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# **Flowers Growing in the Shadow: Stories of the Second Generation Born after the Holocaust in Southwest Transdanubia**

An Unconventional Review of Iván Zádori’s „Második”  
Monograph on Judaica Culture and History



## **ABSTRACT**

Iván Zádori’s book traces the life-histories and memories of nearly sixty members of Southwest Transdanubia’s Jewish second generation—those born between 1945 and 1965 to Holocaust survivors. Using an oral-history approach, the book reveals how these “children of survivors” negotiated Jewish identity, community life, and the legacies of trauma in postwar rural Hungary. Spanning childhood through to the present, Zádori interweaves personal narratives with regional history, highlighting both the singularity of Transdanubian experience and its resonance with broader debates on memory, identity, and intergenerational trauma. This review situates Második within national and international Holocaust scholarship, underscoring its methodological rigor, narrative richness, and contribution to understanding how memory and identity are co-constructed across generations.

## **KEYWORDS**

Holocaust memory; second generation; oral history; Jewish identity; Southwest Transdanubia

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Holocaust's immediate aftermath and its imprint on subsequent generations have long preoccupied historians, sociologists, and cultural scholars. Processing collective trauma, reconstructing identity, and transmitting memory are urgent both for survivors and their descendants. Seminal works – Eva Hoffmann's *After Such Knowledge*<sup>1</sup> and the volume edited by Kovács and Braham<sup>2</sup> – demonstrate how the Holocaust shaped identity, politics, and memory across decades. In the early twenty-first century, as firsthand witnesses pass away, preserving their stories and understanding transgenerational trauma becomes ever more critical.

Iván Zádori's book makes an original contribution by focusing on the Jewish second generation in Southwest Transdanubia. Through nearly sixty in-depth interviews, conducted with individuals born between 1945 and 1965, Zádori reconstructs how "children of survivors" experienced Jewish identity, family, community, and religious practice in rural Hungary—contexts often overlooked in urban-centered Holocaust studies. His use of oral history enriches the historiography by foregrounding subjective memory and individual agency within broader structural forces.

## **ORIGINS, FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD (CHAPTERS 2–5)**

The opening chapters explore family backgrounds and childhoods fractured by the Holocaust. Interviewees recount how survivors struggled to rebuild family ties, transmit Jewish traditions, or – alternatively – silence the past. Some grandparents and parents endeavored to revive religious customs; others adopted silence as a protective strategy. School experiences, early encounters with antisemitism, and the ambivalence of a majority society that

<sup>1</sup> HOFFMANN 2004

<sup>2</sup> BRAHAM – KOVÁCS 2015.

“knew” about Jewish origins but often refrained from open hostility are vividly portrayed. Zádori shows how these early experiences shaped self-understanding and identity formation, echoing Hoffmann’s findings on post-trauma silence and memory.<sup>3</sup>

## YOUTH, FRIENDSHIP, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY FORMATION (CHAPTERS 7–8)

Entering adolescence and young adulthood, the second generation navigated religious, cultural, and social identities in majority-Christian contexts. Many forged friendships beyond the Jewish community; mixed marriages became common, accelerating assimilation yet rarely provoking overt conflict. Zádori’s narratives parallel Barry Chazan’s work on informal Jewish education.<sup>4</sup> While religious literacy remained patchy, communal gatherings – holiday celebrations, synagogue visits – offered occasional reinforcement of identity.

## CHRISTIAN HOLIDAYS, LITERACY AND PRAYER (CHAPTERS 9–10)

Chapters 9 and 10 investigate how Christian holidays, literacy, and prayer shaped Jewish identity. Zádori demonstrates that exposure to majority-Christian practices often diluted distinctively Jewish traditions, particularly in small villages lacking institutional support. Yet reading and selective religious practice – where accessible – provided junctures for identity construction, resonating with Sylvia Barack Fishman’s studies of mixed families.<sup>5</sup>

## JEWISH LIFE IN ADULTHOOD AND THIRD-GENERATION RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (CHAPTERS 11–13)

Adulthood brought new challenges: reconciling work obligations with religious observance, raising children with Jewish traditions, and negotiating Israel’s emergence. Many interviewees maintained only episodic community ties; their children’s religious education ranged from intensive transmission efforts to minimal exposure. Zádori’s findings align with Elliot Dorff’s analyses of modern Jewish social ethics<sup>6</sup> and with Harold Kushner’s guidance on religious education in interfaith families.<sup>7</sup>

## COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS AND SYNAGOGUES (CHAPTERS 14–15)

The book next examines institutional life—local congregations, synagogues, and community centers. Zádori reconstructs how these bodies functioned (or failed to) in the decades after 1945. Despite resource constraints, they served as vital identity anchors. His account parallels Steven

<sup>3</sup> HOFFMANN 2004.

<sup>4</sup> CHAZAN 2003.

<sup>5</sup> FISHMAN 2004.

<sup>6</sup> DORFF 2002.

<sup>7</sup> KUSHNER 1999.

Cohen and Arnold Eisen's studies of American Jewish community life<sup>8</sup> and Riv-Ellen Prell's work on small-group religious movements.<sup>9</sup>

## **RESTART, RETURN AND CONVERSION (CHAPTER 16)**

Chapter 16 explores later-life "returns" to Judaism and conversion stories. Some descendants, divorced from religious practice in youth, experienced renewed interest in adulthood; others formally converted. Zádori captures conversion as both personal and communal phenomenon, reflecting broader trends documented by Anita Diamant<sup>10</sup> and Norman Lamm.<sup>11</sup>

## **GENERATIONAL TRAUMAS (CHAPTER 17)**

Transgenerational trauma is the focus of Chapter 17. Zádori shows how the fear of recurrence, inherited anxiety, and the moral imperative to remember persisted into the second and third generations. These narratives resonate with Dori Laub and Nanette Auerhahn's probing of Holocaust culture ethics<sup>12</sup> and Hoffmann's reflections on post-traumatic memory.<sup>13</sup>

## **CONTEMPORARY JEWISH LIFE, TURNING POINTS AND THE FUTURE (CHAPTERS 18–20)**

The final chapters address present-day identity, critical life events, and future hopes. Interviewees share how they sustain Jewish life amid Hungary's changing political and social landscape, drawing on cultural practices, community activism, and transnational connections with Israel. Zádori's thematic treatment recalls Alan Dershowitz's inquiries into the American Jewish future<sup>14</sup> and Ari Goldman's studies of contemporary practice.<sup>15</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

„Második” offers an invaluable, richly textured portrait of Southwest Transdanubia's Jewish second generation. By centering oral histories, Zádori bridges personal narrative and regional history, contributing both to Holocaust memory studies and to understanding how communities – and their descendants – rebuild identity after atrocity. His work complements and extends international scholarship, demonstrating that even in Hungary's rural districts, the interplay of silence, transmission, and renewal shapes collective memory and communal resilience.

<sup>8</sup> COHEN – EISEN 2000.

<sup>9</sup> PRELL 1989.

<sup>10</sup> DIAMANT 1998.

<sup>11</sup> LAMM 1998.

<sup>12</sup> LAUB – AUERHAHN 2017.

<sup>13</sup> HOFFMANN 2004.

<sup>14</sup> DERSHOWITZ 1997.

<sup>15</sup> GOLDMAN 2000

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