebrew version through projection with the help of a mini camera attached to the end of the yad, the pointer for Torah reading. Another member from the congregation read out the Hungarian version, while a third person recited kaddish for the enemies that were killed.

Pesach is probably the most popular holiday attracting many people who otherwise do not belong to Dor Hadash. It is a tradition to read out Marom's alternative Haggadah during the Seder which has about sixty guests on the first evening of Pesach and about twenty on the second.

For Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur most members of Dor Hadash go to various synagogues in Budapest.

MASORTI, NEOLOG OR RECONSTRUCTIONIST?

Affiliation with a certain branch of Judaism is a debated issue within the congregation. It is the intention of the board members, as well as the leaders of Marom to get Dor Hadash acknowledged as a Masorti congregation under Masorti Europe. This would help maintain their independence from MAZSIHISZ and strategically it would also be beneficial for both organizations seeing as Marom is part of Masorti. It is interesting, however, that the Hungarian pattern does not coincide with the European one, as Rebeka explains:

"Everywhere else in the world young people launch a Marom from existing Masorti congregations. Budapest is the only place where this happened the other way around."[104]

Masorti affiliation though would entail much more than a good strategic step, it would require the congregation to be more strict in many areas, most importantly in kashrut, but smoking on Moishe House's balcony is also problematic, as well as the use of musical instruments during kabbalat Shabbat. Dor Hadash's rabbi is hopeful that with the help of the congregation's great supporter, Stockholm rabbi David Lazar they would be able to liberalize the very traditional Masorti Europe by creating a liberal wing on the inside.[105]

He adds, however, that Dor Hadash is closer to the Hungarian Neolog trend, and closest probably to American Reconstructionist Judaism, originally part of the Conservative Judaism but today an independent branch in the United States, but in Europe it does not exist.

EGALITARIANISM

Another important feature which sets Dor Hadash apart from the rest of Hungarian Jewish communities is the very high number of non-Jewish and non-Halachically Jewish members (more than half of the congregation) and its treatment of these members. The founders of Dor Hadash have been from the very beginning committed to being egalitarian and leaving all religious rituals open for women.

Another area where Dor Hadash puts up a united front is the equal treatment and unequivocal acceptance of its many gay members, including first and foremost the rabbi. This has become such an important and refreshingly unique feature of the community that it comes up in all of the interviews with a host of positive adjectives. While gay members of Dor Hadash tend to think of the congregation as isolated islands of acceptance and tolerance in

[104] Rebeka, "Interview," 10.
[105] Rabbi, "Interview," 20.

the ocean of Hungary's homophobic majority society, non-gay member often stress how their stereotypes have been radically reevaluated and cast aside as a result of their newly acquired experiences within Moishe House. Klára however, points out that the community's tolerance is not necessarily determined by whether or not their rabbi is gay, though that probably helps too, the appeal of Dor Hadash for its gay members on the other hand is connected to him: "It's always been accepted and not because our rabbi is gay but because of the community is very liberal and tolerant. But they come here because of the rabbi."[106]

The case was somewhat different with non-Halachic Jews and non-Jews, initially it was agreed upon that they would not count towards the minyen, however, as more and more young people eager to learn joined the group it was decided that they be accepted as equal members, as well. As the rabbi recalls,

> In the beginning some people suggested we always ask newcomers about their Jewishness. It was a big dilemma for me too because Jewish law is very clear about this, on the other hand the situation demanded completely different measures. After a while it was obvious that this was a learning community of young people, and that our openness and liberalism must be stronger than our traditionalism.[107]

As pointed out earlier ethnic and Halachic definitions have already been losing ground, becoming less and less determining in the definition of Jewishness especially since the demise of Communism in Eastern Europe. Many Hungarian congregations retain these definitions, which is rightly questioned by Dor Hadash especially in the face of intermarriage rates, the abandonment of tradition in several generations and the general decline of religion. It is no wonder that even Dor Hadash's rabbi, who is well aware of Jewish law, had to change his initial standpoint on the subject, as he argues: "It is important to see what Jewish law says about this but it is also important to see that what determines our lives and our decision when we decide to accept somebody as Jewish is not based on religion."[108]

[106] Klára, "Interview," 21.
[107] Rabbi, "Interview," 15.
[108] Ibid., 4.

Another important feature of the various Jewish identities within Dor Hadash is that these identities represent a new direction within Hungary in the sense that they are less and less determined by the stigma attached to Jewishness or the trauma of the Holocaust, as the rabbi claims,

> Even though very large portion of our members are not Halachically Jewish, 90% of them have completely new and very healthy Jewish identities. Jewish roots of the family, family background are no longer definitive. The majority of people in Dor Hadash consider themselves Jewish for reasons that have nothing to do with what happened to grandma or what Krisztina Morvai[109] said about Jews, and this is very important and the appearance of such a community in Hungarian Jewish religious life is completely new and refreshing.[110]

Less and less determined by ethnicity, anti-Semitism or the Holocaust Jewishness in post-Communist countries has become a matter of choice and this has resulted in wide spectrum of new Jewish identities. This freedom of choice in affirming Jewishness and constructing a Jewish identity tailored to one's own needs is also exercised by Dor Hadash members. They are free to say they are Jewish if they identify as such but they are just as free to participate in the life of the community if they consider themselves non-Jewish and have no inclination to become one. Jewishness in Dor Hadash is not a requirement and it does not carry any kind of value judgment, it is "not as issue", as many of the interviewees claim. As András puts it, "It is not expected that someone be Jewish, let alone Halachically, nobody asks how Jewish you are or whether you are Jewish at all in the first place. This is the charm of Dor Hadash, this is something that doesn't exist anywhere else in Budapest."[111] Whereas in other congregations as many of the interviewees attest to it this is a decisive question, which often makes them feel excluded and not an accepted part of the community. This is why Mina always welcomes new members by assuring them that Dor Hadash is an egalitarian, non-judgmental congregation: "I always tell newcomers that many people in Dor

[109] Hungarian politician and lawyer, member of European Parliament. She is affiliated with far-right party, Jobbik.
[110] Rabbi, "Interview," 16.
[111] András, "Interview," 7.

Hadash are non-Jews and that many of our Jewish members have received very little tradition at home. I tell them because they shouldn't feel awkward, they shouldn't feel bad if they are not Jewish or if they know very little about Jewish tradition even though they're Jewish."[112]

Dor Hadash fills a niche in this respect, as well, as Dávid says, "It is not their fault nobody taught them how to pray in their childhood. If Dor Hadash can reach young Jews who are interested in Judaism, who want to learn, who choose Jewishness, then this organization does more for Hungarian Jewry than any other congregation in Budapest."[113]

This very conscious and unconditional acceptance of all members who are not Jewish gradually evolved over time but the issue was once and for all decided after an emblematic member of Dor Hadash asked in front of the entire community one of the non-Jewish members, who incidentally had been in an especially traditional phase as he was preparing for conversion, not to recite the ha-motzi over the challah. This incident, after which both of them left the community for good, went down in Dor Hadash history as one of the most determining and painful conflicts of its existence and as the rabbi recalls, "the community just couldn't forgive her for this. This was a defining moment for the community and since then we consistently have left these rituals open for anybody."[114]

CONVERSION

Over the years many non-Jewish members have decided to convert to Judaism and although this is by no means an expectation towards them, Dor Hadash encourages and supports its non-Jewish members in their decision to convert so that their Jewishness is accepted outside the walls of Moishe House, too: "We agreed that rituals were left open for anybody communally and liturgically, however, in order for our non-Jewish members to be

[112] Mina, "Interview," 24.
[113] Dávid, "Interview," 6-10.
[114] Rabbi, "Interview," 15.

able to integrate into the wider Jewish community and take part in major life cycle events such as Jewish wedding, childbirth, burial, we encourage and support them in conversion."[115] While in the future Dor Hadash is planning to organize a conversion course for aspiring converts, for the time being those who decide to convert are taught by the rabbi on a one-on-one basis, like Dávid who has been having private session with the rabbi for over a year and praises his ability to transmit Judaism to his students.

Dávid will also be the first one in Dor Hadash to convert not through MAZSIHISZ but through Masorti, which will be a major breakthrough for the organization as it will finally break the privileged status of MAZSIHISZ, and while doing so this conversion will still be accepted by world Jewry, as they are acknowledged by the International Rabbinical Assembly. Furthermore, it will also enable immigration to Israel for future converts, something MAZSIHISZ conversion will not, as pointed out on Masorti Europe's website: "Those who convert to Judaism under our auspices are entitled to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return, providing all other requirements are met."[116]

The process of conversion naturally culminates in some overtraditionalizing the degree of which depends on the individual. Dor Hadash has witnessed this phenomenon many times during its existence. Many converts feel the need to prove to the world that they are observant Jews and they often overcompensate and become more Jewish than everyone else. As the rabbi explains,

> This is a natural process for everybody who converts or returns to tradition: the initial obsession. They feel they have to prove that they are good Jews but I'd like to think that Dor Hadash is a community where people are accepted unconditionally and that it's a community that fills a niche in this respect, too. It's natural that there is some romantic fever of excitement in the beginning but that usually passes.[117]

[115] Ibid., 18.
[116] "Conversion to Judaism through The European Masorti Bet Din", n.d., http://www.europeanmasortibetdin.org/conversions.htm.
[117] Rabbi, "Interview," 17.

This obsession with tradition nonetheless often leads to conflicts especially in a community like Dor Hadash where tradition is treated very liberally, therefore many converts eventually end up leaving the community for more traditional congregations, as it also happened with one of the recent converts who went through a phase of overtraditionalizing:

> She decided to kosher their new apartment, completely separated everything, different drawers for utensils, different set of utensils for the dairy and the meat, everything marked with red and blue dots. Then when she thought this still wasn't enough, they took everything to the mikveh, one by one. Then she thought this was still not kosher enough because what if Calgonit wasn't kosher! So she launched an investigation over its ingredients. She wrote to the Hungarian branch of Calgonit but their reply didn't satisfy her so she wrote to the international Calgonit, they finally sent her a kosher certificate. But before all of this she asked many rabbis in Budapest but nobody knew the answer because no living soul in Budapest has ever pondered whether Calgonit was kosher enough. When she finally got an answer, she reached an endpoint and told me that she may have overdone it. I said, 'You think?'[118]

This kind of obsession is hard to understand for non-religious Jewish members, such as Manó: "It's almost embarrassing that all of what she's yearning for and what she does a thousand times better than any of us was given to me at my birth and if I could I'd give it to her. She deserves it so much more.[119]

While conversion is definitely an option, a lot of non-Jews decide against it as they already feel accepted by the community and their primary reason for being in Dor Hadash is not necessarily religion. However, the rabbi says that if these members will one day want to get married he will not be able to marry them, as it is one of Masorti's four standards that a rabbi must not officiate in intermarriage. However, the question of gay marriage is left to the decision of the rabbi, in that case, though, it would probably be MAZSIHISZ to say the final veto. Pondering the future of non-Jewish members of Dor Hadash, the rabbi adds amusingly: "Those who don't want to convert can of course stay part of the community. But if most people who are now thinking of converting will really convert than that will create an

[118] Ibid.
[119] Manó, "Interview," 19.

unprecedented situation in Dor Hadash: the majority of the community will be made up of Halachic Jews."[120]

CONFLICTS

The conflict arising from the new converts' demand for more tradition is just one of the many conflicts that have come up in Dor Hadash over the years. Religious matters often incite conflicts exactly because of the laxity of rules. There have been debates about whether or not Moishe House should have a kosher kitchen, whether it is acceptable to smoke outside on the balcony, whether it is prohibited to operate a beamer after kabbalat Shabbat. Many of these debates and quarrels happen online through Moishe House's mailing list which makes it easier for people to voice their opinion. General meetings also serve as a forum to speak about these issues, however, they are rarely solved, and they keep arising from time to time.

The question of the monthly 1000HUF contribution members should pay is the subject of a never-ending debate, where one side argues for self-financing and the individuals' responsibility for their own community, while the other advocates voluntary contributions in any other form but money. The monthly fee of the professional guitarist who plays during kabbalat Shabbats is also the subject of heated discussions.

Living together under the same roof also generates conflicts between Moishe House residents, and their busy lives as organizers of the community frequently conflict with their private lives, too.

[120] Rabbi, "Interview," 19.

FUTURE

Two issues came up during the discussion of the future of Dor Hadash and Moishe House, both of which will be challenges for the community. Dor Hadash's young rabbi is planning to move to Israel to finish his studies there in the next couple of years, which as Mina says, "will hit the community hard."[121] It will require some of the members, most probably András, to step up and learn how to lead kabbalat Shabbats.

Over the long run Dor Hadash will outgrow Moishe House and the separation of the two organizations will be inevitable. Hopefully by this time Dor Hadash's rabbi will become an ordained rabbi and the community can search for a synagogue of its own. Rumbach synagogue is the dream of many members, including the rabbi, and in many ways it would be a perfect home for Dor Hadash. Its circular arrangement would allow the congregation to form a circle during kabbalat Shabbats, while traditional rows of benches would disrupt this tradition. The synagogue, currently unoccupied and in bad shape, would symbolize the Dor Hadash story, as the rabbi reasons: "It is in shambles now. And to fill that with life and a community, that would be something."[122] Moving to a synagogue would also mean that the Dor Hadash would have to grow and reach older and younger generations as a healthy congregation that plans for the future does not only have young members. Mina argues that the creation of a circle for their mothers would help integrate older generations and it would also help reestablish the broken chain of tradition.[123]

If Dor Hadash moves out of Moishe House, the organization will be left without a community and programs.

[121] Mina, "Interview," 20.
[122] Rabbi, "Interview," 23.
[123] Mina, "Interview," 21.

CHAPTER 2

INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY STRATEGIES WITHIN THE MOISHE HOUSE / DOR HADASH COMMUNITY IN BUDAPEST

After the institutional analysis of Dor Hadash I am going to change the focus of my thesis now and turn to the individual identities of my interviewees. Their respective narratives correspond to the relevant literature about post-Communist Jewish identities. All of them come from families with very little, if any tradition, two of them have no Jewish roots at all. What is common in all of their narratives is that they had to create their Jewish identities from scratch, as young adults. The very different identities they have custom-made for themselves reflect both the importance of choice and selection, what Gudonis refers to as consumerism, that characterize the era that they grew up in, but they also reflect their very different life stories and personalities. All of them at one point or another faced some kind of identity crises which propelled them to redefine themselves and search for things, people, places, customs, rituals, religions, communities that they felt reflected who they were.

Below I will analyze their life narratives one by one and uncover first the identity dilemma or crisis which pushed the interviewees on a search for something, as well as why they decided to choose Jewishness and the particular community of Dor Hadash. I will not analyze the interview of the rabbi.

MINA

Mina was born on May 13, 1983 in Budapest. Both of her parents are Jewish, her father does not have a particular interest in Jewish tradition, her mother is a member of the Reform congregation, Szim Salom, even so, there was little tradition in Mina's family during her childhood and they never celebrated Jewish holidays.

The first determining experience in Mina's life was when her parents decided to keep her for an extra year in kindergarten before going to elementary school. As a child she was not willing to talk and psychologists recommended she stay in kindergarten for one more year. Her mother decided to enroll her in a Jewish kindergarten to learn Hebrew. This was during the final year of the Communist regime, thus the only Jewish kindergarten was hidden in Budapest's orthodox center in Kazinczy utca. This year was formative for Mina as it ignited in her a life-long eagerness to learn, she learned to read in Hebrew here before she learned to read in Hungarian, and it was also her first real contact with Judaism. Even more importantly this extra year allowed her to enroll next fall in the newly established Lauder Yavne Jewish Community School and Kindergarten's very first class.

The first 5-6 years at Lauder were one of the happiest times in Mina's life as she recalls. This was right after the change of system and as a student of the very alternative Jewish school Mina had first-hand experience of the ongoing Jewish revival. She dove headfirst into the study of Judaism and Hebrew; however, she claims she often felt alone with her desire and enthusiasm to rediscover tradition as most students were much less eager to reestablish a connection to the heritage which their parents had abandoned.[124]

Mina's parents divorced when she was 8 pushing her into a crisis and after her parents remarried she often felt she was on the margins of her parents' new families and could not fit in. Excelling at Lauder, pursuing various extracurricular activities and attending regular Shabbat services in Szim Salom helped her pull through this personal crisis, though.

Szim Salom and the ten years she spent there were also formative for Mina as she got closer to tradition and ritual but she also became more and more disillusioned by the Reform congregation's very diluted tradition interpretation: "It didn't satisfy me, it wasn't enough, and I realized that my relationship with religion, with Judaism is more intimate and

[124] Ibid., 1.

intensive."[125] It was finally the despotic woman rabbi and her frequent unwillingness to hold kabbalat Shabbat services that made Mina reexamine her relationship to religion and Szim Salom and decide to leave the community, her first important decision as a young adult[126], as she says.

This also reflects how religion is more of a choice for the young generation and if they do decide to make room for it in their lives then it should be something which they can identify with. Mina says Jewishness was a choice for her, and one day she would also like to allow the freedom to choose for her own children, while she thinks it is important to transmit tradition to them, something her family never did.[127]

Mina's ties to Judaism were yet again reevaluated after graduating from Lauder and starting her French and Aesthetics Studies at Eötvös Loránd University. It was in the strikingly non-Jewish environment that she realized how important religion was for her.[128] It was also around that time that she made the conscious choice never to eat pork, fulfilling at least this much from kashrut.[129]

Upon leaving Szim Salom Mina began a search for a community that could fulfill her needs. For many years she was wandering from synagogue to synagogue, trying Neolog places, Orthodox places, never quite finding what she was looking for. While on a scholarship in Berlin she found a community of young yeshiva students that could finally satisfy her temporarily.

It was in 2007 when Dor Hadash was launched that Mina finally felt that she found something of her own, something valuable and worth putting effort into. Mina has been there from the beginning in Dor Hadash, building it up from nothing, little by little, nurturing it,

[125] Ibid., 2.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 11.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 2.

worrying about it when it almost ceased to exist in the winter of 2008-9, and, as revealed earlier rescuing it with Moishe House.

Jewishness occupied more and more of her life as in the fall of 2009 she also began working at the Jewish Museum as a guide, while simultaneously fulfilling her responsibilities as a Moishe House resident. These days she organizes alternative socio-cultural Jewish walking tours around the 8th district in Budapest while also working towards her PhD.

She still does not keep kashrut but refrains from eating pork and her Friday evening is devoted to the Shabbat no matter where she is: "I have to be somewhere on Friday night where they hold Shabbat, preferably in a liturgical framework. When I'm abroad I always try to go to a synagogue or even here in Budapest if there is no synagogue around I recite Friday's prayers on my own."[130]

Her parents do not follow her in preserving tradition but as she says she has made her peace with this: "I am the one in my family who's revived tradition. I no longer want to change my grandparents who were more or less affected by the Holocaust, neither my parents who grew up in silence."[131]

ANDRÁS

András was born on November 14, 1986 in Budapest and grew up in the suburbs in Káposztásmegyer. Both of András's parents are Jewish but Jewishness in the family was only present in the form of anxiety over the stigma and instead of a living tradition the parents transmitted to their children the identity strategy of passing.

After elementary school András enrolled in Berzsenyi, a Budapest high school with a traditionally high proportion of Jewish students, however, this was not a real connection to

[130] Ibid., 11.
[131] Ibid.

Jewishness either, and neither was reading one Herman Wouk book after the other and fantasizing about moving to a kibbutz in Israel.

The turning point came in 2003 in the form of a Hagesher concert organized by Marom which presented an image of Jewishness that was positive, contemporary, life-like, and cool, it was finally something András could connect to and identify with: "I remember the feeling, it was such a shock to me to see that Jewishness could be a cool thing, not some lame and tedious community center program where we stuff our faces with matzo wearing paper kippas. But there were these slim, bespectacled, young intellectuals rapping in Hebrew on stage."[132]

He developed many new friendships within Marom and started attending its events as a kind of extracurricular activity parallel to high school. He participated in Marom lectures, talks, discussions, and felt proud and happy for belonging to such a group. This also lead to conflicts with his friends in Berzsenyi who had no particular inclination to get involved in Jewish culture, for them Jewishness equaled having funny-looking noses. Over the following years András kept going back and forth between these two groups of friends, getting more and more involved in Marom's work first as a volunteer, later as a coordinator in the organization's Jewstock and Bánkitó festivals. Currently he is a history major at the very conservative Pázmány Péter Catholic University where he keeps running into racist remarks and futile debates with his classmates. However, he also enrolled in the Hebraic Studies Program mostly so he can learn Hebrew well enough to understand Shabbat prayers.

András's relationship with Judaism is quite untraditional and he does not consider himself religious. A traditional synagogue environment would even irritate him, as he says, "People pray with a different pronunciation, to tunes that don't appeal to me, while sitting in an arrangement that I dislike, and I am surrounded by strangers in a building which is meant

[132] András, "Interview," 2.

to be a place where you're supposed to pray and feel God's presence. I just cannot ease up in such an environment."[133]

For a long time even though he knew about Marom's Shabbat programs in 2005-6 he was reluctant to join his friends who were all annoyingly unavailable on Friday nights. When he finally did join Dor Hadash in 2007 he was often bored in the beginning and wouldn't sing with the others. However, the catchy Carlebach tunes seem to have made the trick as András soon caught himself humming Jedid Nefesh and other psalms during the week and anticipating Friday nights. The turning point, he says, always comes when someone decides to join in and become involved personally, "It's when you start having a living connection to the whole thing. And then all of a sudden I was the one putting out chairs for people and calling people to come. After a while it becomes important to you personally."[134]

András's relationship towards Jewish tradition is the perfect example for Judaism a la carte: he selects some things from the menu that he likes, while stays away from others. He chose to become a member of Dor Hadash because it is the only place in Budapest where he can do this, where he can practice Judaism the way he wants to, the way it makes him feel good without having to face any kind of judgment. Even though he does not refrain from chametz during Pesach, does not fast on Yom Kippur and has no desire to keep kashrut or observe Jewish law, Friday night services are an integral part of András's week, if not its highlight, they make him relax and feel good and they also give him energy for the week ahead. And most importantly, they involve a community of friends, which is another very strong pull towards Dor Hadash and Jewishness in general, and it is also the reason why András became a Moishe House resident.

[133] Ibid., 6.
[134] Ibid., 7.

REBEKA

Rebeka was born on May 19, 1987 in Budapest. Her parents are Adventists but Jewishness has always had an underlying, unsaid, quite ambiguous presence in the father's side of the family. As Rebeka says, she can only guess, there are certain signs and family stories about name changes, conversions, a grandma who knew how to make matzo. Even though her father has never explicitly told Rebeka that they were Jewish he kept taking her with him to synagogue on Jewish holidays, he himself earned a degree in Hebraic Studies when Rebeka was a child and he is currently working towards a PhD at the Jewish Theological Seminary. All of these things planted the seed in Rebeka and she too began exploring Judaism and Jewish culture in the footsteps of her father.

She attended Radnóti High School where traditionally a huge percentage of the student body is Jewish, which was yet another strong pull towards Jewishness and as Rebeka says, it was very liberating that it was not a taboo subject there, everybody was talking about it.[135]

Rebeka decided to become a doctor and enrolled in Semmelweis University where Jewishness was rarely affirmed by students, however, Rebeka refused to go back into this invisible closet and found ways to embrace her very strong attraction towards Judaism. She discovered Sirály and Marom in 2007 and began to work as a volunteer at their programs. Rebeka was also an avid reader of Judapest.org and the online acquaintances gradually turned into offline friendships with several long-time Dor Hadash members, most importantly Klára. Together they started going to Rabbi Darvas's congregation in the Nagy Fuvaros synagogue which she loves, as well as to Marom's hugely popular Seders.

Her parents soon began to worry as she was becoming more and more Jewish and her father even stopped going to synagogue with her, but by this time it was too late, Rebeka

[135] Rebeka, "Interview," 1.

continued along the path that she chose for herself and while at Nagy Fuvaros she began a conversion course to make up for the gaps in the family narrative.

This course propelled her to reexamine her beliefs and her relationship to Judaism and when she eventually decided to quit this course that was an important turning point for Rebeka, and it also became the foundation of her Jewish identity. She made her peace with the blanks in her family history and felt that her Jewish identity was strong enough as it was and she no longer felt the need to convert. As she recalls: "I decided that I was already embedded deep enough in the whole thing without the conversion and if somebody is bothered by this, I don't care about that. Because I know what I know about myself and what really matters is how I define myself and not the fact that I have a paper to prove it."[136] Since making this decision Rebeka has no longer been in doubt as to how to refer to herself, from that point on she has been a self-professed Jew who does not need the outside world to legitimize her Jewishness.

Although her rabbi understood and accepted this decision, Rebeka eventually left that community for Dor Hadash whose mission of being non-judgmental and egalitarian made it the perfect choice for Rebeka. Another important reason for choosing Dor Hadash was its community which comprised more and more of her friends.

As for religion Rebeka says believing in God was never really a question for her but she exercises some scrutiny over which parts of tradition to integrate into her life and which she has no need for.

KLÁRA

Klára was born on August 4, 1979. She comes from and intermarried family, her father is not Jewish and an atheist, her mother is Jewish, although not Halachically. She never

[136] Ibid., 6.

received a Jewish upbringing. As a child Klára often had self-esteem problems and an ongoing identity crisis which reveled around questions like, 'Where do I come from? Where do I belong?'. Klára could not identify with her parents' working class background. She knew she wanted to achieve more. Therefore she studied hard, always excelled in school. She wanted a better life for herself.

The first point of identification with Jewishness was when she started reading the Bible. The Jewish people's chosenness was something she could identify with as she herself also felt chosen to achieve more than her parents did and break out of their working class environment. It was only when she enrolled in Berzsenyi that she finally felt that she was among her own people, who were smart, liberal and incidentally, Jewish.

It took a downward spiral in her personal life for Klára to connect to religion and make it an integral part of life. A major crisis in her family, her mother throwing her out of their home, the ensuing pressure of making it on her own and supporting herself financially while going to college were becoming more and more overwhelming. It was after a painful a breakup and a broken nose that she finally hit rock bottom. Klára was in desperate need of something that could give her strength and hope to go on, so she began to search for answers. She found two of them: Jesus and Judaism. In 2000 she started attending the services of an alternative Christian congregation, called Golgota, where she found comfort in knowing that her reason for being in this world is God and that Jesus is her savior.

On the other hand, Judaism was important to Klára because it was an age-old tradition transmitted from generation to generation, and by becoming part of this tradition she was also becoming part of something that is much bigger than her.[137] As Judaism is inconceivable without a community, Klára was also looking for ways to connect to Judaism this way, too. Like Rebeka, she became a reader and guest-blogger of Judapest in 2006 and found many

[137] Klára, "Interview," 12.

friends both online and offline, most importantly Rebeka. Together they attended services in Nagy Fuvaros synagogue for a while but Sirály, Marom and finally Dor Hadash gradually replaced Rabbi Darvas's congregation because Dor Hadash was something of their own and the people, like Rebeka and Klára herself were all rediscoverers constructing their Jewish identities and their interpretation of Jewish tradition on the go.

When asked about how Christianity and Judaism can coexist in her belief system, Klára claims that for her this is the only way they make sense: "Christianity does not make sense without Judaism, while Judaism's ultimate goal, the reason why Jews were chosen, points to Jesus. Though most Christians think I'm a crazy philo-Semite, and Jews think I'm a Jesus loving weirdo." As she claims, in Dor Hadash she has the most conservative religious views, "I refrain from premarital sex. I take the Bible verbatim, I believe the Bible is divine in origin, I believe the Jews really were in Egypt and that there were miracles, that they really crossed the Red Sea, while the majority of the people in Moishe House, including the rabbi do not believe in this. I am the rabbi's complete antidote."[138] However, according to Klára this is all the more so a reason for her being in Dor Hadash: "You need something like this too on the spectrum in the congregation. Just like you need a gay rabbi."

While her beliefs about God and the Torah do seem conservative to most Dor Hadash members, when it comes to ritual, Klára is a lot more lax. She says she cannot understand why new converts keep tormenting themselves with all those restrictions and rules and she does not feel any need to perform these rites only to please God or to prove to the world that she is a good Jew. She decided to refrain from premarital sex not because she wants to please God but because she believes that there is one person for her in this world and she wants to wait. On the other hand she does not think that keeping kosher would do her any good and therefore she does not observe these rules.

[138] Ibid., 19.

MIRJAM

Mirjam was born in April 4, 1986 in Budapest, but this is not how she begins her narrative. She begins by stating that her life story starts with her mother's story: "She was born in 1946 and my grandparents adopted her. My mom's birth mother was very young, something happened to her as she was coming home from the camps, she got pregnant, after arriving home she gave birth to my mother and put her in an orphanage."[139] Starting her own narrative with her mother's shows how much Mirjam's own identity is connected to her. This intimacy is also reinforced by the fact that both of them learned about their origin relatively late, Mirjam's mother when she was 20, Mirjam when she was 12.

Jewishness had a similar unsaid but still somehow felt presence in Mirjam's family as it had in Rebeka's. Mirjam recalls that it was always there, under the surface but it manifested mostly in the kind of culture they consumed, the friends her mother had, most of them Jewish, and the books they had at home. The question of religion was unambiguous though, as both parents were raised as Catholics.

The most important and formative event in terms of Jewishness in Mirjam's life is connected to the Jewish summer camp in Szarvas where her parents sent her at age 12 without telling her why they were sending her there. The Szarvas experience, which for a generation of young people is mostly characterized by positive adjectives, for Mirjam was quite traumatic, as she recalls. The sense of being an outsider became a recurrent motif in her later life but Szarvas was the first time she felt this way. Back at home when she asked her parents why they sent her there they told her because she belonged there, which shocked her to the core. Later she also learned about her mother's story. However, for a long time she had the feeling, especially around Jews who were deeply embedded in tradition that she could not make up for those lost years.

[139] Mirjam, "Interview," 1.

In her search to recover Jewish tradition Mirjam started going to Tikva, an Orthodox community in Budapest, which was a determining period in her life and she learned a lot about Jewishness, Judaism and how that can be incorporated into one's life. She spent Friday nights in the homes of various families from the community, learning little by little. She felt accepted by them and she always made an effort to respect the rules they lived by, even though she could not fully identify with all of them and the environment was overall too religious for her.

Moishe House, on the other hand offered something less strict, as well as community of similar rediscoverers, and a rabbi who was always welcoming and accepting. It was a place where she did not have to prove her Jewishness and nobody ever questioned it either. As she remembers: "Years later when I returned to Tikva they were asking for papers. I said 'That, I don't have, but I have a Jewish identity. In Moishe House nobody asked."[140]

Dor Hadash is also a learning community which suits Mirjam's identity and needs better. As she claims she is not very religious, she has no desire to observe kashrut but she is eager to learn and her favorite part of kabbalat Shabbat is the discussion about the weekly Torah portion. As a girl it is also important for Mirjam that she belongs to a community where she is an equal member who can take part in rituals the women in Tikva can only watch as outsiders.

Finally, Dor Hadash gave Mirjam a community where she could fit in, a community of young, liberal, tolerant, and open-minded people, many of whom have become her friends. It opened up her eyes to issues she had had no real contact with before coming to Moishe House, most importantly the LGBT community. Becoming friends with many of Dor Hadash's gay members has been an enriching and eye-opening experience for Mirjam.

[140] Ibid., 15.

She has especially fond memories about the kabbalat Shabbat on New Year's Eve: "That was a real communal experience; everybody was so euphoric and happy. There was this group of people in the hallway who were standing there and I'm not kidding, for an hour and a half, entangled in a group hug, some people left, others joined, and they were hugging each other. That was very sweet."[141]

MANÓ

Manó was born on December 21, 1989 in Budapest. Both his parents are Jewish, but Jewishness in the family meant more of an identification with Jewish culture and the trauma of the Shoah which affected the grandparents. The preservation of tradition and any religious activity was kept to a minimum, it was limited to going to synagogue once a year.

Despite the absence of tradition in the family the question of Jewishness and the problem of defining himself and his place in the world have been a recurrent source of frustration for him pushing Manó into crises of identity from time to time. It was in elementary school when he first realized that Jewishness can be the basis of differentiation between people and on occasion it has an added negative value. This left the young Manó perplexed and confused as he could not discern any palpable or visible difference between himself and his peers. It frustrated him how people looked at him differently as soon as his Jewishness came out in the open and he refused to determine his identity based on this, as he says Jewishness should be like eye color, marginal, although it undoubtedly makes him more sensitive to certain injustices in the world.[142] Nonetheless he decided never to exploit his Jewish status and never to accept the same thing from others either pro, or contra.

[141] Ibid., 14.
[142] Manó, "Interview," 2.

High school was a formative period for Manó as his parents enrolled him in Sándor Scheiber High School, one of the Jewish schools of Budapest. Here he experienced the same phenomenon as earlier, only this time it was turned inside out and exercised by his Jewish schoolmates. Their proud chauvinism and the fact that at the same time they were lacking in basic knowledge of Judaism developed an aversion in him towards Jewishness and he vehemently resisted identifying with their kind of value system which valued people merely because they were Jewish and looked down upon others because they were not. This eventually pushed him into an identity crisis to which he eventually found two solutions, one was playing the piano, which also determined his choice of higher education (Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music) and his career of being a pianist, while the other strategy was surrounding himself with "middle-aged IQ-fighters who were much more liberal than most Jews."[143]

What eventually lead Manó to Moishe House was the search for a community of young and liberal people. His first time in Dor Hadash was the kabbalat Shabbat on 2010 New Year's Eve which had a huge impact on him, as he recalls it was "sensational." What made it sensational was the shock of realizing that what had been previously inconceivable, was exactly the explicit mission of Dor Hadash: Jewishness did not carry any value judgment in this community.[144]

That Friday night and the many more which followed made Manó reevaluate his position on Judaism and Jewishness. Dor Hadash finally presented a positive image of Judaism: "It wasn't forced on people, they weren't tormenting themselves every day, doing whatever they do with the Torah and the whatdoyoucallit that you wrap around your arm in the morning, but it was something that people could love."[145] Although he did not get any closer to God and nor does he intend to in the future as he is not religious and does not take

[143] Ibid., 5.
[144] Ibid., 7.
[145] Ibid.

part in ritual, does not recite the prayers and the blessings, he says it still makes him feel good being part of the community, which he refers to as a "gem" and a "refreshing exception."[146]

Becoming a regular member of Dor Hadash has brought significant changes into Manó's life, as well. First and foremost his aversion to Jewishness disappeared from his life and in came many new friends who were finally his contemporaries and shared the same values.

DÁVID

Dávid was born on August 8, 1979 in Heves. He is one of the members who decided to convert in Dor Hadash, and he is also going to be the first one to do so through Masorti Europe. When he talks about his family he mentions that religion was a taboo subject at home, he did not have any religious upbringing. It was only after the change of system that Bible study was available at school. As his parents still did not let him participate he decided to go to the classes in secret anyway. However, as he claims he could never really identify with Christianity as it did not seem as family and community centered a religion as Judaism.

What really set things in motion for Dávid was the 6 months he spent in New York in a Hasid neighborhood in Brooklyn. He finally had a first-hand experience with Judaism and seeing how it can be incorporated to daily life and especially family life Dávid felt that this was something he wanted. From that point on he was consciously looking for ways to connect to Judaism, going to synagogues during his travels, surrounding himself with Jewish friends, and deciding to learn Hebrew and Judaism from a young rabbinical student who turned out to be Dor Hadash's much loved rabbi. After a while the rabbi took Dávid to Moishe House so he could experience Judaism as it is practiced in a community. After

[146] Ibid., 8.

months of learning, attending Dor Hadash kabbalat Shabbats, visiting various synagogues around Budapest, and much learning Dávid decided that he wanted to convert.

This decision was a turning point as it marked the beginning of the long process of converting, as well as the foundation of a new identity, a Jewish identity. David says he has referred to himself as Jewish when asked and more importantly, identifies as Jewish since he decided to lead a Jewish way of life.[147] This entails keeping kashrut whenever and wherever he can, keeping Shabbat and refraining from using his cell phone and computer, which has brought a healthy balance into his life.[148] He also devotes more and more of his days to prayer, while initially he only prayed during Shabbat, these days he makes an effort to attend morning services during the week in several synagogues around Budapest, as well as Shaharit services in Chabad.

The most important reason for Dávid to convert is so he can raise his future children in Jewish tradition, which is in large part motivated by his own childhood experience of growing up without religion. Conversion, he says, is a long process of learning. Standing in front of a Masorti Bet Din sometime in the coming months is the symbolic end point of this process, which will formally legitimize his Jewishness but will not especially change his relationship towards Judaism and his own Jewish identity as he already has been feeling Jewish for a long time now.

ÁRON

Áron was born on June 5, 1991 in Cegléd. He comes from a Christian family, he has no Jewish ties. He began to develop an attraction towards Jewishness in high school when he learned about the Shoah. This attraction was further strengthened by the rise of anti-Semitism

[147] Dávid, "Interview," 7.
[148] Ibid., 4.

in Hungary around 2006. Áron decided to learn more about Jewish culture and history and he borrowed many books from the library after a librarian seeing his growing interest in the subject started recommending him books. What fascinated him the most was how the Jewish people managed to survive in the face of centuries of persecution. This was the most palpable turning point in Áron's search for Jewishness: even though he was neither ethnically Jewish nor especially religious, he had one thing in common with Jews, he also belonged to a minority, the LGBT community:

> This is where the two intersect, that I am gay. And maybe I needed some kind of an example that showed that you can survive being in minority, not really survive because you don't have to survive anything, my life is not in danger, but how to live in a society which is completely different from me, or rather I am completely different from the majority.[149]

When it turned out that an old friend of his converted to Judaism Áron seized the opportunity and accompanied her to synagogue, which was his first real connection to Jewishness.

After graduating from high school he became a Hebraic Studies major at Eötvös Loránd University where he met new friends who had already been going to Moishe House and at one time during the fall he joined them. He was instantly touched by Dor Hadash's charm of being a non-judgmental place where nobody asked him about his Jewishness and even when he told them he was a non-Jew he still felt as an accepted and equal member of the congregation.

Another even greater shock for Áron was that Moishe House was a place where being gay was not only accepted but many of the congregation's members, including the rabbi himself were gay: "It was so surreal for find a place like this. Back home I was always a nervous wreck about the whole gay thing. Being openly gay, talking about it was so unusual for me when I first came to Moishe House. But now, it's natural, like how many dioptres my

[149] Áron, "Interview," 2.

glasses have."[150] Finding a place like Moishe House in a society where the majority is homophobic was like finding a refuge, an island for Áron.

As for his reasons for coming to Dor Hadash other than the fact that it is a gay-friendly environment, Áron says his main reason is the community and his friends, as well as learning. His favorite part of the Friday night service is the discussion of parshas, and although he likes the communal singing and taking part in rites, he does not consider himself religious and has no intention to convert to Judaism. Which, for the time being is a legitimate choice in Dor Hadash, however, if the two organizations separate one day and Dor Hadash will have a synagogue of its own with a larger congregation Áron is not sure how those non-Jews whose primary reason for coming to the community is not religious will find their place in a more traditional Dor Hadash.

[150] Ibid., 4.

CONCLUSION

In my thesis I have demonstrated how despite the various initiatives that sprung up following the collapse of Communism offering new religious and cultural options, as well as new identification strategies to Hungarian Jews many young individuals still felt that these options were not adequate for their needs and decided to create a unique community for themselves, a universe of their own, as they call it. Most features that make Dor Hadash exceptional in Budapest Jewish religious life reflect the niches and failures of the mainstream Jewish community. It is an independent, grassroots organization that makes it its mission not to depend on MAZSIHISZ, therefore encourages its members to actively participate in community building.

It also responds to the dramatic break in the chain of Jewish tradition by taking the responsibility of teaching the young generation of rediscoverers many congregations around Budapest fail to do so. Dor Hadash however, not only reestablishes the missing tradition but it also breathes new life into it by reconstructing and reinterpreting it in various forms which are reflected in its alternative ways of celebrating Jewish holidays. Dor Hadash's new tradition interpretation offers a livable form of Jewishness members can partake in and while doing so they can find joy in it.

Another unique feature of Dor Hadash is its commitment to egalitarianism and going beyond definitions of Jewishness that are becoming less and less relevant and definitive. The equal treatment of Halachic and non-Halachic Jews, as well as women and non-Jews, all of whom are otherwise often marginalized and denied participation in other congregations, not only reflects the contemporary realities but it also enables Dor Hadash to reintegrate exactly the generation of Jews into a living tradition who have the potential and enthusiasm to reverse the erosion trend of the generation of the parents and grandparents. Of course such

liberal tradition interpretations might incite criticism by the more traditionalists but the real question is: what is more important, strictly adhering to rules at the price of losing those who are not as traditional or allowing more liberal tradition interpretations but gaining also more people? Dor Hadash obviously chose the second path and so far it has been a successful choice as it is shown by the growing number of its participants each week.

It will be extremely exciting to see what will happen to Dor Hadash in 10 years. By that time most of its current members will have children of their own but they will have a completely different situation on their hands. Those children will already have a living tradition they can connect to.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Bálintház", http://balinthaz.hu. Last accessed May 14, 2011.

"Chabad-Lubavitch in Hungary", http://zsido.com/szoveg/English/42. Last accessed May 14, 2011.

"Conversion to Judaism through The European Masorti Bet Din", http://www.europeanmasortibetdin.org/conversions.htm. Last accessed May 14, 2011.

Gitelman, Zvi, András Kovács, and Barry Alexander Kosmin. *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003.

Gruber, Ruth Ellen. "A Virtual Jewish World." In *Jewish Studies at the Central European University, 1999-2001*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002.

———. *To Begin Again: Jewish Life in Central- and Eastern Europe Since the Fall of Communism in 1989*. Vienna: Centropa, 2009.

"Israeli Cultural Institute", http://izraelikultura.hu/en. Last accessed May 14, 2011.

Jewish Identities in the New Europe. London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994.

Jewry Between Tradition and Secularism: Europe and Israel Compared. Jewish identities in a changing world v. 5. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

Kovács, András. *A másik szeme. Zsidók és antiszemiták a háború utáni Magyarországon.* Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2008.

Kovács, Éva, and Júlia Vajda. *Mutatkozás. Zsidó Identitás Történetek.* Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002.

"Marom Egyesület - Marom Organisation", http://www.marom.hu/en/home/aboutus. Last accessed May 14, 2011.

Mars, Leonard. “Cultural Aid and Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Hungary.” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15, no. 1 (January 2000): 85.

———. “Is There a Religious Revival among Hungarian Jews Today?” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 2 (May 2001): 227-238.

“Moishe House”, http://www.moishehouse.org/. Last accessed May 14, 2011.

Riesman, David, and Herbert J. Gans. *On the making of Americans: essays in honor of David Riesman*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979.

“Sim Shalom Progressive Jewish Congregation Budapest Hungary”, n.d. http://www.sim-shalom.org/.

Webber, Jonathan. “Jews and Judaism in contemporary Europe: Religion or ethnic group?” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 1997): 257-279.