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*Holocaust Victimhood in Hungary: New Histories*

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Alexandra Szabó and András Szécsényi
Special Editors of the Thematic Issue

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# INTRODUCTION

Andrea Pető, Alexandra M. Szabó, and András Szécsényi

There was a significant debate in the Hungarian journal of social sciences and culture *Kommentár* in 2008 initiated by Gábor Gyáni as to whether Hungarian Holocaust research had or had not been successfully integrated into international discourse after 1989.[1] One element missing from the debate was that after 1989, main concepts and the language of the discipline derived from the Western side of the (fallen) Iron Curtain. The histories of the Holocaust survivors had been only descriptive in nature, while the experiences of Jewish communities, the members of which had lived under communism was of predominant focus. There was no theoretical inquiry in Holocaust scholarship as long as the objective fact-finding was taking place, expanding on questions as to when, where, and what had happened to which actors. Historical inquiry, however, needs to extend further to explain the uncovered events and experiences.

For instance, a significant element missing from the scholarship in its entirety is gender analysis, and this observation brings to the fore the lack of discussion on methodology and the consequent absence of acknowledging developments. Hungarian scholarship of Holocaust historical inquiry with a central aim evolving around gender analytical perspectives is still nonexistent, yet there are some contributions about women and the Holocaust in the English language, for instance by Andrea Pető.[2] This special edition of the Hungarian Historical Review lines up studies which draw on new modes of analyses and frameworks with the aim of achieving knowledge production on a whole new level about the Holocaust in Hungary.

The lack of innovative theoretical frameworks and other new approaches in understandings of the history of the Shoah in the Hungarian context explains the current poor state of institutionalized Hungarian Holocaust research. The consequences are not only prevalent in academia, but also in the public sphere (which influences science policy) and in shifts in public memory of the Holocaust in Hungary.

However, the current struggles for memory are far from a memory policy based on democratic consensus and development. Since illiberal states do not

1 The articles of this debate can be found in *Kommentár*, no. 3, 5, 6 of 2008.

2 *Women and the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges*, edited by Andrea Pető, Louise Hecht, and Karolina Krasuska (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2015).

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have an ideology but only a memory policy, the weak domestic institutionalization of Hungarian Holocaust research with low international recognition has contributed to the successful reinterpretation of the Holocaust remembrance paradigm by illiberal actors. Scholarly attempts against this were and are still being made, such as the relevant scholarly volume published on the occasion of what is referred to as the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary, which was published in Hungarian and English by CEU Press[3] (a year of anniversary that is misleading as it suggests that the Holocaust in Hungary began with the German occupation in 1944 instead of with the labor service system and with the earlier deportations of Hungarian Jews, such as the deportation of Jews to Kamianets-Podilskyi in 1941, where an estimated 23,000 Jewish deportees were massacred in two days). At the same time, historical research workshops operating in Hungary mostly outside the system that ensures scientific standards and outside the international scientific frameworks are growing, and they are pursuing ad hoc research in parallel with the existing research infrastructure in support of the present government's politics of memory.

Demonstrating the lack of new research directions in Hungary that are prevalent in international Holocaust scholarship, Andrea Pető called for the organization of a conference entitled *The Hungarian Holocaust: Victimhood and Memory*, together with Gábor Gyáni, Edit Jeges, and András Szécsényi and in cooperation with Central European University and the Humanities Research Center of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest on December 18, 2017. A selected number of presentations were considered for publication in *Századok*, the most prestigious Hungarian historical journal, for its special section dealing with the Hungarian Holocaust. The selection of conference speakers and publications mirrored the work of mostly young researchers who, despite the dwindling research infrastructure, had carried out methodologically innovative work based on archival research. The introduction to this section in *Századok* was censored for discussing "illiberal memory politics," although the authors took a clear stand against this suppressive act.[4] The presentation of this special issue, which took place on September 25, 2019, was met with unprecedented interest at Central European University, indicating that the Holocaust continues to be a subject of major scholarly and public interest.

3 *The Holocaust in Hungary Seventy Years Later*, edited by András Kovács and Randolph L. Braham (Budapest: CEU Press, 2016).

4 Andrea Pető, "Áldozatok, emlékezet, jóvátétel a magyarországi holokausztkutatás új irányai," *Századok,* no. 4 (2019): 639–40.

Despite the controversial nature of memory politics and the lack of proper infrastructure, a new generation of researchers worked on this special issue to present new approaches and findings, thus taking an important step towards international exchange by elevating Hungarian Holocaust research onto the international stage *and* bringing innovative research methods from the international pool into Hungarian scholarship.

The articles in the present volume contribute to historical understandings which primarily work from the perspectives of the victims of the Holocaust. Based on the division of historical inquiry by Raul Hilberg, the Hungarian historiography of the Holocaust focuses on one of categories suggested by Hilberg: perpetrators, victims, or bystanders. This mainstream allocation, however, has been widely criticized in recent decades by many researchers worldwide, and they have offered new approaches which shift the focus to the behaviors, interactions, and dynamics among societies and communities involved in the Shoah, together with closer study of the psychological and sociological perceptions of these groups. This paradigm shift has emerged only recently in Hungarian scholarship, another significant reason as to why Hungarian historiography has only rarely constituted a serious part of the international discourse.

In recent decades, there have mostly been descriptive, fact-finding monographs published that are based on archival sources and avoid the use of private or narrative sources.[5] A group of Hungarian Holocaust researchers who mainly belong to the new generation would like to break from this approach and widen the perspective of inquiry. The papers in this issue seek answers to questions concerning how Jews, who were deprived of their basic rights, forced to serve in labor service, and then, in 1944, compelled to live in ghettos and yellow star houses or deported to concentration camps, lived and survived under these extreme conditions. The histories presented here also consider how the survivors remembered their pasts in the immediate postwar setting with a specific focus on the modes in which these experiences were later recounted.

The approaches and viewpoints presented by our authors are of a wider scale. Some papers belong to the field of microhistory, while others closely examine and reflect on specific oral historical sources and narratives. The interpretations largely rest on contemporary and postwar narrative sources (memoirs, diaries,

5 Gábor Gyáni, "Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary," *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, edited by András Kovács and Randolph L. Braham (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 215–30.

and other notes), in addition to the archival documents, which touch primarily on questions pertinent to individual life stories.

István Pál Ádám examines the case of the butchers of Budapest and considers how the governmental and municipal administration of the late Horthy-era impacted the leftists and the Jewish butchers from the issuance of the 1939 anti-Jewish law. Ádám examines the ways in which the butchers of the capital were forced to change their strategy in the postwar democratic society of Hungary. Tamás Csapody examines diaries, some of them incomplete, written by six inmates of the camps in and around Bor. They were Hungarian citizens of Jewish and other free church denominations who had been deported from Hungary in 1943 and 1944 and taken to the lager-system of Bor (Serbia), later to be brought back to Hungary in the second half of 1944 and then (some of them) taken to German concentration camps. He provides insightful content analysis and examines diaries written by six inmates, one of which is being presented for the first time in this volume. Heléna Huhák analyzes the spatial experiences of some of the inmates who were deported from Hungary to Bergen-Belsen in 1944–1945. She draws on diaries, memoirs, and correspondence in order to explore perceptions of space formed in the memories of camp inmates. Edit Jeges examines survivor accounts by Polish and Hungarian Jewish women and reflects on the nature of her primary sources. She also considers the further potentials of digital storytelling as a source and the importance of survivor memory at a time when fewer and fewer survivors remain among us. Borbála Klacsmann summarizes the roles and the activities of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property regarding the restitution of Hungarian Jews in the first three years of the postwar period, providing specific examples from Pest County through personal accounts and correspondence. Alexandra M. Szabó examines Jewish women's experiences of miscarriages before, during, and after the Shoah through a specific case study in order to draw attention to the significance of such corporeal events from a social historical point of view. Her study considers the implications of the silence concerning women's experiences in Holocaust research to show that gender analysis substantially adds to further knowledge production. In his case study, which partly overlaps with Huhák's paper, András Szécsényi also concentrates on one space, a German DP camp. Szécsényi tries to reconstruct the spatial experiences of György Bognár, a former inmate of Bergen-Belsen who was taken to the Hillersleben DP camp after liberation. The paper explores space perceptions based on Bognár's diary and the maps he drew, which Szécsényi compares with his own in-person experiences of the sites (or

what remains of them). Ferenc Laczó's paper presents German historiography from recent decades on the Hungarian Holocaust by exploring the relevant findings and conclusions of the most important German histories. Through his findings, he seeks answers to questions concerning why there has been so little institutionalized cooperation between the German and Hungarian research communities.

We would like to dedicate our work to the memory of Randolph L. Braham (1922–2018), who, as the pioneer in Hungarian Holocaust research, was a true inspiration and supportive friend of the scholars whose works are part of the present volume.

Hungarian Historical Review 9, no. 3 (2020): 391–407

ARTICLES

# Bor Forced Labor Service as Reflected in Diaries

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Military forced labor service was introduced in Hungary during World War II. Men who were unreliable from the aspects of origin, religion, nationality or politics were conscripted for forced labor. Initially, forced laborers constructed primarily military objects on the home front, while later they were also dispatched to the battlefield. They had no weapons or uniforms, their provisions were poor and often they had to do building or mine clearing in the most dangerous areas. Hungary sent a total of approximately 6,000 forced laborers to work in the southern operational territories in 1943 and 1944. They had to undertake forced labor in the mining district of Bor in Yugoslavia, which was under German occupation. The majority were Jews, but there were also Jehovah's Witnesses, Reform Adventists and Nazarenes. They lived under Hungarian military supervision and worked under German management. The locations of forced labor, the durations of time spent in the mining district, the experienced sufferings, etc. were very different. The forced laborers themselves were also different, for example with regard to their origins, occupations, and age. Several Jewish forced laborers wrote diaries and some of them managed to take those home. Later diaries written in Bor had a particular fate. Some were lost for a time or have remained in fragments, while others with important additions were deposited in archives or taken abroad by the diarists. All the diaries analyzed in the study testify to the survival of their writers. However, they mostly bear witness to the everyday life of forced labor service in Bor (otherwise difficult to learn about) and the behavior of those who held them, as well as the forced laborers' sufferings, faith and hope. At the same time, they speak about the entirety of forced labor in Bor alongside its personal stories. The diaries are ego-documents, yet also historical sources. Their factual descriptions and subjective approaches augment our knowledge gained in the past. The six diaries written in Bor and analyzed in this study are personal confessions with significant source value.

Keywords: World War II, forced labor, Jews, diaries, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bor, Holocaust, ego-documents

Diaries written in Bor occupy a special place in the history of the Bor forced labor service. They were written during World War II, but they cannot be classified as typical war diaries. True, they were not written in the hell of war, during a retreat or on the home front. Yet they were still penned under conditions of war, confined

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between fronts, in theaters of military operations, far from the Hungarian border, in a foreign land, and often also under infernal circumstances. Although those who wrote the Bor diaries in forced labor service were subordinated to the Hungarian and German military, their diaries cannot be regarded as soldiers' diaries or work diaries, even though they contain descriptions of places of work.

It was not prisoners treated as prisoners of war but forced laborers in captivity who wrote the diaries in secret. Although most of the diaries contain descriptions of journeys and the texts also record forced and frequent changes of place, they naturally cannot be called travel diaries. Though the fear of destruction appears repeatedly in the descriptions, since the shadow of death was present in the diarists' lives due to accidents at work, illnesses, beatings, murders, and executions, they cannot be regarded as camp diaries written in concentration or extermination camps. In truth, we can say that they were written by victims of the Holocaust in forced labor camps.[1] They simultaneously represent letter, camp, prisoner, and travel diaries. The Bor diaries found during my research are ego-documents written by Jewish forced laborers, more or less regularly and chronologically recorded, which are fragmented and which contain personal notes.[2]

## *The Known Bor Diaries*

At present, we have knowledge of six diaries that were written at least partly in Bor.[3] Of the six, only four can be appropriately described, since two have survived only in fragments. Those two have more content missing than what exists (László Faludi) or what can be accessed at present (György Szöllösi). The content that is known of them deserves far more than just a mention, yet it is clearly insufficient to allow a comparison with the four that can be read in their entirety (the diaries of György Laufer, Imre Pártos, Béla Somló, and Lajos György).

1 The roughly 6,000 Hungarian forced laborers in total taken to Bor in Serbia in 1943 and 1944 included 161 Jehovah's Witnesses, 19 Reform Adventists, and 9 Nazarenes. We do not know if any member of the minor congregations kept a diary.

2 On the diary as a historical source, see Gyáni, "A napló mint társadalomtörténeti forrás: A közhivatalnok identitása," 145–60.

3 The chronological framework of the study extends from the draft for forced labor service to the individual's return to his permanent residence. There are several memoirs which are regarded as Bor diaries by posterity. See, for example, Károly Koltai's memoir, which according to the official records of the Holocaust Memorial Centre is a "hand-written diary and memoir." Holocaust Memorial Centre 2011.360.1.

The diaries cover durations of varying lengths. Information about the call-up for forced labor service in Bor is the earliest initial point of time (May 31, 1943), while arrival at the authors' place of birth in Hungary and accounts of subsequent experiences mark the latest (April 3, 1945). However, the diaries were written over very different time spans between the two time limits. Time frames are defined essentially by "external" circumstances, such as who was called up for forced labor service in Bor, when (1943 or 1944), and which group (the first or second "stage") the person left Bor as part of. "Internal," subjective differences also played a role in terms of from when and until when the diaries were written. Differences defined as "internal" and "external" were naturally closely connected, since, for example, the forced marches and mass murders which were common during the first stage made it impossible to record the events. This was very different from the situation of those who were dispatched from Bor in the second stage and had plenty of opportunity to write diaries in the period following liberation after they arrived in Temesvár (Timişoara) or Szeged, which both represented freedom and calm for them.

Three of the Bor diaries are held in public collections, while I was able to study or was informed about the other three from contacts of former Bor forced laborers or their descendants. All of the diaries, except for one, are unpublished.

## *László Faludi's Diary*

One of the two diaries that cannot be studied in full was written by László Faludi.[4] His hand-written diary is of unknown length.[5] However, the existing numbered eight pages suggest that its length must have been some 100 pages. His notes written in a grey pen on lined pages are clearly legible.

László Faludi, whose permanent residence was in Budapest, was a forced laborer in Páhi. From there, his unit was ordered to Szeged and then to Bor. According to his diary, the steamer which transported them to Serbia was sailing

4 László Faludi (mother's name: Sarolta Fingerhút; Budapest, December 19, 1920–Budapest, after 1980). Unit V/4. Special labor unit V. supplementary battalion; identification number: 3006.20.3432. Skilled textile mill worker in Budapest.

5 Diary of a Bor forced laborer. MNM, Collection of Contemporary Documents 83.242.1. Pages 29–32 and 81–84 of the diary survived. Parts of the diary were displayed at the exhibition held in the Hungarian pavilion of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in 1979. Three camp postcards written from Bor, which László Faludi wrote to his parents and siblings in Budapest, and one sent to Bor, which he received from his mother, also exist. MNM, Department of Historical Photographs, 78.386.1–4.

between Titel and Belgrade along the Danube on July 14, 1943.[6] They reached Belgrade at night, after having experienced a huge storm lasting an hour. The following day, they reached their destination, the port of Prahovo on the Serbian side of the Serbian-Romanian border along the Danube. The journey by rail to Zaječar and then to Bor took two days. The 3,000 forced laborers arrived in Bor on July 17. He was held captive in Bor in the camp called Berlin for exactly 14 months to the day, until September 17, 1944.

The accessible (presumably) one tenth of the diary suggests that he wrote about three major themes: the forced labor in Bor, the past labor movement and the communist future, and his personal life. Employing the diary genre, Faludi wrote an autobiographical memoir, which is not at all unusual in such literature. He used his diary as a memoir and as a result it has a retrospective character.

His diary is explicitly for posterity. It is addressed not only to those who might find his notes, but to "the future generation who will appreciate"[7] his writing. Thus, for Faludi, writing a diary was an activity intended for a larger, anonymous readership rather than any specific individual or, at least according to the text, the author himself. It is a message for the youth of the future, written amidst the suffering of forced labor service. It is full of pathos and is ideological, almost with an overtone of propaganda.

Considering the proportions of the fragmented diary, the largest section is a description of the past labor movement. The text clearly shows that Faludi came from the organized labor movement, in which he was socialized, started to read literature, and found his best friend. He defined himself as a skilled worker in a cotton mill and a proletarian who "struggled against the infringements of capitalism" and engaged in anti-war propaganda both inside and outside the mill. He believed in "the matter of liberty, equality, brotherhood, peace, work, and bread," and his soul "was united with the souls of other proletarians." "Socialist poets" became his "soul mates" in the movement, and he mentions Endre Ady, Attila József, and Sándor Petőfi by name. Influenced by their writings, he himself began writing poems and short stories. His younger brother became his colleague in the movement, and Faludi refers to him as always being the "best

6 The steamer transporting László Faludi and its towboat departed from Szeged towards the south on the River Tisza and reached the Danube at Titel.

7 Faludi, *Diary of a Bor forced labourer,* 32.

comrade and brother."[8] Faludi also recounted two experiences of key importance connected to the labor movement: reading something[9] and May 1, 1938.

Faludi was sent back from Bor in the first group, and he must have escaped somewhere on the way while still in the Serbian mountains. He joined Tito's partisans.[10]

Nothing more could be found about László Faludi in Hungarian archives, and only tiny bits of information were accessible in online data bases. His brief letters were usually published in the letters section of dailies and weeklies. They suggest that he remained on the left and maintained his critical attitude and sensitivities in terms of public life and his positive vision of the future.[11]

## *György Szöllösi's Diary*

The author of the other Bor diary that cannot be read in full is György Szöllösi.[12] His hand-written diary exists in full, yet it cannot be accessed at present. Neither the few pages at my disposal nor the diary extract sent by György Szöllösi's son[13] provide sufficient information to analyze the diary.[14] However, Szöllösi's life and, within it, the period of forced labor service in Bor can be reconstructed on the basis of a video interview recorded by the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History[15] and his testimony in one of the trials held by the people's tribunal.[16] Although it is impossible to get closer to the notes in the Bor diary, we still

8 Ibid., 83.

9 He was reading Upton Beall's *Kutató Sámuel*.

10 László Faludi handed over two certificates made out in the Serbian and Croatian language by the Yugoslav partisans to the Museum of the Hungarian Labor Movement (MMM), a legal predecessor to MNM. Acknowledgement of receipt: none. Budapest, October 4, 1978. The certificates cannot be found at present.

11 His brief contributions were published in *Népszabadság* and *Új Tükör* between 1976 and 1980.

12 György Szöllösi (George Brent) (mother's name Mária Weisz; Zilah, April 2, 1926–Dallas, January 24, 2001) was a violinist, assistant policeman, member of the French Foreign Legion, and businessman.

13 Dennis Brent (mother's name Anita Myerson; Houston ?–December 1950) was a writer, retired editor, producer living in Dallas.

14 In addition to the cover, I was able to see only four poorly scanned pages of the diary. The school exercise book with a checkered cover and pages could be a total of approximately 30–40 pages. Dennis Brent's email to Tamás Csapody. Dallas, August 24, 2006. (For years, I asked Dennis Brent to show me the full diary, but in vain.)

15 VHA USC, George Brent, interview 19753, 1996.

16 MNL CSML, Nb.206/1945, János Császár's trial at the people's tribunal. Record of testimony. Acknowledgement of receipt: none. Sopron, June 7, 1945. 36–38. Records. No. of acknowledgement of receipt: Nb.206/1945.17. July 30, 1945. 49–50.

learn that Szöllösi was taken to the Bregenz subcamp in the spring of 1944. In the one and a half months he spent there, he experienced instances of "tying" (being hung from his hands after they had been tied together behind his back) ordered by the military detachment, and he witnessed the mutilation of two of his fellow laborers following their unsuccessful attempt to escape. Later, Szöllösi was ordered to work in the mines from a railway construction, and thus he ended up in the Straflager (punishment camp) in Bor. Here, he did not live under the supervision of the Hungarian military but rather of German soldiers. Since he did not get there as a form of punishment, he was far better off than he had been in the Bregenz subcamp. In the end, he was sent home as part of the second group.

Tito's partisans liberated him on September 30, 1944. Like many of his fellow forced laborers, he first went to Temesvár and then to Budapest, which had been liberated in the meantime. (Subsequently, he probably wrote his diary from spring 1943 to the beginning of 1945.) Following his return home, he became an assistant police inspector in Sopron in the summer of 1945. After spending a short time in Germany and France, he left for the United States in May 1947. He settled in Chicago, changed his name to George Brent, and became a businessman.

## *György Laufer's Diary*[17]

At present there are four Bor diaries which can be accessed in full. The first note in György Laufer's[18] 36-page hand-written diary, which is now part of a public collection,[19] was written more than two and a half months after his arrival in Bor on October 5, 1943. His last note was recorded ten days before the first group left Bor on September 7, 1944. So the diary starts "too late" and finishes "too early," including a duration of almost 11 months to the day: a large proportion of the nearly 14 months he spent as a forced laborer in Bor. With regard to its total length and the number of entries, the diary can be described as "brief." Laufer wrote his diary continuously, but not daily. The longest gap, which lasted nearly

17 The diary was published in full. Csapody, "Laufer György naplója," 184–224.

18 Laufer, György (mother's name Róza Somogyi; Budapest, August 9, 1920–Budapest, September 30, 1995). Unit V/4. Special labor unit V supplementary battalion. Identification No. 3009.20.2796. He was a photographer, press worker, motorcycle delivery man, leather goods artisan, and self-employed plastics craftsman.

19 Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, B/327 L2_E4_75. Documents Collection connected to the Holocaust, Laufer György Diary written during Bor forced labor service.

two months, occurred between January and March, 1944. It was presumably cause by an illness which lasted for five weeks. Like László Faludi, Laufer was in the Berlin camp, and he also worked in the limestone quarry in the village of Krivelj to the north, as well as in Bor, but in Bor, he worked as a photographer.

His diary touches on the series of changes which occurred in the life of the Berlin camp beginning in early 1944. When the new chief commander of the camp, lieutenant colonel Ede Marányi,[20] arrived in this period, the life of forced laborers changed dramatically. As Laufer noted in his diary, prisoners were treated more and more strictly. Individual and group "tying" took place regularly and frequently, and as a result, more and more people tried to escape. From his notes, it is possible to reconstruct precisely to the day the time when 15 "lads" fled on March 27, 1944. More people were able to flee within a few days. Of those who tried to escape, 10 were captured the same week. Ede Marányi had two of them executed on Sunday, April 2, 1944. In his diary, Laufer reported the death of a "Jehovah's Witness" escapee (April 11, 1944). Although he does not mention names, the dates of the deaths agree with the data in the official records of military graves.[21] However, the attempts to escape were motivated not only by the increasingly common practice of "tying," but also by other forms of abuse. Laufer noted that from the beginning of April 1944, prisoners were only allowed to receive letters from their parents or wives, but not from girlfriends.

György Laufer identifies August 29, 1944 as "the most exciting and eventful" day of the time he spent in Bor. This was because, as he writes, "we were called upon to be ready to march because we could expect the order to set off at any moment."[22] The following days were spent waiting, although Laufer had only recently ended up in Bor as a photographer. A one-line note in his diary was made at 4:50 a.m. on September 7, 1944 saying, "Alert! My God be with me."[23]

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20 Marányi, Ede (mother's name Katalin Dörgő; Pétervárad, October 7, 1896–Markdorf, Germany, September 20, 1985). His fictitious data: Antal Fehér, Komárom, March 5, 1900 was a special corps lieutenant colonel, off-duty Arrow Cross Party colonel, and commander of the camp group in Bor.

21 The two executed forced laborers were Sándor Friedmann (Budapest, 1907–Bor, April 2, 1944), Special Labor Unit battalion V. Resident of Budapest, and Tibor Béla, about whom there is no data in the official records of military graves. The Jehovah's Witness was István Besenyei [András Besenyei] (mother's name Borbála Nagy; Kisléta, November 28, 1911–Bor, April 11, 1944), special labor unit 801. According to the file of official records of losses, he "died during a collapse of earth." HM HIM Records of Military Graves, search by name: http://www.hadisir.hu/hadisir-nyilvantarto (last accessed September 21, 2018).

22 Laufer, Diary, August 29, 1944.

23 Laufer, Diary, July 9, 1944.

However, the alert was not followed by marching orders at that time. He had to wait another ten days, though there is no record of this in his diary.

The diary comes to an end here, but Laufer's story in Bor, of course, continued. He was dispatched from Bor in the first phase. He did not write his diary during the marches. He was shot in the head in Cservenka (Crvenka/Tscherwenka) in western Bačka or its vicinity, but shockingly, he survived, and after he had recovered, he returned to Budapest in April 1945.[24] The effects of György Laufer's severe head injury inflicted in the vicinity of Cservenka accompanied him throughout his life.

Little is known of the photographer György Laufer who finally settled down in Budapest and started a family after his years in Szeged. Taking the circumstances of the period into account, the fact that his name is included in the list of profiteers published in the Bulletin of the People's Tribunals in its issue of March 1946 does not tell us anything about him.[25] He became an active member of the Bor group, and his name appeared in the documents of secret investigations in connection with the death of Miklós Radnóti (1967–1975).[26]

## *Imre Pártos's Diary*[27]

Law graduate Imre Pártos and economist Béla Somló belonged to the older generation among the Bor forced laborers. Pártos was 42 years old and Somló was 41 when they reached Bor in 1943. They were taken to Bor in the same group as the much younger György Szöllösi and Lajos György, who also wrote diaries. Pártos and Szöllösi presumably knew each other, since they were taken to the same subcamp.

From the day of joining his unit (June 5, 1944), Imre Pártos recorded something in his diary every day up to the last day of the year. He wrote entries in his diary for a total of 210 days, regardless of which Bor camp he was in or which way he had to take after liberation. He spent four months in Bor camps

24 BFL, Nb.3281/1945.80. Trial of cadet sergeant András Tálas at the people's tribunal. György Laufer's testimony. Budapest, October 30, 1946. No. of acknowledgement of receipt: 619/1946.

25 Anonymous, "Itt a feketézők, valutázók, árdrágítók második hivatalos listája," 5.

26 ÁBTL, 3.1.5.-16476. File codenamed Abda murderers. The appearance does not have any significance since György Laufer did not go with the marchers after Cservenka.

27 Dr. Imre Pártos (mother's name Malvin Freidlander; Budapest, March 27, 1902–Budapest, September 30, 1973) was a solicitor, people's prosecutor, deputy people's prosecutor, deputy chief prosecutor, and legal counsellor.

and two months wandering, marching, and fleeing between Bor and Szeged. He then spent two months in the liberated city of Szeged.

He generally summed up the events of a given day in three concise sentences. An obvious reason for being concise was that he wrote his diary in a small notebook (the only one among the Bor diaries) which offered him only a limited amount of space. Unlike the other diarists, he did not have to do physical work. From the very beginning to the very end, he was a clerk, and he was aware that this was a privilege. He was not held in contempt for being a legally qualified clerk, and if he had anything to fear, it was only the members of the detachment outside his unit. Enjoying the trust of both the detachment and his fellow forced laborers, he became president of the "welfare committee."[28] His estate[29] includes an original document that indicates an income of 10,092 *pengő*s and expenditures of 4,469 *pengő*s. This suggests that a self-help social support system was organized with the approval of the camp commander in the Bregenz subcamp. However, Imre Pártos was able to take home both this unique document and a possibly complete list of names (497 in all) of those in the subcamp.

Pártos and the other forced laborers alongside him were liberated by the partisans from the second group setting off from Bor. This meant that he was finally freed from Bor, yet neither had the war come to an end nor was he no longer in danger. The story of his march with the partisans and his escape from the Germans is unusual but, thanks to his diary, we know it. Pártos did not advance in the direction of Arad or Temesvár, as one would have expected, but traveled instead to Szeged via Nagybecskerek (Zrenjanin). He arrived barely two weeks after Szeged was liberated. One day, he was still threatened by the horror of public work and "malenkij robot," while the next day he was already working as a detective with the Szeged police. Although the diary provides information about the increasing workload at the police, it does not reveal details. It is also known only from a note which was written after he had stopped regularly writing in his diary that he was appointed as Szeged tribunal prosecutor on June 6, 1945. Pártos worked in both job in which he had both political and professional competencies for 16 months, until October 31, 1946, when he was relocated to Budapest.

The files of the people's tribunal and the local press provide a fragmented picture of Imre Pártos's work as a prosecutor. Newspapers in Szeged and its

28 Pártos, Diary, July 4, 1944.

29 The original diary and Imre Pártos's documents connected to his forced labor service in Bor are in the ownership of his daughter-in-law and granddaughter, who reside in Budapest.

vicinity reported on some 35 people's tribunals for which Pártos served as prosecutor.[30] During the trials, he acted as prosecutor in cases in which charges were brought against particularly important war criminals and "anti-people" criminals, such as the commander of the former ghetto of Szeged, the former chief of police, the former Lord Lieutenant, the former deputy mayor, and the former guard commander of the Csillag Prison. In several cases, Pártos was the people's prosecutor in the trials of military superiors of Jewish forced laborers. As a tribunal prosecutor he participated in at least two cases when the people's tribunal passed sentence on former detachment members in Bor.[31]

After almost exactly two years spent in Szeged, he was appointed to the position of people's prosecutor in Budapest (October 31, 1946) and deputy chief people's prosecutor eight months later (June 6, 1947). This took place at a time when the Communist Party was seizing power. The people's tribunals often played a role in this. Pártos represented the prosecution during certain phases of the trials of the Arrow Cross chief of press Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa,[32] minister from the Smallholders' Party Endre Mistéth,[33] and social democratic leader Károly Peyer.[34]

After the people's tribunals ceased to function, the government appointed Pártos deputy chief state prosecutor (January 27, 1950).[35] About five years later, the Presidential Council of the Hungarian People's Republic awarded him the "Order of Merit for Socialist Labor" in "recognition of his excellent work in the Chief Prosecution Office." At the time, Pártos was the prosecutor of the main department of the Chief Prosecution Office (December 24, 1954).[36] Following

30 Primarily *Szegedi Népszava* and *Délmagyarország*, less frequently *Szegedi Kis Újság*, *Makói Népújság* and *Szentesi Lap* published some news in connection with Imre Pártos.

31 MNL CSML, Szeged. Nb. 1200/1945. Captain István Vida's anti-people crime. Sentence: two years imprisonment. Also: MNL CSML, Szeged. Nb. 1106/1945. Lance corporal Mihály Palócz's war crime. Sentence: ten years hard labor by the court of first instance, changed to three years by the court of second instance.

32 Dr. vitéz ("the Valliant") Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa (mother's name Margit Kolosváry; Kolozsvár, June 27, 1896–Budapest, December 6, 1946) was a journalist, editor, titular state secretary, and member of parliament. BFL - XXV.2.b - 13981–1945.

33 BFL - XXV.1.a - 2815–1948, Dr. Endre Mistéth (mother's name Emília Konstantinovics; Buziásfürdő, September 10, 1912–Budapest, July 12, 2006) was a bridge construction engineer, state secretary, and minister.

34 BFL - XXV.1.a - 3757–1947, Károly Peyer (mother's name Katalin Frank; Városlőd, May 9, 1881–New York, October 25, 1956) was an ironworker and minister, member of parliament.

35 *Magyar Közlöny*, 1.

36 *Magyar Közlöny*, 754.

the suppression of the 1956 revolution, he did not participate in the show trials.[37] Pártos began his career as a solicitor before the war and retired as a legal counsel from the Budapest Contractors' Company on December 31, 1966.

## *Béla Somló's Diary*

The author of the longest diary known among this admittedly small group was Dr. Béla Somló.[38] The text, which exists in a typed transcript in a public collection, is several times longer than any other Bor diary.[39] The manuscript is a typical example a work with a retrospective character which is not "intact,"[40] since in the absence of the original hand-written diary, it cannot be established whether subsequent changes were made and what expectations the author wanted to comply with in relation to any potential changes. Béla Somló passed on to succeeding generations all of his diaries about marches into the regions of the southern borders of Hungary and to Ukraine in the same way.[41] At that time, the anti-Jewish laws had not yet affected Somló, and he participated in the reinforcement of the occupying troops as a soldier of the Pécs mechanized division.

Somló's diary written in Bor is a source of abundant information about the lives of forced laborers who were taken to the Rhön subcamp in the second group. After his fortunate liberation, he provides a uniquely rich description of the colorful life in Temesvár, a city which survived the war with relatively little damage and had already been liberated. It was an urban center in which Jews, Hungarians, Romanians, and Russians lived together.

The bulky file of surveillance documents kept by the State Security Authority reveals more about Béla Somló's post-1945 life than any other source. Somló,

37 He is not included in the 1956 data base of the Committee of National Remembrance (NEB) in any form. https://perek56.hu/ords/f?p=1051:1. (Last accessed June 18, 2019.)

38 Dr. Béla Somló [Béla Schwartz] (mother's name Körpel Ilona; Budapest, July 14, 1903–Budapest, April 2, 2000) was a chartered economist, agrarian economist, bank clerk, and photographer in Budapest.

39 HM HIM HL, PgyM/368 and M/368. His Bor diary consists of two large units. The section written in Bor consists of 49 pages. The other section, which was written in Temesvár, comes to 64 pages (Bor, June 1, 1944–Temesvár, October 19, 1944 and Temesvár, October 19, 1944–Budapest, February 27, 1945). The author later transcribed the texts for the Archives of Military History in 1979 and 1982.

40 Kunt, "Kamasztükör," 15–20.

41 HM HIM HL, PGy 2826. The participation of the Pécs motorized heavy vehicle division IV/2 in entering the region to the south of Hungary's border in 1941 (1980). Also: HM HIM HL, TGy 2811. The participation of the column of the Pécs motorized vehicle division IV/2 in the rapid deployment force of the military campaign in Russia.

who was not a party member, spoke several languages and liked music. He was kept under surveillance on suspicion of spying for six years between 1950 and 1956. The suspicion was unfounded, and his case was closed.[42]

## *Lajos György's Diary*[43]

The author of the sixth Bor diary which has survived in full[44] is Lajos György. While I had to make inquiries about László Faludi and Béla Somló and about György Laufer's authorship, the opposite was true in the case of György. Also, he was the only person among the Bor diarists with whom I was able to meet in person.[45] His son, aesthetician Péter György, first mentioned the existence of the diary in a biographical essay published in the literary journal *Alföld* in 2010.[46] A year later, in his essay-novel *Apám helyett*[47] (Instead of my father), which met with considerable interest, the story of his father's forced labor service in Bor and his Bor diary played essential roles in the first seven chapters.

Lajos György's Bor diary can be divided into three distinct sections based on chronological and topographical aspects: Bor, liberation and wandering, and finally, being home in Budapest. Regarding its themes, it is a historical and a personal diary. The personal thread is intense in the sections written during his time in Bor and during the period he spent wandering and also in the notes made after he had returned home, although in the latter, the proportions are naturally turned around completely. The narrative changes from a war-time forced labor camp diary into a "travel diary" and a personal one. It is the diary of a year in the life of a young man who was 18 and then 19 years of age and who was taken to a forced labor service, compelling him to cross international borders, pass through theatres of military operations, and learn about the old and new systems from close-up, and yet György was barely able to separate from his parents. In addition, he was in love. So the text is also a diary documenting his turbulent emotional life over the course of a single year of his first love. Moreover, the

42 ÁBTL, 3.1.5. O–9054. Béla, Somló.

43 Dr. Lajos György (mother's name Emma Schwitzer; Budapest, April 16, 1926–Budapest, November 1, 2008) was a physician, editor, writer, environmentalist, ecologist, and doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

44 The original copy of the diary is with Lajos György's widow, Otília Vass, who resides in Budapest, while the copy seen by me is in the possession of Péter György.

45 Email communication from Lajos György to Tamás Csapody. Budapest, September 13, 2005.

46 György, "Az amnézia-terápia," 64–69.

47 György, *Apám helyett,* 2011.

diary has another important layer. The text is a document which sheds light on the ways in which his attitude towards the communist idea developed via practical trials. Thus, Lajos György's diary can clearly be regarded as a diary of transformation, mobility, and the process of becoming an adult.

Lajos György wrote his diary between May 31, 1944 and April 3, 1945. The section on Bor embraces a shorter period, and it also contains entries written during and about the liberation and the events of the months after György had returned home. It begins when he was drafted to work as part of the forced labor service, and the diary contains entries kept over the course of a year, almost to the day. Over the course of this period of time, according to his entries, György slept in a total of 58 places, starting with Jászberény, the location specified in the summons he received, followed by the locations in Bor, and on the way home following liberation as far as to his residence in Budapest.

György's diary contains drawings, which is not unusual in diary literature, though his is the only one among the Bor diaries that contains drawings. Tiny sketches in red ink are found in the margins and, in some instances, at the top of the pages. They are connected to the texts. György drew a castle, rails, mine carts, piles of bricks, a red star (with "Long Live Tito" underneath in Serbian), a hammer and sickle, a red cross, tanks, books, a watch (with the word "watch" in Russian underneath), a Christmas tree, and a traditional Hungarian Christmas cake.[48] In the same red ink, he underlined titles, sub-titles, some dates, and words or names which he regarded as important, presumably when he reread the diary later.

Lajos György was placed in the Laznica camp, which was, relatively speaking, the best in Bor. It was the only subcamp of Bor that was situated inside a village and was not surrounded by a fence due to its location. It was the furthest Hungarian subcamp from Bor and it was not along the busier north-south main road. Last but not least, the commander of the camp, ensign Jenő Halász, had a comparatively humane attitude.[49] Yet later, Lajos György encountered a member

48 A total of 13 drawings including signatures in two places. There are also three words and remarks written in the margins in the same red ink ("гладам сам" [I am hungry], "B.U.É.K." (the Hungarian abbreviation for Happy New Year), and "Hungária").

49 Reserve ensign Dr. Jenő Halász was a teacher in Újvidék (Novi Sad). Two pieces of news spread about him among the forced laborers (he fled and joined the partisans, and he did not return after his official time off). He was sentenced to five years of imprisonment in Yugoslavia after 1945. The second commander of the camp was lieutenant Béla Nagy from Szeged.

of the detachment named János Császár in the Berlin camp.[50] The cruelty of this sergeant major had the same negative effect on him as it did on the other diarists. Later, like László Faludi, György Laufer, and György Szöllösi, Lajos György also participated in the people's tribunal trial of János Császár.[51]

## *Summary*

On the basis of the number of diaries which have survived, even if in some cases only in fragments, one has the impression that very few of the forced labor service men in Bor wrote diaries. Two of the authors of the surviving six diaries were taken to the Berlin camp with the 1943 group and spent 14 months in Bor. The others arrived a year later and were held captive in different subcamps in the mountains. The diaries clearly show how differently the diarists experienced their forced labor service, depending on their ages, qualifications, assignments, and the conditions in the camps. Nothing was previously known about how a forced laborer lived and thought during his time in Bor if he worked inside the camp, for instance in the kitchen, or he was a photographer or a clerk or if he had been in the organized labor movement. The Bor diaries provide us with a few impressions of the experiences of forced labor in theaters of military operations or under Hungarian and German control. Notes made in the present tense at the locations and the later transcripts make it possible to draw a more nuanced picture.

Another perspective from which the diaries may offer a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of people assigned to forced labor camp service involves the so-called "Jewish question" in the camp. As György Laufer writes in his diary (which is the only source known so far which touches on this), the Jewish forced laborers were marked with "the Mogen Dovid," which was daubed in "oil paint" on their chests and their backs (Laufer writes about this in the entry from March 30, 1944).[52] So from then on, the Hungarian Jewish forced laborers held as prisoners in the Berlin camp were compelled to wear the

50 János Császár (mother's name Judit Burkus; Medgyesegyháza, April 17, 1905–Szeged, August 3, 1945) was a sergeant major and a member of the detachment in the Bregenz and Rhön subcamps and then in the Berlin camp. The Szeged people's tribunal sentenced Császár to death for war crimes in 1945 and he was executed.

51 BFL Nb.206/1945. 160–61. Lajos György's handwritten, signed submission without any date. The registered date is June 19, 1945. János Császár's trial at the people's tribunal. No. of acknowledgment of receipt: 1542/1945.

52 Diary, March 30, 1944. Mogen Dovid: Star of David, in Hebrew Magen David.

Star of David on their clothing until the liberation. Béla Somló dealt most with the situation of the Jews in the camp. He was preoccupied with the difference between the position of "whites" and "yellows" (the term "white" referred to people who were born Jewish but converted to the Christian faith. They were officially considered Jews). He often wrote about the distinction between "white" Jews and non-baptized "yellow" Jews. Thus the anti-Jewish laws carried weight in acts of discrimination even in Bor. Those with yellow armbands could not be cooks, nor could they work in the kitchen. Moreover, they could not be workers within the camp or be present in the office. They had to turn in their boots and wear the Star of David. Béla Somló, Imre Pártos, and Lajos György had white arm bands, as did the poet Miklós Radnóti and the philosopher Sándor Szalai, who were also taken to Bor.

With one exception, the Bor diaries did not end in Bor. They record the liberation and the experience of encountering the partisans and Russian soldiers. They also describe what the forced laborers experienced during their escape, on the way home, and at the locations where they stayed. After having survived Hungarian and German captivity, they were still exposed to threats from the partisans and the looming danger of falling into Russian captivity. The diaries show precisely how the war, its consequences, and the temporary situations affected them. Arrival home also presented them with losses, since they learned that many of their relatives had perished in the Holocaust. They had to rethink their lives, including their personal lives. In different ways, they participated in the emergence of a new world, including the rise of a different dictatorship, the complex circumstances of which they themselves struggled with later.[53]

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53 I would like to thank everyone in the public collections and private archives who helped me in my work, as well as those who contributed to the process of creating accurate typewritten versions of the diaries.

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# The Corporeal Continuation of the Holocaust: A Look at Miscarriages

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Scholarship on women's experiences is recently surfacing to understand a broader and more nuanced picture of Holocaust history. This case study wishes to add to the currently emerging interpretations of gendered experiences through the events of miscarriages that persecuted women experienced before, during, and after the Shoah. While the topic of miscarriages is only a segment of the larger subject of pregnancy, this research aims to offer a methodological example of including corporeal experiences into the gender analysis of the examined time period. This case study thus presents its relevance in bearing the ability to alter previous scholarly understanding on the demographics of Jewish communities after 1945 by showing that women's reproductive and fertility experiences have not been included in social scientific discussions.

Keywords: Women and the Holocaust, gendered experiences, gender analysis, pregnancy, miscarriages, Jewish women.

In this paper, I examine experiences of miscarriages caused by the Holocaust in order to present the idea that defined timelines of history and demographic indicators do not necessarily align to the social reality of corporeal and gendered experiences. Originally, the wider scope of my research was about returning Holocaust survivors who had been deported from Hungary,[1] and the initial step was to review demographics concerning the Jewish population from the immediate postwar period in comparison to the past decades of the twentieth century, especially the interwar period. My examination of the demographic data led me to the discovery that Holocaust survivors are mainly treated as a homogenous group in Hungarian scholarly work, and this failure to draw distinctions among them has led to some unexplored ground in the history of survivors.[2] The aim of this paper, therefore, is to look deeper into the

1 For my thesis work at the Central European University, see: Szabó, *The Return and New Beginning for Hungarian Holocaust Survivors, 1945–1949*.

2 Several recent works examine different experiences among different groups of survivors, for example child survivors, see: Borggrafe et al., *Freilegungen: Rebuilding Lives – Child Survivors and DP Children in the Aftermath of the Holocaust and Forced Labor*; Ouzan, *How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives*; several biographies and testimonies of LGBT Holocaust survivors show differences in coping mechanisms and

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social history of the Hungarian Jewish population in the so-called transitory period of the early postwar years in Hungary from liberation in 1945 to the beginning of Communist rule in 1949.[3] The purpose of such a case study about a specific group of people within a specific timeframe is, ultimately, to provide a lens we can glean insights into societal changes from a wider but also from a closer perspective. Therefore, this paper is going to complement quantitative research with a qualitative approach. Through this examination, I seek further explanations and a more nuanced understanding of alternate *realities* that lay behind macrosociological knowledge with the help of a feminist approach.[4]

Such an approach provides further questions about the context and actors of a given societal reaction or change, especially about women and their role. Given the outstanding shifts in the demographics of the Jewish community in Hungary post-1945, sociological and historical analyses specifically highlight the low amount of live births, which becomes an even more so focused aspect when taken the contemporary general claim into consideration that it became the Jewish woman's social duty to recuperate the lost souls of the Holocaust.[5] Therefore, the aim of this paper is to turn towards the survivors with an inquiry that allows us to understand further possible reasons of the low statistics through a qualitative approach instead of a quantitive one, yet with the aim of integration. Consequently, my examination has led me to the understanding that women miscarrying in this era was just as significant, if not greater, as in other contexts. However, claiming definite causality is not the aim of this paper, in that the traumas of the Holocaust affected all of the women's reproductive health and led to high rates of miscarriage; the intention is rather to present that such casualties *did* happen, as by nature, such explanations are omitted from the statistics.

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life after the war; marked differences among survivor groups can also be traced based on the places of resettling, see Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing*.

3 This investigation is mainly based on post-1945 Hungarian sociological works: Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők;* Stark, *Zsidóság a vészkorszakban és a felszabadulás után 1939–1955*; while political histories have already addressed the period of 1945–1949, see Novák, *Átmenetben*; Kovács "Hungarian Jewish Politics from the End of the Second World War until the Collapse of Communism"; Barna and Pető, *Political Justice in Budapest after World War II*; Horváth, *A DEGOB Története*.

4 The aim is to go beyond presenting gender dichotomies, yet with the approach of a gendered view, see: Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust"; Lorentzen and Turpin, *The Women and War Reader*; Kaplan, "Gender: A Crucial Tool in Holocaust Research"; and further feminist works cited in this paper.

5 Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust*, 115.

## *Demographics after Survival*

As Viktor Karády's extensive work on the Hungarian Jewry after 1945[6] clearly shows, the main change in the social structure of survivors was the high demographic losses due to casualties (illnesses and the poor physical state of survivors, self-destruction, and even pogroms), conversion, emigration, and mixed marriages. Moreover, a significant upsurge can be observed in terms of Jewish marriages, and a change in family structures. Given the importance of the latter two shifts, I have chosen to consider the realities of starting a new family, as such decisions amount to and represent significant social changes.

The demographic boost in marriages within the surviving Jewish community in Hungary in the immediate post-war period becomes significant in comparison to before and during the active years of the Holocaust. This compensatory demographic process is noteworthy if we seek to understand familial choices, at least in part, as fundamental coping strategies of Holocaust survivors on a macrolevel. A prevalent response was to (re)marry, and this led to a surge of approximately 1,000–1,200 more Jewish marriages in 1946 than in 1943/5, and more than 2,200 Jewish marriages were held in Budapest in 1947.[7] The demographic upswing is extraordinary if one considers the growth of the numbers of Jewish marriages to the stagnant number of marriages among people of other faiths in this time period in Budapest.[8]

The tremendous growth in the numbers of new marriages did not, however, mean a similar upward trend in birth rates. The demographic recuperative tendency of Jewish communities in Hungary, according to Karády, is not significant in other than getting (re)married; recuperative fertility is thought to have lessened or ceased due to several reasons, such as the destruction of households, losses of property and wealth, psychological effects of persecution, etc.[9] The female experience of not being *able* to bear a child for psychological reasons, physiological reasons, or a complex combination of the two, and further realities, remains unexplored. Therefore, after carefully presenting the demographic data on the number of live births, I will turn my attention to those mothers who are not counted in the statistics due to unsuccessful pregnancies.

6 Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők,* 67–135.

7 Ibid.

8 The numbers, however, are rough estimates in the case of Budapest and unknown in the case of the rest of the country.

9 Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők,* 83–87.

I find this dimension extremely important because it constitutes an essential, if not overlooked, component of the social history of Holocaust survivors; it shows that the trend of Jewish births after the Shoah, compared either to the number of Jewish marriages or the live birth rates among couples of other faiths, is not exclusively due to inherent structural differences in Jewish families. My discussion of some of the reasons behind the numbers will show that, at the time, this was a silenced social reality, and it remains a silenced part of the past to this day. This is true in part because women who lost pregnancies or were unable to conceive are not included as distinct categories in demographic data and in part because sociological inquiry on the Holocaust has, in general, failed to include gender as a perspective.

I will complement my discussion of the background of this social history with elements of oral history by concentrating on the voices of women about intimate topics related to the establishment of families. I thus focus on the unexplored and rather unarticulated topic of miscarriages as one of the many almost unmentioned events in the lives of women survivors and the several different responses with which miscarriages were met and the outcomes they had. My paper will show that miscarriages were (and are) a hidden yet significant topic and that pregnancy losses changed the responses and roles of women even after the Holocaust. My discussion thus also adds to the theoretical literature on how gender is a fluid social category and women do not have an "essential nature" under any circumstances.[10]

## *Women and the Holocaust*

To begin an inquiry from the perspective that women survivors did not consistently respond in "typical" or expected ways to pregnancy or a miscarriage is to suggest that women should be studied independently in Holocaust history. The historiography on women in the Holocaust follows an evolution of thought, beginning with an insistence on distinguishing women from men, since history and the study of history have been largely influenced by men, yet men have had different sets of experiences than women. This starting point includes emphasis on allowing women to speak for themselves and also to be seen and heard.[11] However, gender analysis in Holocaust scholarship has been a rarity, though a

10 Turpin, "Many Faces: Women Confronting War," 13.

11 Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust,* 3–4.

more recent trend of studying women separately in the Holocaust follows the same route as studying women in general history, and this has made women somewhat more visible in Holocaust studies.[12]

Feminist scholarship on war and women, moreover, has gone beyond conclusions based on simple gender dichotomies and has been able to shed light on new realities while deconstructing myths that limited further knowledge production.[13] A crucial distinction which has been drawn is that war affects women, and it affects women in different ways than men in terms of torture and murder (for instance), an aspect which has been marginalized by the standard that war is "men's business."[14] Yet, there are several experiences that easily debunk this standard. For instance, a specific form of psychological torture as a result of wartime rape affected only women, namely being made pregnant by one's rapist, who was also the enemy in the larger conflict, and then being stigmatized within one's own group. Moreover, women in the wars of the twentieth century constituted a significant share of direct casualties as civilians due to the strategy of so-called total war, which drew no distinction between combatants and civilians,[15] while Jewish women, together with Jewish men, were "nonpersons" unworthy of life according to Nazi ideology.[16]

Nazi ideology was genocidal based on racial distinctions, thus it might seem as it took no consideration of gender, but it has already been established that Nazi practice was not gender neutral,[17] so it is important to note that it was so because Nazi policy never neglected the aspect of gender, rather it added to the complexity of its power structures. The Holocaust was inherently a gendered process, wherein the forced changes of location, forms of forced labor, forms of treatment, etc. were all gender based and thus had formative effects on experiences, survival, and death.[18] A significant example includes the initial selection upon arrival in the camps, which determined the fates of the persecuted based on gender. Visibly pregnant women and women with children were immediately sent to their deaths.[19] Those who were not sent to the gas chambers after arrival were then segregated, also based on gender, which then

12 Pető, "Writing Women's History in Eastern Europe," 173–83.

13 Lorentzen and Turpin, *The Women and War Reader*, xii.

14 Ibid., xi.

15 Turpin, "Many Faces: Women Confronting War," 4.

16 Goldenberg, "From a World Beyond: Women in the Holocaust," 669.

17 Ibid., Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 242–66.

18 Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust*, 114; Caplan, "Gender and Concentration Camps," 82–107.

19 Ibid., 79.

marked the differences in how women and how men faced hardships and experienced the modes of survival.[20]

Moreover, specific strategies applied in genocidal practice are gender-focused, such as sexual assaults and other means of targeted attacks on reproductive abilities, which coheres to the main aim of annihilating an ethnicity and culture.[21] Women's bodies could function as a weapon of war, as raping women who were regarded as part of the "enemy" group had the effect of stripping their husbands and fathers of their masculinity and destroying their status as protectors within their communities.[22] This practice was also part of the Holocaust, although the policy of *Rassenschande* under the Laws for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor might suggest otherwise, given that it prohibited sexual relations with anyone identified as Jewish.[23] Whether the rapes which were committed during the Holocaust were part of a military strategy or acts prompted in part by the genocidal desire to dehumanize, historians agree that sexual violence against their did happen and is an important part of their experience.[24]

Survivor accounts also inform us that the fear of suffering any sort of sexual violence was constantly present, and sterilization is a central theme in many of the women's memoirs.[25] However, accounts in which experiences of sexual assaults, menstruation, pregnancy, etc. are elaborately discussed are rather scarce. Women did not talk about them in part, as Joan Ringelheim comments in her discussion of interviews with Holocaust survivors, because the assaults were seen as having "no significance within the larger picture of the Holocaust," even by the victims themselves.[26] Whether this is the result of a male-dominated memory of the Holocaust or of the stigmatization mentioned above, the silencing added to the exclusion of female experiences from the history of the Holocaust. And although not every woman may have suffered any or every form of sexual assault or gendered violation, the sources concerning practices of sexual assault in some camps suggest these experiences were more common than not. For example, in the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, the methodologically planned steps against menstruation were coffee-like drinks which contained bromide, and as

20 Goldenberg, "From a World Beyond: Women in the Holocaust," 671.

21 Bemporad and Warren, *Women and Genocide*, ix.

22 Alison et al., "My plight is not unique," 4.

23 Sinnreich, "And it was something we didn't talk about," 2.

24 Sinnreich, "'And it was something we didn't talk about'"; Beck, "Rape"; Katz, "Thoughts on the Intersection of Rape"; Mühlhauser, "The Historicity of Denial"; Ephgrave, "On Women's Bodies."

25 Goldenberg, "From a World Beyond: Women in the Holocaust," 672.

26 Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust," 745.

in other camps, invasive sterilization methods were used to prevent pregnancy, while infants and children were sent to the gas chamber.[27]

## *A Feminist Framework*

Study and discussions of exclusively female experiences are not intended to measure the sufferings of women and compare them to the sufferings of men, but rather to learn about fertility before, during, and after the Shoah in order to gain a better understanding of the success or failure of the coping strategies of survivors regarding family structures. Much as women's responses to experiences are not universal, the timelines of physical and psychological recuperation were not either. Therefore, when discussing miscarriages specifically happening to survivor women, I refer to fetal loss as a possible corporeal continuation of the Holocaust to strengthen the need to include this aspect not only to sociological analyses but to an overall historical understanding. The basis of this approach is Lenore J. Weitzman's and Dalia Ofer's *sequential framework*, which offers a methodological scheme to understanding women's responses to the Shoah in Holocaust historiography.[28]

The sequential framework complements the continuity and the disruptive frameworks by inviting Holocaust historians to broaden their view of women in a timely manner, which in my interpretation means looking at the "longue durée" of women's lives, to follow the shifts in responses and behavior through the entire course of the Holocaust, and not statically.[29] This framework is divided into three stages: 1) the general reaction of the continuity model at the beginning of the Nazi assault on Jews, 2) the in-between stage of coping strategies changing into disruptive patterns as Nazi measures intensified, and 3) the tipping point, when change came about in the women's perspective, and the "new me" was born, usually due to a fatal trigger (e.g. a miscarriage, the death of a loved one, etc.).

I have chosen the sequential model to put survivors' testimonials that mention instances of miscarriages into a framework because of the attention this model devotes to time. The other frameworks either consider the roles of women from the prewar period as mothers, wives, and homemakers as roles

27 Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp,* 210–11.

28 Weitzman and Ofer, "The Sequential Development," 27.

29 Ibid., 35–38.

which were kept up or roles which retained their relevance[30] or they focus on forms of female behavior that were or are considered discontinuous, i.e. the dramatic ways in which women abandoned their prewar roles and conventions eventually to engage in activities that would have been unthinkable prior to their experiences of the reality of the Holocaust.[31] The main argument of this paper about miscarriages concentrates on the time aspect in a sequential sense, i.e. that it is not only characteristic of the female experience during the Holocaust statically, in singular point(s) of time ending 1945. According to this view, I find it important to reconsider the sociological findings on the population of Hungarian Holocaust survivors in the immediate postwar setting and, more specifically, to explore the underlying reasons for the low number of live births in a retrospective manner.

## *Demographics Revisited*

As a demographic examination of the Jewish population shows, although there was a high compensatory upward trend in the immediate postwar years in Hungary, this was mainly visible in the number of marriages but less so in the number of births.[32] In 1945, the number of Jewish births (529) was about half what it had been in 1944 (1,164). This figure rose significantly to approximately 1,500 births by 1946/7, but this meant only a return to the prewar figures (1,540 births in 1938).[33] Moreover, the main argument of Karády's chapter on reproduction and the family structures among Holocaust survivors is that after the compensatory upward trend of demographics, in the long run, the Hungarian Jewish population returned to its tendency towards decrease.[34] This statement fits the overall thesis of Jewish social studies about a general trend of decline in terms of Jewish populations most commonly due to a low number of live births, conversion, and mixed marriages, etc., namely, that there is a threat of "Jewish disappearance."[35]

30 Ibid., 28–32.

31 Ibid., 32–34.

32 Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők,* 83–92, and Stark, *Zsidóság a vészkorszakban és a felszabadulás után 1939–1955,* 77–90.

33 Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők,* 86.

34 Ibid., 83.

35 See Don and Magos, "The Demographic Development of Hungarian Jewry," and for criticism on the topic see: Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity*.

However, conclusions concerning a "Jewish disappearance" as a general trend turn out to be too vague and lack a qualitative approach for more precise consideration, offering explanations borrowed from history through the lens of statistical data as decontextualized pieces of information.[36] Even if changes in demographics concerning a decreasing Jewish population is worrisome at a given time, the interpretation of a "Jewish disappearance" does not work in all cases. In this respect, other, deeper analyses of given set of demographic data could show that the numbers have been decontextualized and this decontextualization explains why social histories fall victim to general conclusions concerning loss or "disappearance." In a study on Breslau Jews, for instance, Till Van Rahden shows that the linear understanding of intermarriages leading to integration was not applicable to the Jews of the city. Rahden demonstrates how this understanding or assumption (that intermarriage leads to assimilation) does not do justice to the complex identities of the Jews of the city and that choosing a Gentile partner did not always represent a break with the Jewish tradition, since in many instances, the intermarried spouses continued to follow Jewish religious practice, and in several cases they did so with the children born to the mixed families.[37] Similarly, the decreasing demography in Hungary after 1945 can hold further realities which offer other explanations for low birth rates.

When contextualizing the declining numbers of births, Karády elaborates on the possible reasons for this drop by reviewing the corporeal explanations. He reviews the statistics from a vast societal starting point on an annual basis, and he includes a list of the psychological effects of persecution alongside a more detailed explanation of the consequences of migration, political shifts (the increasingly powerful Communist Party, the rise to power of which caused a new wave of shock among Hungarian Jews), the disproportionately large number of women aged 0–20 in comparison to men, and the structural changes of families in terms of trends (having one or two children after the war instead of seven or eight, which had been typical before the war).[38] However, Karády does not include, in his discussion, the possibility that some couples had other underlying reasons, or that women were not able to become or remain pregnant, though in

36 Ibid., 2.

37 Rahden, "Intermarriage, the 'New Woman'."

38 Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők*, 85–87.

some cases, this inability to bear a child would constitute a further effect of the Holocaust which did not cease with liberation.[39]

I contend that a woman's inability to have a child after the Holocaust must be included among the possible reasons for low birth rates among Jews and must also be studied if we seek to arrive at a nuanced understanding of women's sexual vulnerability and the potential consequences of the experiences of persecution that Jewish women suffered during (and in this case also after) the Holocaust. These are issues which remain largely unexplored in the secondary literature.[40] In order to initiate such an understanding, I have conducted qualitative research based on oral history using the Visual History Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation. When I searched for survivor testimonies using the indexing term "miscarriages," I found 16 accounts in English, which I have chosen to use as the basis for the present case study. A larger sampling could be achieved by adding further indexing terms and by including other resources and databases, which is an aim for further extended research on the topic, wherein I can go beyond identifying miscarriages as an additional explanatory point, and achieve a deeper understanding of the extent of miscarriages, its direct and indirect effects on the population, its scope in connection to the era's politics of reproduction, and other related questions. Nonetheless, given the framework of the paper, I corroborate my argument about the urgency of identifying the survivor women's reproductive issues by using the results found in the narrower search of the VHA testimonies.

It is important to note the time scope of the oral histories examined. The survivors' accounts were videotaped in the 1990s and early 2000s, and a very small number at the end of the 1980s. This might, of course, mean that elements of memory and remembrance are problematic, since over 45 years had passed since the actual events had taken place, yet in the specific case of miscarriages, I believe that being embedded in the social matrix of the time of speaking is of greater impact. In case of the VHA Shoah Foundation interviews, women talking about pregnancies can be articulate, but surely not as emphatically as today, when there is a more assertive mindset and vocabulary with which to talk about sexuality (or the vulnerability of sexuality, for that matter). This might further explain the low number of testimonies in which women discuss their experiences of failed pregnancies. The majority of the searched testimonies,

39 About the process of liberation simplified to "the happy end of the Shoah," see Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*.

40 A conclusion to which Zoe Waxman also arrived in 2017, see: Waxman, *Women in the Holocaust*, 126.

moreover, discuss the event of a miscarriage before or after the Holocaust, and there are less recollections of pregnancy losses during the murderous Nazi persecution when forcibly removed from home.

Instances of miscarriages during the Holocaust, either in ghettoes, camps, or in hiding, are more silenced due to the fact that the pregnancy itself had to be kept a secret for the woman in question could thus avoid being murdered immediately or, because of the lack of medical help, the mothers passed away after the miscarriage. Here, the risk of comparing experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust might arise. Any attempt to measure or quantify sufferings, in my assessment, would be misguided, as each of these three time periods was unique for its own reasons. Moreover, each experience is distinctive and unmeasurable since these events happened to individuals, much as, more generally, the pain and torments suffered by woman cannot be meaningfully compared to the pain suffered by men and children.

## *Qualitative Research: After the Holocaust*

Of the 16 testimonies, one is a duplicate (possibly a system error of the search engine), so the actual number of interviews on which I based my case study is 15. Of the 15, two accounts were told by men about their wives and their lost children. Almost half of the people (seven) mention miscarriages that happened after liberation, while two mention miscarriages which took place before ghettoization in Poland and six speak of miscarriage which took place during the active years of the Holocaust, out of which four happened in Auschwitz and two in hiding. Although the quantity of the testimonies is too narrow to be of representative value of an entire society, it does include these different sets of experiences that allow the sampling to be an indicative case study, i.e. miscarriages occurred in this period and thus its examination needs to be elevated into the historical inquiry, however small a number of witnesses testify.

One of the male interviewees claims that he and his wife were constantly trying to get pregnant and his wife had several miscarriages for about twelve years after liberation, during which time they migrated to Israel, and they were only successful in their attempts at childbearing later, in Canada.[41] This indicates the complex circumstances of the aftermath of the Holocaust in a survivor's life, which might illustrate the different tolls this complex new reality might have

41 Baruch K., interview 54511, segments 100–102.

had on restarting life. Another male Holocaust survivor speaks about his wife's miscarriage after their marriage in 1956.[42] Considering the over ten years that had passed since liberation, discussing this miscarriage in terms of Holocaust trauma might rather be of a speculative nature but especially because Charles does not elaborate further on the fatality. Nevertheless, this testimony is also of crucial importance in the discussion of miscarriages as it instigates the question how far can we think in terms the continuation of the Holocaust in women's bodies if 1945 cannot be declared as an end point, and whether such a question could be sufficiently examined at all.

Similarly, the women who speak about miscarriages which took place after 1945 note that they lost several pregnancies, some at a late stage. Two female survivors mention multiple miscarriages which took place in 1947–1948. One of them gave birth in 1946, right before making Aliyah, but her baby died in infancy.[43] Another mother, Tobi was seven months along when she had a miscarriage.[44] Tobi got married to her husband in Canada in 1950, after which she had a miscarriage when she was in her seventh month (the child would have been their first born). When seeking medical attention in the local hospital, she was told by the doctor that she would have to start trying to have another baby immediately and not spend too much time grieving.

Seven months after the loss of her first pregnancy, Tobi gave birth to her son, who weighed five pounds. Similarly, her second child was born prematurely at six months and was kept in an incubator for seven weeks. The hospital required payment for the child to grow strong while in the incubator, which was a financial burden for Tobi who had her firstborn child at home while his husband earned $45 a week. As she had to pay rent and feed her family, Tobi offered the hospital a deal: "or you gonna take 15 dollars from me per month or you keep the baby. And when I'm gonna have money, I'm gonna come for the baby to take it home. And he was 'Ok, ok, 15 dollars…'." She thus managed to pay for the intensive care her baby needed in a year's time, spending $1,000 to save her children.

Tobi's recollections about the beginning of a new (family) life after having survived the unthinkable shows the politicized significance of a woman survivor from a social and biological viewpoint. She was to bear a child, not mourn the loss of a pregnancy, to fulfil her familial desires, and perhaps a social, and even

42 Charles K., interview 53904, segment 130.

43 Sonia H., interview 54151, segment 104.

44 Tobi B., interview 54504, segments 161–167.

a religious duty.[45] The demographic indicators, as well as the interview questions (embedded in the framework of VHA's interview methodology in 1996) do not allow us to extend this investigation further, and thus leaves room only for speculation. For the "business" of keeping her child alive, she was the primary caretaker and the primary executive power concerning the financial aspects of the necessary healthcare in an emergency situation, thus reversing the prewar gender differences of spatial orientation within the family structure. Her husband was earning the income for the household, but it was she who had to negotiate for the future life and health of their children, outside of the home.

However, the multiple and late miscarriages from the sampling of this case study show that stability was trembling in women's bodies to the extent that even successful childbearing did not guarantee life for the newborn. One of the stories told symbolically invokes the sensation of trembling, possibly a result of a seemingly never-ending persecution: Lena,[46] Jewish Holocaust survivor born in Thessaloniki, got pregnant again around 1947 after her husband arrived back from deportation, at a time when they were living in a small room in their previously confiscated apartment with several Greek strangers. Once, while she was having a shower, one of the men pushed the door in and entered the bathroom to which Lena's sudden reaction resulted in her falling to the floor, and losing her child, a baby girl. "I fell down, and I had miscarriaged. And was a girl. A little girl. And I start to cry, all the time, I was crying because they took me in the hospital, to clean me, to do whatever it was, it was a miscarriage, it was not like normal. And I was all the time crying that it was a girl, it was a girl, a little girl, a little girl. That was the problem."

Lena's account shows that the underlying psychological effects are in a complex relationship with physical fear that could have resulted fetal loss in such a direct way because of falling, but presumably also in indirect ways. The underlying reasons of fear can be not only complex in its nature but caused by a number of causes, such as the stress of having to live in a previously confiscated apartment with others, the justifiable or unjustifiable threat of Gentiles in the early postwar period, or that of antisemitism that was prevalent in several

45 Religious duty comes to mind as Tobi is registered to have practiced Orthodox Judaism before the war, but her postwar religious affiliation and practice remains unclear for that section of the biographical profile is empty.

46 Lena H., interview 55046, segments 93–107.

countries even to the extent of newly occurring pogroms[47], and possibly several other factors depending on the time and space (in Greece, for example, the overshadowing of the Holocaust and the survivors returning to Greece by the Greek Civil War[48]).

Pregnant women were also exposed to unsafe conditions since they were often on the move, as emigration was one of the most common coping strategies for previously deported Holocaust survivors, and this also constituted a risk to a healthy pregnancy. Maria W., for example, was on her way to make Aliyah when, in Marseille, she had a miscarriage. As she did not speak French, she felt even more vulnerable and was rather an observer of what was happening to her. After she had spent some days in the hospital, she was taken to a DP camp, where she was left lying on the floor for two weeks. Only later, after having arrived in Israel, was she given the professional medical attention that a miscarriage would necessitate.[49] Maria never had a child after this experience. In her recollections, she does not elaborate on not having had children, i.e. she does not indicate whether this was for physiological or psychological reasons. However, it becomes clear that for all the women whose accounts I read, the circumstances of childbirth were rather difficult, often even harsh. Women had to deal with the continuation of the Holocaust in their bodies, both mentally and bodily, and they also had to address the circumstances and environments in which they found themselves at a moment of emergency.

## *Qualitative Research II: Before and During the Holocaust*

The sources indicate different reactions to the growing tension and hostility during the period leading up to the Holocaust as well and to the changing structures of family lives. Some of the findings offer significant examples of the experience of unsuccessful pregnancies due to the growing tensions of Nazism in Poland in the 1930s. One account is about a neighbor who was pregnant, while another survivor talks about her own story. Chronologically, the first incident happened before ghettoization, but when German soldiers were already strolling in the streets of Kazimierz (a district of Kraków) in Poland. One day,

47 The most outstanding examples include that of Kielce in Poland (see Gross, *Fear*), but there were several cases of atrocities all over Europe. For pogroms in Hungary, see Barna et al., *Társadalmi és etnikai konfliktusok a 19–20. században;* Apor, "The Lost Deportations."

48 See Králová, "The 'Holocausts' in Greece."

49 Maria W., interview 55436, segments 102–105.

soldiers entered a store-holders' property and were greeted and served by the store-holder's daughter, who had recently gotten married and was pregnant with their first child. For unknown reasons to the narrator, the pregnant daughter was kicked in the stomach by one of the Nazi soldiers, causing her to miscarry. After having lost her child, the mother also passed away. The acquaintance of the storyteller remembered this regrettable event specifically because the funeral which was held for both mother and child was the first funeral she had ever attended.[50]

Similarly, when more drastic measures of persecuting Jews were implemented in Poland, a woman named Fay lost her father to "some gangsters" in their town, and later her mother also died during the German invasion. Fay remembers the Germans entering Grodzisko Dolne, the small village in which they lived, with their huge motorbikes and cars. According to her account, the fear she experienced caused her to miscarry. "I was so scared," she said, "I lost a baby."[51] Although Fey was not directly attacked by any of the Nazi invaders, the fear of the unknown preceded the actual events of aggressive persecution, and it may have been this fear (as she herself seems to have thought) that caused the death of her unborn child. This is the only information she provides in her testimony in 1988, without further comment. She does not talk about the emotional aspects of this experience or of her grief. Her articulate but hardly detailed account offers an example of one way in which a Jewish woman felt it acceptable or appropriate to speak about the loss of a pregnancy.

Of the fifteen testimonies, two tell vividly detailed stories of miscarriages which took place while the mothers were still in the camps. Marika, a Hungarian Jewish woman held in Ravensbrück, formed a close relationship with a woman named Elvira in the camp, and Elvira eventually told her story. [52] Marika had become pregnant in the previous concentration camp she had been taken to in Frankfurt am Main (Elvira hints that Marika may have been a victim of rape). Marika did not tell anyone anything of her pregnancy, but she started to become very sick, and eventually, she could not eat or stand anymore. Those in the same barrack with her realized that she was pregnant when the older women interpreted these signs as clear indications of pregnancy. The miscarriage happened when she was lying on the top bunk. Elvira and the other women saw blood flowing down onto the floor from the top bunk, so they took her down ("And we had

50 Ethel K., interview 54163, segment 12.

51 Fay W., interview 54432, segment 12.

52 Elvira N., interview 10705, segment 20.

to drag her down from the top"). They wrapped her in a blanket and took her to an isolated part of the camp where corpses were lying and they left her there, crying out in pain. According to her account, Elvira went back to where Marika lay several times, possibly tormented by the (a)moral decision they had made, against the other girls' warnings not to return. Eventually, she left her there. Elvira said several times that there was nothing they could have done for her, but she also showed doubt as to whether the decision to abandon Marika, who was presumably in the midst of losing her baby, was the best choice.

The act of giving an account of this event, whether as an intentional compensatory act or not, seems to have been critically important for Elvira throughout her testimony. And her account is, indeed, an important part of Holocaust history, as it demonstrates the extent of secrecy that pregnancy called for in camps and how a pregnant woman would attempt to tackle such a situation in order to escape immediate murder at the cost of (unanticipated) pain (not to mention offering an example of one of the reactions of those in her immediate surroundings). Marika's attempt to keep her pregnancy a secret as long as she could tragically suggests that similar events (pregnancies and miscarriages) during camp life remain not only untold but unexplored.[53] Although I find the tendency towards reticence on this subject common among the different survivor groups for the abovementioned reasons, the secondary literature on the world of the concentration camps is again outstanding in this respect, i.e. in its failure to explore this subject, much as it has largely failed to explore the subject of rape as a sexual and not just violent act.[54] It is crucially important, therefore, that Elvira told Marika's story, as it now offers textual evidence of Marika's tragedy (and thus makes her part of Holocaust memory), even if by telling it, Elvira risked moral judgement.

Another miscarriage that we know of happened in Auschwitz, where initial secrecy was just as much a factor, but here the mother's life was saved by some medical attention. The story of the woman involved, Eszter, perfectly illustrates the lack of adequate medical treatment and hygiene. She managed to keep her pregnancy a secret until giving birth to her son on December 5, 1944, when she was taken for medical care to one of the healthcare facilities in Auschwitz. After the birth, her placenta did not come out, and a Polish woman attending to her (not a Jewish woman, yet it is not quite clear who the personnel were from the

53 For instance, obstetrician Gisella Perl's case shows that intended abortions also happened in camps and were told, see: Goldenberg, "From a World Beyond: Women in the Holocaust," 672.

54 See Sinnreich, "'And it was something we didn't talk about'"; Mühlhauser, "The Historicity of Denial."

testimony) did not call the doctor for medical attention and help. Though she was bleeding continuously, the doctor arrived only two hours later and pulled the placenta out, when the bleeding finally stopped. Eszter recalls that the people treating her did not wash their hands, though she did not come down with an infection. The people who knew about her childbirth did not put her back in the barracks, because then she would have been sent to the gas chambers, so they gave her a job in the hospital.[55]

Although the medical staff saved Eszter's life by keeping her pregnancy a secret, the mistreatment she had to undergo put the health of her reproductive system and indeed her very life at risk. Most definitely such events in the camps had an impact on the women's future ability to bear children, but if one accepts the definition of health (including reproductive health) found in the preamble to the constitution of the World Health Organization, according to which health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity,"[56] the health of women who did not have miscarriages during the historically defined timeline of the Holocaust were also affected, not necessarily at a specific moment of the Shoah, but throughout it.

## *Conclusion*

Overall, I find that though we have only a small number of sources which touch on miscarriages suffered by victims and survivors before, during, or after the Shoah, it is important to examine them closely in order to gain some insights into the personal stories which demographic statistics alone do not offer. After having reviewed the sociological findings with the inclusion of survivor testimonies, I found that sociological analyses do not suffice in achieving far-reaching conclusions. The damaged state of women's reproductive systems could easily constitute as a significant reason for the lower rate of childbirths in Hungary in the period of 1945 to 1949.

This conclusion suggests that in order to add nuance to our understandings of societies which were strongly influenced by the Holocaust, we should expand the scope of our inquiry to include groups and forms of trauma which have been largely overlooked. This is not an easy task. The difficulty is caused by the intimate nature of women's experiences and the fact that their experiences were

55 Eszter K., interview 52181, segments 9–10.

56 "Reproductive health."

not given voice or were actively silenced for so long. Therefore, unsurprisingly, sexuality, sexual vulnerability, or miscarriages specifically and the sufferings they caused were not easily brought up, nor were questions specifically concerning miscarriages asked by the interviewers. My findings, however, could be grounds or directives for further research on the allocation of resources for the study of testimonies and ego-documents as well, which could complement sociological findings and offer a wider perspective and more intimate knowledge of the continued traumas of the early postwar era. Such a wider scope of investigation could even result in a historiographical rebalance which would put more trust (back) into memoirs as primary historical sources, a concern which has been resurfacing in the works of other historians as well.[57] Without meaning to overstate the potential implications, it is perhaps unsurprising that by including women's voices through a feminist approach to a structural rethinking of history, one may draw more attention to and encourage more interest in survivor narratives.

Finally, after we have discussed these experiences and allowed gender analysis to inform "the memory of violence and the destinies and decisions made by those targeted for annihilation."[58] it would be important to analyze modes of expression. Further research could explore how the narratives were formed, what this entails, and how potential results could add to the conventional narratives of the Holocaust and of other genocides. Women's narratives shed light on experiences which have been left untold, and they offer new perspectives even when describing the same events. A significant example could be emotion as a determinative factor[59] due to the unique connection between gender and memory.[60] This would represent just one of the additions further research could offer towards the general aim "to give women the voice long denied them and to offer a perspective long denied us."[61]

57 Laczó, *Confronting Devastation*, xviii.

58 Bemporad and Warren, *Women and Genocide*, 9.

59 Ibid., 1.

60 Kaplan, "Gender: A Crucial Tool in Holocaust Research," 105; see further: Leydesdorff et al., *Gender and Memory*; Horowitz, *Gender, Genocide, and Jewish Memory.*

61 Kaplan, "Gender: A Crucial Tool in Holocaust Research," 106.

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# Place Attachment in a Concentration Camp: Bergen-Belsen

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In this paper, I examine ego-documents created by two Hungarian deportees regarding the Bergen-Belsen concertation camp: Margit Holländer's diary and Magda Székely's letters to her father, Károly Székely. Holländer's diary sheds light on two periods of Bergen-Belsen. The letters offer insights into experiences in two different parts of the camp at the same time. These sources include details about the everyday lives, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of the inmates in the most extreme space of persecution. I argue that, with its focus on the attachment to place, by which I mean the emotional bond between person and place (an important concept in environmental psychology), Holländer's diary reveals how she reflected on the different spaces in the camp and how her emotions regarding the physical and natural environment shifted depending on the situations of camp life. Magda Székely's letters to her father reveal how the different sectors of the camp influenced the emotional bonds between father and daughter. I also argue that the attachments that these individuals seem to show to some of the sectors of the camp suggest that there were emotionally "positive places" in an otherwise negative environment. The illegal world of the camp, the secret act of letter writing, meetings in the "positive places," and the exchange of goods on the black market are all indications of the very limited freedom of space usage, which continued after the liberation of the camp.

Keywords: Hungarian Holocaust, Nazi concentration camp, Bergen-Belsen, ego-documents, place attachment, emotional history

Margit Holländer had a pleasant surprise at the third stop of her "lager journey"[1] in the Salzwedel concentration camp (after Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen). She wrote about this experience in her diary: "[...] I was taken along with many others to block no. 2. I could not believe my eyes. This cannot be true. A real desk, chairs, wooden bunk beds covered with blankets. Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen! Heaven after hell. I tried the chairs right away. It was so good to sit on them after four months, considering that I have not even seen any chairs so far, only

1 I borrow this phrase from the title of her published diary: Holländer, *Lágerutazás*.

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from afar, in the rooms of the barracks leader. Everything seemed more humane here."[2]

The furnishings in the barracks of the concentration camps were minimal. The interiors were dark and had little more than three-story bunks. Holländer, who was drifting among places completely unsuitable for housing humans for months, felt as if she has regained some of her humanity at the sight of a desk and a few chairs. The diary entry cited above highlights the role of furniture as a sign of stability and the impact of the material environment and spaces on an individual's emotional wellbeing.[3]

In this paper, I examine ego-documents created by two Hungarian deportees who were writing on the Bergen-Belsen concertation camp: Margit Holländer's diary and Magda Székely's letters to her father, Károly Székely. These texts further an understanding of the inner world of the camp society that be more subtle and nuanced than the understanding we glean from other sources. First, the diary and the letters touch on life in different sectors inside the camp at different periods of the war. Second, they include many details about the inmates' everyday lives, perceptions, and feelings in and about the most extreme space of persecution.

In the Holocaust historiography, there are several volumes about ghettos,[4] camps, train journeys, and death marches[5] that approach the subject from the perspective of space and experiences of space. The works dealing with the concentration camps focus on the structure and development of the camp system from the perspective of operators, organizers, and architectures.[6] In comparison, relatively few studies focus on the social dimensions of the inmates' daily lives.[7] However, the strategies used by the inmates were also influenced by the physical features of the camp. I argue that space-related experiences were key elements of everyday life in the camp, and perceptions, understandings, and uses of space were essential to survival in the camp.

By analyzing the deportees' texts from the perspective of attachment to place, which is a primary concept in environmental psychology, we can see how complex

2 Holländer, *Lágerutazás*, 180.

3 Csíkszentmihályi and Roschberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 59–60.

4 Cole, *Holocaust City*; Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust.*

5 Baltman, *The Death Marches;* Gigliotti, *Train Journey;* Gigliotti et al., "From the Camp to the Road."

6 Some examples: Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps;* Megargee, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*; Dwork and van Pelt, *Auschwitz;* Jaskot et al., "Visualizing the Archive Building"; Kelly Knowles et al., "Mapping the SS Concentration Camps."

7 Pingel, "Social Life in an Unsocial Environment," 71.

this use of space and, in connection with this, the organization of everyday life was. Place attachment is considered "the bonding of people to places."[8] We find signs of these attachments in the notes and drawings, which suggest that the prisoners reflected on their built and natural environments. The inner world and the closed society of Bergen-Belsen and the similar concentration camps and forced labor camps were shaped by the diversified systems of relations among individuals and groups. The prisoners, however, did not connect to other people only. Inevitably, they formed attachments to the places themselves, including the built and natural environment, the objects, sounds, noises, and even the weather. The physical environment created a certain emotional environment around the individual. What kind of bonds evolved between the spaces of the camp and the prisoner's emotions? How did the physical features and the symbolic meanings of the environment influence their way of thinking?

The personal stories which unfold in the ego-documents I examine in this article suggest that the prisoners should be viewed not simply as victims of SS terror, but also as actors.[9] According to this broad assumption, the spaces of the camp could be characterized not simply as tools of repression in the hands of the SS, but also as spaces within which the prisoners had some (admittedly limited) opportunities to adapt. From this perspective, one can raise the question, how did the deportees use the spaces of the camp for their benefit? Were they free to use the spaces in various, even if limited ways? I search for answers to these questions in my discussion of Holländer's diary and Magda Székely's letters, but before presenting their stories, I offer a brief overview of the place where they were forced to spend some months in 1944–45.

## *The Camp*

The implementation of the so-called Final Solution, i.e. the attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe, can be examined as a spatial process.[10] The persons concerned were deprived of their homes and new places were established for them, including ghettos, collection points, and labor, concentration, and extermination camps. The world of the camps was a completely new spatial

8 The theories and findings of environmental psychology can be used in Holocaust studies. Scannell and Gifford, "Defining place attachment."

9 Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 22; Prenninger, "The Camp Society," 39–40.

10 Some examples for edited volumes of the geographical approaches: Kelly-Knowles et al., *Geographies of the Holocaust*; Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes;* Giaccaria and Minca, *Hitler's Geographies.*

experience for those who ended up there, something they had never seen before.[11]

Bergen-Belsen was one of the largest Nazi concentration camps.[12] This camp has a very complicated history and a special place in the web of Nazi camps because of its unusual mission. Bergen-Belsen functioned as a "residence camp" *(Aufenthaltslager)* from 1943, and this fact had a great impact on the history of the Hungarian Holocaust, too.

Having acquired Adolf Hitler's consent, in the spring of 1943 Heinrich Himmler ordered the establishment of a collection camp for Jews who might be used in prisoner exchanges or permitted to travel to neutral territory in return for money. He made clear that the conditions in this camp should be such that the Jewish prisoners "are healthy and remain alive." These "exchange Jews" were placed in the special sector of Bergen-Belsen, the *Sonderlager*.[13]

The passengers on the so-called "Kasztner train" from Budapest were housed in the Hungarian camp *(Ungarnlager)* inside the *Sonderlager* in the summer of 1944. They left the camp and arrived in Switzerland in August and in December 1944. Then a next transport came from Budapest with 2,001 people. Forced laborers were added to this group, Károly Székely among them, on December 14. The passengers in total 5821[14] on these trains were placed in the Hungarian camp, where the conditions were better than in the other camps. Families were kept together, they weren't taken to do forced labor, and they were permitted to keep their luggage.[15]

In the summer of 1944, Bergen-Belsen went through a huge transformation. It went from a site for the "exchange of prisoners" to a reception camp for inmates from other camps, mainly sick forced laborers.[16] Several transports brought inmates from Auschwitz (for example Margit Holländer) and other concentration camps. Thousands of Hungarian prisoners were placed in the barracks in the camp for normal prisoners (i.e. prisoners who were not treated

11 Cole, *Holocaust City,* 19–20.

12 See its summary in Shephard, *After Daybreak,* 18–26.

13 The *Sonderlager* had several separate parts where Polish, Dutch, Greece deportees and citizens from neutral countries were held. Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*, 345–50.

14 We have name lists about the inmates of the *Ungarnlager* but we do not know the exact number of inmates of the other camp sectors. The Gedenkstätte cumulative name database includes 15,423 people were deported from Hungary to Bergen-Belsen (on September 14, 2020). I thank Bernd Horstmann (Bergen-Belsen Memorial) for the data.

15 Kádár and Vági, *Self-financing Genocide,* 209–19.

16 Lattek, "Bergen-Belsen. From 'Privileged' Camp to Death Camp."

differently by the camp authorities). The overwhelming majority was placed in the women's camp *(Frauenlager)* and a smaller number was put in the men's prison camp *(Häftingslager)*.

As a result of the evacuation of the other camps because of the Soviet advancements, the population of the Bergen-Belsen grew from 15,000 to 44,000 by March 1945. In March, 18,000 people died of famine, hypothermia, sickness, and a typhus outbreak which had begun in February. According to the estimates, the death rates were highest in the women's camp, where Magda Székely became one of the victims of the epidemic. By the last months, the camp where the prisoners who were being held for potential exchange and therefore were being given somewhat better treatment also became a site of mass death. The Hungarian camp was evacuated only a few days before the arrival of the British-Canadian Army, and the prisoners were liberated in Theresienstadt, Hillersleben (where Károly Székely was being held), and Tröbitz.

The Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was liberated on April 15, 1945, by the 8th Armored Division of the British Army. They were greeted by the sight of 53,000 emaciated prisoners and more than 10,000 corpses. Those who were liberated in Bergen were waiting for repatriation in the displaced persons (DP) camp established in the military camp. Holländer was one of them.[17]

The differences in the perspectives from which the personal stories are told are explained in part by the different statuses of the deported groups ("exchange Jews" and the ordinary prisoners). Margit Holländer was brought from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen in August 1944. She was transferred to Salzwedel to work in a factory in early October, where she was liberated in April 1945. Three months later, she was brought back to the DP camp which had been established in Bergen-Belsen in the meantime, from where she returned home in October. Károly Székely and Magda left Budapest in December 1944, but they did not arrive at Bergen-Belsen at the same time, and they were held in two different sectors of the camp, Károly in the Hungarian camp and Magda in the women's camp. The letters they exchanged were written between December 1944 and March 1945, when Károly was evacuated and Magda died.

17 The Wehrmacht/SS military stone barracks were a mile away from the barracks of the lager. The latter were destroyed in April and May of 1945 under the leadership of the British army. Schulze, "Forgetting and Remembering," 217–19.

## *Diary and Letters*

The story of Bergen-Belsen is mainly known from the narratives of its liberation.[18] The secondary literature and the testimonies of the British-Canadian Army and the members of the medical teams offer impressions of the period (April 1945) when the history of Bergen-Belsen as a concentration camp came to an end, albeit the history of the site and the life stories of the inmates had not come to an end. The accounts of the people who suffered deportation, however, are conspicuously absent from the international (mostly English language) publications.[19] This is particularly true in the case of the Hungarian Jews and political prisoners.[20]

Margit Holländer's diary[21] includes five handwritten notebooks 10.5 x 15 cm. In addition to the manuscript, which comes to 97 pages, there is a typewritten transcription which was made in 1962 and which contains supplements.[22] Holländer did not start her diary in Bergen-Belsen, but in Salzwedel in April 1945, and she continued writing entries in the DP camp in Bergen-Belsen. Thus, her notes about the time before the liberation are technically not referred to as a diary but rather as a recollection. Some diaries survived from the Hungarian camp, where the conditions were much better from the perspective of an inmate's ability to keep a written record of the events, as I mentioned above.[23] In comparison, similar sources from the prisoners' camps (i.e. sources that were written at the time and not decades later) are very rare. As far as I know, only two

18 For instance, Shephard, *After Daybreak*; Celinscak, *Distance from the Belsen Heap*; Bardgett and Cesarani, *Belsen 1945*; Reilly, *Belsen*. Testimonies: Flanagan and Bloxham, *Remembering Belsen*; Berney and Wood, *Liberating Belsen Concentration Camp*; Hargrave, *Bergen-Belsen 1945*; Hardman and Goodman, *The Survivors*.

19 Some example of translations of testimonies by authors from other European countries: Laqueur, *Diary of Bergen-Belsen*; Reichental and Pierce, *I was a Boy in Belsen*; Herzberg, *Between Two Streams*; Lévy-Hass, *Diary of Bergen Belsen*.

20 Only a few Hungarians' testimonies have been published in English, for example three memoirs: Perl, *I was a doctor in Auschwitz;* Lantos, *Parallel Lines*; Stadler, *Mosaics of a Nightmare;* and a collection of drawings*:* Abadi, *Elmondom… my story…1942–1945*.

21 The original diary is in the possession of the author's daughter, a copy can be found in the Holocaust Memorial Center, and it was published in 2017 by Jaffa Publishing Company. Holländer, *Lágerutazás*.

22 The publication released includes the diary, but it is distinctly separated from this text, and also where we considered it reasonable, we inserted supplementary parts from the typewritten transcription. When we quoted from the latter in the text, we indicated this with italics in all cases. This is true for parts quoted here too.

23 In the different collections and at private owners, I found six diaries, those were written by authors from the Hungarian camp.

texts were written by Hungarian deportees in the prisoners' camp and based on original diary notes, or at least only two survived.[24]

This mixed genre, which includes reminiscence and contemporary notes, is very typical among the personal sources. The survivors got their hands on paper and pencils after or around the liberation and started to record their time in the ghetto and the camp. At one point, the memoir turns into a diary because the story catches to the moment of writing.

Holländer wrote her notes at a time when she was quite close to the events of summer and autumn 1944. Moreover, the inmates in the Hungarian camp, including the authors of the diaries, were mainly intellectuals and members of higher social strata. Holländer came from a poor peasant family. Before she was deported, she had been working as a factory laborer and, later, a maid. Thus, she had a different background and point of view compared to the perspective of the diary writers from the Hungarian camp.

Her diary is also interesting because it includes 39 drawings, floor plans, and maps of the camps. She made drawings of places which were significant for her for some reason, inducing both positive and negative associations: the Auschwitz bathhouse, the Salzwedel barracks, the environment of the DP Camp, and the route of the funeral procession after the liberation. These drawings could not be called maps. They are neither accurate enough nor precise enough from the perspective of scale to enable someone to identify the locations, so the term befitting them is a "mental layout plan."

Magda Székely's letters are also a rare surviving source. While there are numerous indications of communication and letter writing inside the camp in testimonies, the letters themselves were not saved. So far, I have found only one other example of a letter that was sent by a Hungarian prisoner inside the camp.[25] In comparison, the Székely bequest includes 14 letters.[26] The messages, which were written on shapeless pieces of paper and sent between the two barracks between December 1944 and March 1945, put the authors at serious risk since they would have been killed had the letters been discovered. Magda Székely died, so only the letters her father wrote have survived, as they were saved by him.

24 The diary of Sándor Zinner, Holocaust Memorial Center, 2011.169.1-4; The diary of Gabriella Trebits, Bergen-Belsen Memorial, BO 4173 1.

25 Magda Reichfeld's letter, Bergen-Belsen, Autumn 1944. Memorial Museum of Hungarian Speaking Jewry (Safed) C.2208. (I read a copy of the letter in the Archive of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, BA 1012.) A Dutch example of letter writing in the camp: Polak and Soep, *Steal a pencil for me*.

26 Károly Székely's bequest ended up in the collections of the Holocaust Memorial Center in April 2013 thanks to Zsuzsanna Székely through donation, published in 2014: Huhák and Szécsényi, *Táborok tükrében*.

The letters are, in part, about the women's camp and, in particular, about how it was connected to the Hungarian camp. None of the prisoners knew both camps from the perspective of the prisoner, but these letters refer in a certain way both of them.

The diary and the letters represent the history of the camp from unique perspectives. Furthermore, the texts are related to the different sectors of the camp and cover different periods, so they further a more subtle understanding of the complicated history of the camp.

## *The Story of Margit Holländer*

"March 6, 1942, is a day that I will never forget. It was the day I came to Újpest, not even thinking about how far I will go from my home village." The first entry in the diary reports a change of location. At the time, Újpest, a working-class neighborhood close to Budapest (since 1950 part of Budapest), was still a faraway land for a girl growing up in a little village Doboz in southeastern Hungary. Three years later, in October 1945, during her homecoming journey of 1,000 kilometers from Bergen-Belsen, Holländer presumably thought differently about distances.

The 18-year-old Holländer was deported from the ghetto in Újpest in June 1944.[27] She was taken to three different concentration or extermination camps, though this meant being held in a total of five different camps, as the functions of the individual sites changed: Auschwitz (camp B III), Bergen-Belsen (the women's camp), the Salzwedel forced labor camp, the transit camp for people who had been liberated in the same location, and, finally, the Bergen-Belsen DP Camp.

The journey is an important part of the Holocaust narrative. It is related to the loss of home, and the physical circumstances of traveling. This is true of Holländer's diary. From a practical perspective, the conditions of the terrain over which the prisoners were forced to move on foot between or inside the camps were not irrelevant. When Holländer was punished, she had to kneel on the ground of *Lagerstrasse*, which was covered with sharp stones, but it was not easy to walk on the ground either, as the small stones injured her feet.[28]

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27 On the ghettos in rural parts of Hungary (meaning outside of Budapest): Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust*; Fritz and Novak-Rainer, "Inside the Ghetto."

28 Definitions of sense of place have a three-component view which weaves together the physical environment, human behaviors, and social and/or psychological processes. However, the role of the physical environment is often neglected. Stedman, "Is it really just a social construction?"

Open spaces such as *Lagerstrasse* and the *Appellplatz* easily became sites of dangers compared to the shelter of the dark and crowded barracks.[29] Prisoners were often beaten, and the guards would hit them with sticks when they did not walk fast enough or if the guards felt that they were in the way. As Holländer notes in one of her entries, they struck her during one of the marches. Her feet were size 37 (US 6.5), but she was given a pair of men's boots that were so big that she was unable to walk in them at a normal pace.[30]

The road is mentioned in different entries. Holländer was at the same sites first as a prisoner, later as a free woman in the DP Camp, and then as a mourner commemorating her dead companions. Her account suggests that, as she revived memories of people walking down *Lagerstrasse* in September 1945, the different experiential layers of the timelines and the journey piled one on top of the other:

> A little girl came half an hour later, saying that there will be a headstone unveiling in the death camp. Boriska and I went there. On the same road on which we had been walking exactly a year ago on this day. We met three Jewish boys on the way. One of them told us that he had been brought here a few days before the liberation, the whole road was full of trees and electric lines. The over-exhausted people had to get through these obstacles. If any of them dropped to the ground, they were taken into the woods. They heard a shot and it was over.[31]

Holländer's entries and drawings also describe or depict the buildings in the camp. One of the drawings is of the Auschwitz bathhouse, the Brezinska.[32] The notes describe the devices in the rooms (clothes racks, partition grilles, windows, furnaces), their functions, i.e. what was happening in the given space ("the depilated body parts were anointed with some acrid fluid"; "we had to put on the clothes while walking in front of the men"; "they painted an X on our backs with yellow oil paint"), and where the men were standing compared to the girls who were going along the route marked by arrows.

The women, who had not had a bath for two weeks at the time, saw the clothes racks in the first room as accessories of the civilized and cultured process

29 Many places in the camp were dangerous for the inmates because they were not aware of the design and the geographical features, and the SS used this knowledge against them. Jaskot et al., "Visualizing the Archive Building," 185.

30 Holländer, *Lágerutazás*, 61.

31 Ibid., 116.

32 Ibid., Figure annex no. 6.

of undressing. However, the huge windows in the hallway did give them any light. Rather, they let in the cold and the wind. The most significant aspect of this space, however, was the clothes and the process itself of being forced to undress, having one's clothes taken from one, and being given prison clothes.[33] The depiction of the hallway leading from the undressing room is long in the drawings. It may indeed have been long, but the distance between the two rooms on Holländer's mental map may have been increased by the feeling of humiliation caused by the fact that she was forced to march naked in front of men.[34] Thus the clothes and the site itself (the disinfection building) were associated with the ritual and the emotional process and impact of becoming a prisoner.

Holländer's feelings regarding the Bergen pine forest are more complex.[35] Emotional attachment to place is a complex phenomenon. Holländer's diary entries offer accounts of three different experiences regarding the trees which are related to three different times and different states of mind. Upon arrival, the sight of the pine forest created a bad feeling inside her due to a fear of the unknown:

> We are walking down the road in rows of five with armed SS soldiers with dogs on either side. There are woods are either side, and it's getting darker and darker. The leaves on the trees are moving, and you can see strange mounds and holes among the trees. Everyone is overwhelmed with bad presentiments, such a fearful sight this forest was. I started seeing graves in my mind. I was getting really scared. This is death, I thought to myself. They will execute us right here.[36]

Somewhat later, when she considered her situation more tolerable (compared to Auschwitz), the pine trees intensified Holländer's desire for freedom while she was in a state of apathy. After she had survived the first encounter with the forest, nature no longer seemed to symbolize death to her, but rather came to embody freedom which was the opposite of the built environment of the camp:

33 Belk, "Attachment to Possessions," 51–54. The psychological importance of one's own clothes was proved when the inmates were brought to select dresses for themselves in the clothing store after the liberation. As the women received clothes, their social personalities would return. Shephard, *After Daybreak*, 99.

34 "My Goodness, how awful it was walking naked in front of the men, they were watching us like we were stave woods. As we were proceeding slowly, we arrived at a long, narrow hallway. Some part of it was separated with a metal grid. I saw some kind of furnace there, and men in striped clothes, who were busy working on some garments." Holländer, *Lágerutazás*, 36.

35 She even glued a tiny leafy branch from the forest into one of her booklets as a memory.

36 Holländer, *Lágerutazás*, 57.

> We were heading back to the lager. The road goes through the forest, our grievous procession was marching while we were surrounded by armed men. There was a nice smell of pines among the trees standing in line along the road. I was overwhelmed by the desire if only I could walk alone freely once again![37]

Entries written after the liberation of the camp contain descriptions of the forest which present it as a picturesque landscape. No longer the backdrop for scenes dominated by the fear of or a symbol of freedom, the pine forest finally turned into what it would have been without the lager: it appeared as a pleasant natural environment at the edge of a populated area.

> I love wandering around together with Manci. There are so many beautiful landscapes and nice forest trails in the camp. It is vast. The camp is like a city at the edge of the forest. Especially in the evening, when the lights are lit along the fine asphalted roads.[38]

The drawings in her diary show the areas of the camp with which she was familiar at the given time. After liberation, when she was given the freedom to move around at will, the horizon grew. The windows became one of the central places of daily life in the DP camp because they opened onto the noises of the "street" and offered views of the neighboring barracks and social life outside. The diary entries written at this time suggest that it was a period filled with relatively positive emotions. The former prisoners were able to socialize with one another freely. The young women and girls joked while sitting on the window sills, and Italian and Russian prisoners of war and British and Hungarian soldiers came over to chat with them and court them: "We were under a real Italian invasion."[39] Although the diary suggests that the women and girls sometimes enjoyed the attention that they were paid by the men, some entries also suggest that they did not want to let everybody get close to them and that the autonomy over the spaces even entailed shutting out certain groups:

> We have a habitual place where we go near the stables, that's where Manci and I usually go. We sit there for hours. One day, there was a German nurse and a German Red Cross soldier at the place, so we

37 Ibid., 59.
38 Ibid., 89.
39 Ibid., 91.

> wrote a note and nailed it to the tree with the following text: Ferbotn Dautcsh Fherflhuhte. Kaput Hitler.[40]

Holländer indicated the location of the episode in one of her drawings, and she did a drawing of the sign.[41]

However, these descriptions of vivacious social life touched only on the surface of life in the DP camp. In addition to the challenges of physical recovery, almost all of the inmates were grappling with mental and psychological traumas.[42] The physical and mental burdens which were endured by members of the Jewish families who were deported had begun, in many cases, before the deportations. The story of Károly and Magda Székely takes us back to Budapest in 1944, to the events which resulted in the letters written by Magda several months later in Bergen-Belsen.

## *The Székely-family*

Károly Székely (1898–1965) grew up in a lower-middle-class Jewish family in Budapest. He earned a living as a chemist-perfumer. He lived together with his wife Katalin Stern, their daughter Zsuzsanna (born in 1943), and Magda, who had been born in 1921 from his first marriage. Rózsi Günsz, Zsuzsanna's nanny, was also part of the smaller family. They lived in Király Street, in the seventh district of Budapest, which was known as the traditional "Jewish quarter" of the city.

The first shock to their family life was the conscription of the head of the family into the labor service in 1942.[43] Beginning in the spring of 1944, the women in the family went through the stages of discrimination against Jews in Budapest. In the summer of 1944, Károly Székely served in a forced labor service camp in the capital, separated from his family. In June, Katalin and the others were relocated to a so-called Yellow Star building.[44] Until the Arrow Cross Party took power, however, they were not in any immediate danger of death. On a winter's day, they were all taken to the bank of the Danube, where the paths

40 The correct spelling of the text in German would be: "Verboten Deutsch Verfluchte. Kaputt Hitler." It means: Prohibited for damned Germans. Hitler is dead. Holländer, *Lágerutazás,* 102.

41 The diary of Margit Holländer, 4th booklet.

42 Shephard, *After Daybreak*, 108–12.

43 Hungarian Jewish men were conscripted into the unarmed labor service *(munkaszolgálat)* in Hungary. Csősz, "The Origins of Military Labor Service in Hungary."

44 Instead of establishing a centralized ghetto, the authorities in Hungary created so-called Yellow Star buildings for Jewish citizens in Budapest.

of women's lives parted. Katalin and Zsuzsanna were taken out of the queue by a "more humane" Arrow Cross member (or a Zionist rescuer in disguise), who released them and warned them to "get lost quickly."[45] However, until the liberation of the city by the Red Army, they had to struggle with the inhumane conditions in the Pest ghetto. Magda and Rózsi, however, were not as fortunate. They were expecting to be shot into the river with the members of the group lined up on the pavement of the riverbank. All we know for sure is that the Arrow Cross members, who were often acting on ad-hoc decisions, forced them to do work removing rubble in parts of the city that had been bombed.[46]

A new twist in their story occurred when, in December 1944, Károly, Magda, and Rózsi were deported to Bergen-Belsen, though not at precisely the same time. Károly was taken to the Hungarian camp as a member of the so-called protected forced labor unit.[47] Magda and Rozsi were put in the women's camp, so they essentially ended up in very different living conditions, but Károly and Magda found each other again.

The tools used for written communication, i.e. the paper and the pencils, came from the Hungarian camp, and that is how they ended up in the system of information exchange and news circulation within the women's camp. The messengers were probably people who brought food or other prisoners with functions which enabled them to move more freely between the different parts of the camp. Since clothes and foods were changing hands not only on the camp market[48] but occasionally between the correspondents as well, the letters can also be considered as a report on objects migration within the camp. Magda mentions socks and bread as concrete items, and she even managed somehow to get her hands on some cigarettes, which were like currency in the camp. The prisoners were given cigarettes in the Hungarian camp for a while, which were, in a way, more valuable for non-smokers, as they could more easily exchange the cigarettes for other items than people who craved tobacco. The father was a

45 Zsuzsanna Székely, interview by Heléna Huhák and András Szécsényi, April 1, 2014, Budapest, Hungary.

46 On the story of Hungarian Jews in Budapest in 1944: Cole, *Holocaust City;* Vági et al., *The Holocaust in Hungary*.

47 Protected Labor Service companies whose members were under the diplomatic protection of a foreign country in 1944–45.

48 Each concentration camp had its own underground economy. On the black markets, bread, shoes, cigarettes, pins, thread, and many other things changed hands. Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps,* 394–97.

heavy smoker, but he did without cigarettes, getting them instead to Magda and Rózsi in order to enable them to trade them for clothes and food.

The letters report on failed and successful attempts to meet and seem mostly intended to soothe Károly. Movement within the camp was adapted to the expected meetings by the fence, and thus, the spot by the fence had a central role in the daily lives of the Károly and Magda. Károly had more freedom to move around due to the internal autonomy of the Hungarian camp, and the girls were also able to move some, as they had to do forced labor in their part of the camp only occasionally. By late 1944, the camp had become so crowded that it became easier for Károly and Magda to meet, and they were less likely to get caught.

Attachment to place is not always positive. Some research emphasizes the plurality of emotional bonds to places, bonds which include negative feelings as well as positive.[49] Despite the harsh and inhumane conditions in the camps, prisoners still developed attachments to some specific sites.[50] Since the Holocaust involved the displacement and murder of individuals and the destruction of communities, one might well assume that the only emotional attachments which were formed to the spaces within the camps were attachments involving abstraction, separation, and apathy. However, in the case of Magda, optimism, the will to live, and mental integrity have also created "positive places." The meetings among Károly and Magda created a "positive place" in a negative environment. This was possible in this hostile place, where inmates were deprived of freedom and rights because place attachment behaviors are not necessarily territorial. Territoriality is based on ownership and control of space, but attachment to places is an affective, proximity-maintaining bond that can be expressed without the underlying purpose of control.[51]

The meetings by the fence had an undoubtedly enormous emotional resonance for Károly and Magda. This site came to embody the hope each must have cherished to see the other again. The quarantine meant increased restrictions on movement and thus effectively eliminated the "positive places" within the camp. Magda wrote about the quarantine on February 28:

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49 "The places where Nazi lagers were located are certainly 'places' with a strong emotive value, in particular for Jewish people. Would they say that they are 'attached' to them?" Guiliani and Feldman, "Place attachment in a developmental and cultural context," 272.

50 Some inmates accounted that they got some calmness when they sat down by the wall of the barrack and enjoyed the sunshine; others often visited those places where they met their acquaintances earlier.

51 Scannell and Gifford, "Defining place attachment," 4.

> Unfortunately, we can't leave this place at all for a while. This is a so-called quarantine barrack. I do not know why they brought us here, because t. [thank] God, we are fine. I would love to fly into your arms, but there is a gate here with a German guard, no one can leave this place, not even for work. I don't know how long it will last.[52]

The thoughts were written with few words but with much more emotional resonance. Positive exaggeration is frequent means: "Our appetite is great, we eat everything"; "The hot water was marvelous"; "The air is great"; "The sock is wonderfully warm." Besides love and her desire for her father, gratitude is the most common feeling the sentences refer to; every letter has a "thank God" phrase.[53]

Regarding liberation, Magda often refers to their hopes that her father will go and rescue them from the barrack. The vision of freedom becoming a reality was linked to a vision of Károly as a savior figure:

> We think about you a lot, about going home as soon as possible. This keeps us going. When the moment comes, please, I want you to come for us, because that is a lot safer. We are waiting for you like the Jewish people for the Messiah.[54]

Due to the specificity of the situation in Bergen-Belsen, the euphemistic exaggerations and expressions of gratitude and the appreciation in Magda's letters may not have been entirely sincere. Rather, they may have been intended to provide some comfort for her father, who Magda must have thought undoubtedly feared for his daughter's wellbeing (and life). She may also have feared that he felt helpless, and she may have sought to assuage this fear. Károly indeed may have felt a terrible sense of helplessness, given the divided world of Bergen-Belsen, which consisted of different spaces that provided fundamentally different opportunities for survival. People in the Hungarian camp were aware of the conditions in the prison camp. György Bognár, who was held in the same barrack as Székely, wrote the following: "K[ároly] Sz[ékely] is talking about his family. Everyone is crying at such times, I was crying too. My daughter, he says, we left Teleki Square together and now she is in the other camp. They are treating her worse than me, why are they treating her differently? And then he

52 Huhák and Szécsényi, *Táborok tükrében*, 93–94.

53 Ibid., 85–86.

54 Ibid., 93–94.

begins weeping and crying."[55] However, the existence of the Hungarian camp also made it possible for Károly to provide some support for Magda and Rózsi, who, as young women, could have even survived the adversities with the clothes, foods, and cigarettes (which they could use to trade for more food and clothes) that they received from Károly if the typhus outbreak hadn't claimed their lives.[56]

Magda's last letter, written March 5, seems full of desperation and fear. Though at the beginning of the letter she writes, "thank God we are fine" (perhaps in an effort to comfort her father), she then offers an account which seems dire:

> Rózsi is dying. The last minutes. Daddy, only you can help us. I don't know what will happen. There's an epidemic too. My feet are swollen, I can barely walk. We can't drink any water here, but we are always thirsty. This is terrible. I say your name at night, can't you hear it? Daddy, help me! I am waiting for you in terrible desperation. Hugs and kisses from Muki [a pet name for Magda].[57]

In spring 1945, father and daughter were separated again. Károly Székely was taken from Bergen-Belsen on the occasion of the evacuation on April 7. After the liberation, he traveled from the DP camp in Hillersleben to Bergen-Belsen in the hopes of finding Magda, but he did not know anything about her whereabouts. He found his wife, their daughter Zsuzsanna, and his mother-in-law unhurt in Budapest in June. However, regarding the fate of Magda, months of uncertainty followed for the Székely family. Finally, in 1946, they received the official announcement of her death by the International Red Cross.[58]

## *Conclusion*

According to Edward W. Soja, "thirdspace" is the combination of the physical world around us and our conceptions of and thoughts about this physical world. The third, lived space is the reality experienced by the subjective consciousness "here and now," in the given moment. These three spaces are closely connected

55 The diary of György Bognár. Holocaust Memorial Center, 2011.25.1. 88–89. Péter Lantos and other inmates of the Ungarnlager wrote about the wrong conditions is in the other camp sectors. (Further examples: Huhák, "Bergen-Belsen a deportált magyar zsidók élettörténeteiben," 243–95.)

56 The typhus epidemic was spread by lice, which were spread with the exchange of goods in the camp, mostly clothes, and also among prisoners via contact and on the camp black market.

57 Huhák and Szécsényi, *Táborok tükrében,* 95–96.

58 Székely interview.

to and mutually affect one another. Every space is physical, imagined, and lived at the same time.[59] In the personal sources, Bergen-Belsen figures as a "thirdspace." The environment meant the physical setting and the symbolic meanings of this setting in Margit Holländer's diary. We can see that the bath and the process of being compelled to strip were physically and mentally difficult for her. Later, a few basic accouterments of normal life, such as a table and chairs, made her more hopeful. Finally, in the DP Camp, the window of their flat served as a backdrop for her acquaintanceship with the young Russian and Italian prisoners of war and had a strong psychological effect on girls and boys companies.[60]

Though one may have an understanding of the camps as isolated built areas, the natural environment also figures in Holocaust stories. In testimonies, "nature functioned both materially and imaginatively during the Holocaust."[61] Men and women developed emotional attachments to the plants and weather. One recurring motif in the testimonies is referenced to nature as the last thing that the Germans did not take from the prisoners. One of Margit Holländer's drawings captures this. The drawing is of the prisoners standing on the *Appellplatz*, but it includes the sun shining down on them.[62]

Holländer also mentioned in her entries how her feelings about the natural environment changed according to the situation. In the extremity of the deportation, the forest was a source of potential danger.[63] In the normal, safe situation it was the place of relaxing and enjoyment. What happened in the built environment, between the fences, on the camp roads, on the *Appellplatz*, and in the barracks meant the reference point of her feelings about the natural environment. Emotional attachments to the spaces in the camp (sectors of the camp and the fence between them) are also a key element of the Székely-letters. These texts draw our attention to the emotion-filled points of the space. Some of the spaces were sites of trauma, but others had positive associations, such as the barbed wire fence where Károly and Magda saw each other.

The coincidence of one member of a family being incarcerated in the prisoner's camp and another in the Hungarian camp was not rare. There are hints of this in other testimonies, though with very few details. Magda Székely's

59 Soja, *Thirdspace,* 53–82.

60 We find numerous stories about this in the accounts of the liberators and members of the medical team, too. One example: Shephard, *After Daybreak,* 111.

61 About the complex connection between the Jews and the forest see: Cole, "Nature Was Helping Us."

62 Holländer, *Lágerutazás,* Figure annex no. 5.

63 Cole, "Nature Was Helping Us."

letters show how difficult this separation was for the two people who were related, mainly for a father who knew that his daughter was being held under worse conditions on the other side of the camp. The separation of the physical spaces of the camp (due to the special status of Bergen-Belsen) determined the emotional bonds between the father and the daughter.

The illegal world of the camp, the secret letter writing, meetings at the "positive places," and the exchange of goods on the black market are evidence of prisoners' capacity and room for maneuvering. However, the camp inmates' opportunity was very limited compared to the power of the SS. This depended on the circumstances and the physical environment every time. The open camp road could become a site of danger because of SS aggression, but at other times, it could be a site where prisoners had an opportunity to talk and meet. The meanings of the spaces of the camp and its surroundings changed after the liberation when for Margit Holländer the forest became a place with positive associations and she dared post an announcement banning Germans from going to their favorite spot. However, the Magda Székely's letters make clear that the use of space was still limited. Károly was not able to change his daughter's circumstances meaningfully, and while he had advantages as a prisoner who was being held in the Hungarian camp, these minimal advantages did not enable him to save his daughter.

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# Hungarian Holocaust Testimonies in Global Memory Frames: Digital Storytelling about "Change" and "Liberation"

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This article provides a comparative and intersectional analysis of East-Central European Holocaust testimonies by women survivors narrated in writing at the time of the Shoah and recorded five decades later by the USC Shoah Institute's Visual History Archive. The comparison explores both the continuities and changes particularly in the beginning and end of the persecution, which are usually associated with the terms "occupation" and "liberation." I suggest that these conceptualizations prominent in the archive collide with survivor testimonies from the region in that survivors do not interpret Hitler's rise to power and the German occupation as formative events of the persecution against the local Jewry. Further, I provide a typology of liberation narratives arguing for a multiplicity of interpretation based on survivor narratives countering the popular consensus of liberation as a carefree moment in time. Lastly, I conclude that the regional approach is particularly useful in understanding Holocaust memory in Hungary today as it is conducive to highlighting the specific relation of the global to the local.

Keywords: testimony, framing, East Central Europe, digital storytelling, intersectionality

This article explores the ways in which the global nature of the USC Shoah Institute's Visual History Archive (further: VHA) shapes Holocaust testimonies. The thematic focus is the analysis of the intersection of global and local memory frames, which becomes manifest in the sections of the testimonies pertaining to the beginnings and the end of the Holocaust. I argue that the archive is unwelcoming to the marginal or even taboo narratives in the canonized memory and conducive to memorializing standardized narratives. Several memory frames collide and merge with one another in the digital testimonies: the "Americanizing"/personalizing[1] and the "Germanizing"/denationalizing[2] Holocaust interpretations, the interpretation of "invasion/occupation" and

1 According to the "Americanizing" interpretation, the focus of the survivor testimony is personal experience, i.e. witness testimony. Wieviorka, *Era of Witness*.

2 According to the "Germanizing" interpretation, the primary responsibility for the Holocaust lies with Nazi Germany and in particular with Hitler.

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"liberation" in line with the local memory cultures, and the counter-narratives emphasizing continuities of persecution. Regarding the beginnings of the Holocaust, the testimonies analyzed in my research stress the continuities of local anti-Semitism or relativize persecution and thus contrast with the overarching interpretation offered by the VHA, which defines the beginning of the Holocaust as the single event of Hitler's rise to power. Regarding the topic of liberation, I point out that the VHA's conceptualization of liberation follows the common interpretation of liberation as a joyful moment, and this constitutes another contrast with narratives by survivors from East Central Europe.

Holocaust history has entered the "era of the witness," and digital storytelling will influence Holocaust memory in decades to come.[3] The process of the "institutionalization" of memory in the online archive involves an element of standardization, therefore it is imperative to analyze what memories are created and disseminated for future generations. The VHA is the primary global repository of Holocaust testimonies, with its 52,000 digital narratives, and its rationale has been the collection of authentic stories (with an emphasis on first-person accounts and, preferably, eye-witness testimony) for the public record (with the conceptualization of testimony as chronological sequence instead of associative process). It has been characterized as offering a "dichotomous view"[4] as an "archive of survival"[5] because of its focus on Jewish regeneration after the war, which has the overtones of a Hollywood-style happy ending.

I analyze the interaction between local and global memory frames (i.e. how women survivors with East Central European origins[6] narrate their testimonies in an "American" archive) by considering these frames not as cultural opposites but as interdependent.[7] As the nation-based interpretative framework would be anachronistic to the multiethnic communities of the region[8] at the time of the

3 Pető, *Digital Memory*, 222.

4 Wolf, *Holocaust Testimony*, 174.

5 Wieviorka, *Era of Witness*, 115.

6 Translations of the video testimony excerpts from the original languages are mine, from Hungarian: Dora S., Erzsébet G., Piroska D., Olga K., Olga L.; from Polish: Halina B., Halina M.; from Slovak: Margita S. The other testimonies analyzed in this article were recorded in English.

7 Levy and Sznaider, *Holocaust and Memory*, 10.

8 East Central Europe is a dynamic historical concept. The exact understanding of the area as a geographical space is subject to change over time, suffice it to say that it more or less encompasses the current territories of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, excluding Germany and Austria. The elusive delineation of the region relies on certain criteria, as developed by Johnson, two of which I identify that specifically speak to the period of World War II: the experience of multiethnicity and the acceptance of Western Christianity.

genocide[9] and the countries in the region are also similarly situated in terms of the legacy of the socialist memory cultures, I adopt a regional approach. In this analysis of narratives by women survivors, I analyze gender as a relevant vehicle of representation.[10] The aim of my gendered Holocaust analysis will be to "interrogate its very assumptions."[11]

In my dissertation research, I compare 25 pairs of testimonies by women survivors from East Central Europe written at the time of the Holocaust and then recorded five decades later by the VHA.[12] My sample consists of what I term exemplary and unexemplary narratives taking into account the status of the *hic et nunc* and the video narratives. In doing so, I build on Noah Shenker's categorization who identifies three types of testimonies in the VHA based on the archive's internal ratings: exemplary testimonies are the ones deemed most dramatically compelling, unexemplary testimonies are considered the least compelling, and circulating testimonies are displayed in their educational materials to highlight the foundation's mission. In my typology, the exemplary testimonies include those that became canonized both as written narratives (published and widely popularized in most cases) and as video testimonies (included in the VHA's online selection[13] and incorporated in their educational materials in most cases), whereas the unexemplary sources are the unknown written (unpublished diaries and memoirs collected as a consequence of local archival efforts[14] in most cases) and the uncirculated video testimonies (sporadically indexed and in the local languages in most cases). In this article I discuss a section of my findings which focuses on twelve video testimonial narratives in detail, half of which are exemplary and the other half of which are unexemplary. The names of the witnesses in the case of the first six are Aranka S., Gerda K., Halina B., Jane L., Olga L., and Vladka M. The names of the witnesses in the case of the second six are Erzsébet G., Halina M., Lidia V., Margita S., Piroska D., Olga K. Half of the survivors self-identify as Hungarian (Aranka S., Erzsébet G., Lidia V., Olga K., Olga L., and Piroska D.).

9 Bartov, *Eastern Europe as the Site*.

10 Hirsch and Spitzer, *Testimonial Objects*, 368.

11 Peto et al., *Women and Holocaust*, 16.

12 This article presents a fraction of the findings from my dissertation research.

13 The VHA Online collection contains more than 3,000 testimonies from survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides. The full collection can be viewed at access points all over the world.

14 This includes the Holocaust Memorial Center's collection in Budapest and the Jewish Historical Institute's (ŻIH) collection in Warsaw.

I suggest that the VHA identifies the beginnings of persecution with change and characterizes the end of the Holocaust as spontaneous joy. The beginning of the Holocaust, according to this definition, is premised on the assumption of historical discontinuity. In other words, it is assumed that the survivors would narrate the beginning of persecution as a clean turning point. In the video testimonies analyzed in my research, this can either result in productive tension or interpretative conflict between the interviewers and interviewee survivors.

## *Narratives of the "Beginnings"*

The VHA's interpretation of the beginning of the Holocaust rests on a notion of abrupt change caused by Hitler's rise to power. To quote the Foundation's Interviewer Guidelines, "[t]he interviewee is asked to speak about *his or her experiences* under *German occupation*."[15] In other words, the central question of this thematic block is how Hitler's rise to power affected the survivor's life personally. This implies three thematic foci: the assumption of change, the centrality of personal experience, and the equation of the beginning of persecution with Hitler's rise to power. According to my findings, however, these foci, as assumptions on the basis of which experiences are to be narrated, do not fit the narratives by survivors from the East Central European region for three reasons:

1) survivors narrate the persecution suffered during the Holocaust as a manifestation of the continuation or intensification of local anti-Semitism, and therefore not as a novelty or change;

2) survivors from the region do not narrate Hitler's rise to power as a decisive moment or a turning point; rather, they narrate their experiences of persecution within local contexts;

3) the VHA's focus on personal experience and more specifically on eye-witness recollection can be contrary to the survivors' interpretations of persecution, which can be narrated within a collective, relational framework.

Variations on the questions and suggestions which present the beginning of the Holocaust as a moment of change include: "[w]hen was the big change in inverted commas," (Lidia V., s.79), "[w]hen did things change," (Mania G., s.20), and "[l]et us move to the first signs that there was danger ahead" (Halina N.,

15 Interviewer Guidelines, 7. Emphases mine.

s.34).[16] In Helena M.'s video testimony, the interviewer asks about the change in attitude towards Jews in Poland. Helena is of the view that there was no such change. She replied, "the Poles have been anti-Semitic before," and she considered the political changes as a continuation of general Polish attitudes rather than as a German influence, as reflected in her contention that "it has always been happening in Poland" (s.12). In Halina M.'s video testimony, in response to the interviewer's question "[w]hen did the situation start to worsen for you," the survivor explains that "it did not worsen at all," given that she had had a very happy childhood up until the fall of 1939 (s.42). Although Helena M. and Halina M. have diametrically different messages for future generations (the former stresses the importance of tolerance and the fight against anti-Semitism, whereas the latter voices sentiments of religion-based Judeophobia when she blames the local Jewry for the Holocaust), neither of them follow the suggested narrative of historical discontinuity.

Variations on the question pertaining to Hitler's role in the persecution of Jews include the following: "[h]ow did Hitler's rise to power affect your life personally," (Vladka M., s.4), "[w]hat things did you observe as Hitler rose to power in 1933," (Gerda K., s.31), and "[h]ow was Hitler's rise to power perceived in your community" (Halina K., s.30). These questions often lead to interpretative conflicts between the interviewers and survivors, which becomes evident in Vladka M.'s testimony. The thematic block dealing with her wareness of prewar anti-Semitism leads to a series of follow-up questions as to whether the subject of the discussion is conditions "before the war," "before Hitler came to power," "before Hitler came to Poland," or, as the interviewer, insists "before Hitler became chancellor" (s.4–5). Vladka M. emphasizes that in her understanding, anti-Semitism is rooted in Polish society and the Catholic Church and was not a Nazi German specificity.

However, the interviewer, Renee F., continues to ask provocative (or leading) questions: "[H]ow do you explain that Poland was a stronghold of Jewish culture," "[b]ut Jewish culture flourished in this country which was anti-Semitic," and "[s]o when did you begin to really feel the change" (s.6). Finally, in response to the last question, Vladka M. complies with the expectation to narrate a change in the persecution of Jews which was specifically linked to Hitler's rise to power: "As soon as Hitler was settling in Germany, the stronger the anti-Semitism was felt

16 However, some interviewers did not refer to change in these segments of the testimonies. A notable example is Halina B.'s interviewer, Adelle Ch., who asks the following question instead: "[C]ould you please explain what the relations were between the Jews and the Catholics, that is the Poles?" (s.25).

and seen in Poland" (s. 6). Most of the survivor testimonies from East Central Europe analyzed in my research[17] do not depict any connection between Hitler's personal responsibility with and their the survivors' Holocaust experiences.

Variations on the question emphasizing personal experience include "[c]an you describe how external events started to impact your lives," (Olga L., s.53), "[d]id you notice that trouble was looming, any signs," (Dora S., s.12), and "[d]id you also sense that Jews were being persecuted" (Piroska D., s.94). Some responses to these questions point to the perceived continuity of local discrimination and anti-Semitism, for instance as Dora S. put it, "Jews could live but not thrive" (s.12). She narrates the intersection of gender-based and ethnicity-based discrimination in instances when "the Jewish girl could not be best student" (s.12). This meant that though she was the best student in class and even in the whole school, she was not recognized with any distinctions and instead the second-best gentile students received acclaim.

Other testimonies offer evasive responses, as the survivors refer to their gender, social status, or age as an explanation for their lack of awareness. For instance, in response to the question "[h]ow did Hitler's rise to power affect your life personally," Jane L. responds that "[i]t did not affect my life personally, in 1933 I was only 9 years old" (s. 28–29). Jane's testimonial narrative about the prewar and wartime years focuses on her involvement in a youth organization, and her personal experiences are wrapped up in a relational framework. However, the interviewer's questions, which are more tailored to the survivor's experience ("[w]hat do you remember about the day your town was occupied" and "[w]ho occupied it"), elicit the story of her personal experience of hiding in the nearby woods with her family, which is narrated as the first event pertaining to her Holocaust experience (s.31). The archive's focus on personal experience is an effort to enhance the "authenticity" of the survivor testimony, yet personal experience is not necessarily central to the accounts given by East Central European women who survived the Holocaust.

17 The only survivor in my sample who expresses a connection with Hitler's rise to power in 1933 is Gerda K., whose native tongue is German, born in Bielitz/Bielsko-Biała (s.31). This may suggest that German-speaking survivors from East Central Europe constitute a specific sub-group in terms of their Holocaust narratives.

## *Narratives of Liberation*

The questions outlined in the Interviewer Guidelines[18] pertaining to the topic of liberation focus on the day of liberation, the first day of being free, and often even more specifically on first catching sight of the liberators.[19] I suggest that the VHA conceptualizes the topic of liberation as a "rapturous moment in time" (to borrow the phrase used by Dan Stone in his characterization of Red Army films and popular films like *Life is Beautiful* and *Schindler's List*),[20] and, more specifically, as the single event defining the end of the Nazi genocide. However, survivors, and even in some cases interviewers, voice offer counter-narratives to this interpretation.[21]. I identify four frameworks of narrating for the narratives of liberation by the Red Army: sexual vulnerability, glossing over or elusion, continuation of persecution, and spontaneous joy.

### The narrative framework of sexual vulnerability

The most prevalent narrative framework in the liberation narratives by East Central European Jewish women survivors is sexual vulnerability, the threat of sexual abuse or violence, evasion, and instances of liberator violence, although when it comes to this subject there is still a lacuna in the scholarship on liberation.[22] I suggest that the narratives about sexual vulnerability are glossed over in the VHA's video testimonies, which can be attributed to the institutionalization of Holocaust memory in the online archive.[23] This means that the narratives of vulnerability appear either as matter-of-fact stories or as atypical short stories

18 https://sfi.usc.edu/content/interviewer-guidelines.

19 In these segments of the interviews, questions about feelings are often asked, which is in contrast with the approach to emotions in the archive in that such questions are not recommended by the Interviewer Guidelines in general and are consequently rarely asked.

20 Stone, *Liberation*, 2.

21 Most of the survivors whose testimonies are analyzed in my research were liberated by the Red Army. Others were liberated by the British and US Armed Forces. Some camps were liberated by both armies, in which case I took into account both the survivor's narratives and the archive's documentation practices.

22 Stone, *Liberation*, 3.

23 Contrary to the prevalent assumption that survivors start to speak about their experiences of sexual vulnerability in their video testimonies, survivors who had been outspoken in their written testimonies at the time of the genocide were unwilling to discuss the topic in their video testimonies recorded in the 1990s. According to Nutkiewicz, the VHA's leading historical consultant, it was possible to discuss sexual violence during the wartime years, however the topic eventually became traumatizing and taboo in Holocaust memory (Nutkiewicz, *Shame*).

within the narrative style of the interviewees, the majority of which are not indexed as "sexual violence."

Liberation in Lidia V.'s testimony appears in the context of sexual vulnerability. First, she quickly mentions the liberators as those whom they merely passed by. However, when she returns to the topic, her narrative style changes. She becomes hesitant, and the pace of her speech slows down as she narrates the following:

> Lidia: On the following day [i.e. after liberation], as I told you, we met the Soviet soldiers. They were behaving [pause] fortunately [pause] very nicely with us. [Pauses and tilts her head]. They gave us food [pause] and in first days helped us get accommodation. It was not always easy, we could not always get accommodation. (s. 395)
> Nina: When did you start going home?

Throughout the eight-hour long interview, the interviewer, Nina W., asks follow-up questions to the topics to which Lidia alludes, though she reverts to a question pertaining to chronology. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the VHA's interviewers were instructed to devote approximately 25 percent of the length of an individual video testimony to the years after the war, i.e. beginning with liberation.[24] Some suggest that as a consequence of this the VHA testimony is prone to become a more directed conversation, the interviewers ask increasingly polar questions (generally about marriages, children, and the rebuilding of lives).[25] The fragmentariness of the narrative can also be attributed to what Pető terms "silence as the built-in element of narration"[26] in interviews by victims of rape by Red Army soldiers. This appears in this narrative on two levels in that the story itself is interrupted by pauses and the "experience" of sexual vulnerability is glossed over.

The survivor Margita S.[27] was interviewed by Robert S., whose interviewing presence is strong. He asks a variety of questions following the archive's framing, the local context as well as his own conceptualizations.[28] Due to his probing

24 Wolf, *Holocaust Testimony*, 170.

25 You can read more about this in Wolf, *Holocaust Testimony*.

26 Pető, *Memory and Narrative*.

27 Margita's self-identification both prewar and postwar is complex. Several languages were spoken in her home, and thus she did not identify as specifically Hungarian or Slovak. She is a perfect example of the multi-ethnic self-identifications of East Central European Jewry at the time.

28 The interviewer first asks questions related to events in Germany: "[D]id your father follow what's going on in Germany?, [d]id people talk about it?, [s]o you did not follow the political situation?" The

interviewing technique, two modes of narrative about liberation (spontaneous joy and sexual vulnerability) appear in the testimony. Regarding Margita's liberation, he first asks a question following the archive's focus on first-person experience: "[D]o you remember the first time you saw an American soldier?" She replies by narrating her spontaneous joyful reaction and starts recounting her journey home. As Neustadt-Glewe was liberated by more than one allied force, Robert S. raises other questions:

> Robert: Were there differences between the liberators?
> Margita: The Russians behaved very badly.
> Robert: Did they steal from you?
> Margita: No, they raped the girls in Neustadt-Glewe, so in one of the rooms we had to put a cupboard in front of the room so that they could not enter, but then they received an order that it is not allowed [...] they were afraid to come near us.
> Robert: They were afraid?
> Margita: Yes, yes, they were not allowed to enter our barracks. (s. 50)

The interviewer's technique here is indicative of his previous knowledge or assumptions about certain characteristics of liberation by the Soviet army (i.e. his association of "bad behavior" with looting), and despite the fact that he is offering an interpretation of the events to the survivor, he is contributing to the unfolding of a narrative that otherwise might have remained untold. Margita's story is a succinct one, in which she curiously alternates between the third-person plural and the first-person plural as a manner of distancing. Her use of the third-person and the first-person plural could be described as characteristic features of narratives of evasion, as they make a given experience seem either collective, not individual.[29]

Narratives of sexual vulnerability do not harmonize with the expectations of the agents who were crafting the archive, something that becomes especially pronounced in Olga L.'s testimony, which is highlighted with the indexing term "liberator sexual assault."[30] The interviewer, Nancy F., asks generic questions

interviewer then asks questions more focused on the local political context: "[a]fter the disappearance of the Slovak state, did things change for you, for example people's attitudes" and "[d]id you personally see Masaryk" (s. 12–16).

29 Mühlhauser, *Historicity of Denial*, 36.

30 There are about 1,000 testimonies by Jewish survivors out of the 52,000 that contain indexing terms related to sexual violence, which include for instance "sexual assault" and "coerced sexual activities."

regarding liberation and freedom suggested by the Interviewer Guidelines, and in response, Olga narrates her experience of attempted sexual violence in a village near the Auschwitz camp by the Soviet liberators. The "troupe de choc" arrived in town during the night "in search of enemies" while Olga and her two friends were sleeping. One of the soldiers handcuffed and dragged Olga out to the courtyard with "evident motives." They struggled, moving back and forth between the courtyard and the room, and eventually the soldier bit off Olga's wristwatch and she fell into the cellar in the middle of some feathers and Polish locals who were hiding (s. 37). Despite the suggestiveness of Olga's narrative (or maybe precisely because of it), Nancy F. focuses on the interrelation of freedom and liberation, as if insistently committed to the generic focus of the archive:

> Nancy: When did you know that you were liberated, that you were really free?
> Olga: *Next day*, because the Russian came and occupied the village and every woman who was in the village was violated and raped that night but bear in mind that *troupe de choc* it was not the real Russian army, I don't want to defend them, but that is the fact. [...] A few days later I was called to Russian headquarters about this [pointing at her wrist]. He advised don't complain about the Russian to the Russian, so I said this was an accident, how they treated me. [...] I went back and in this house, *I had the first day of liberation.*
> Nancy: What did freedom mean to you?
> Olga: [...] that I am not in the concentration camp [...] I had food, I had bread, it was paradise. (Italics mine, s. 38)

Olga speaks of sexual violence as an inevitability of war, though she also emphasizes the role of the army hierarchy in policing (and interpreting) these instances, as does Margita. She initially resists the interviewer's attempt to frame her experience of liberation by narrating her meeting with a senior officer. Although the chronology of her story is askew, the significance of her narrative, from the perspective of this discussion, lies in her mention of sexual vulnerability as a determining experience of the "first day" of liberation. This echoes Levenkorn's assertion that "for some Jewish women, the liberation began with rape by the liberators."[31] Olga uses her account of "the first day" to some

However, there are numerous instances when sexual vulnerability is discussed in the video testimony, but no such indexing term is applied.

31 Levenkorn, *Death*, 18.

extent in a metaphorical sense to represent her first moment of freedom, which is not identified as a moment of joy.

## The narrative framework of the continuation of persecution

In these testimonies, liberation is narrated as a continuation of persecution in the widest sense of the term. Persecution continued, according to the narratives, in the form of discrimination against Jews, oppression by the liberating/invading Soviet Armed Forces, and the persecution of the nation. This narrative mode of liberation, which offers a counter-narrative to the VHA's conceptualization of liberation, is particularly characteristic of the narratives by Polish survivors.[32]

Jane L.'s liberation narrative is a very special and rare testimony by a resistance fighter who smuggled Jews from Poland via Slovakia to Hungary. Jane and other members of her group were liberated by the Soviet partisans, who flew them to Moscow, where in the end she was sentenced to four years of forced labor in Siberia as a "dangerous element." In her testimony, persecution continues even after liberation in that her Jewishness was questioned and ridiculed by the Soviet authorities who did not consider her Jewish because she did not know Yiddish (s.193–194).

In Halina M.'s[33] testimony, when the interviewer asks about "future message," she indicates that Polish anti-Semitism must be understood in the context of the isolation of Polish Jews, i.e. expressing traditional anti-Semitic sentiments and delineates two options for the Jewry: either assimilation or emigration (s.251). Furthermore, she stresses the continuity of the persecution of the Polish nation, first by the Nazi Germans and then by the invading Soviets. Thus, her narrative fits in (and strengthens) the framework of Polish national martyrology[34] (s.249–250).

In the case of Olga K.'s testimony, the interview does not always follow a strict chronological order thanks to the interviewer, Anita Cs., who follows

32 This narrative framework of liberation was not characteristic of written testimonies, as the main motivation of the survivors was to inform the world about the genocide. These themes do appear elsewhere sporadically in the written autobiographical narratives, however, in the form of factual descriptions.

33 Halina M. was first persecuted as a Warsaw Jew during the time of ghettoization and, later, as a Polish resistance fighter in a POW camp. Polish self-identification characterizes other Jewish women who participated in the Polish resistance, for instance Halina K., though it is most pronounced in Halina M.'s case. Since she is identified as a Jewish survivor by the archive and this does not contradict her self-identification, I also consider her as such.

34 Orla and Bukowska, *New Threads*, 179.

instead the survivor's associative narrative style. In some instances, however, Anita introduces topics that have not yet been raised in the interview, for example when she asks whether some women were raped in the concentration camps (s.102), to which Olga responds in the negative, though she offers the following narrative pertaining to the period of liberation:

> Olga: Violence happened when we were liberated two weeks later and we were taken to the Soviet zone 40 km away on trains […] and we were handed over to the Soviet soldiers. These things did happen there unfortunately, to young Jewish girls, to one or two of them, but there were people who saved them.
> Anita: How did you spend your way home? (s.103–104)

Unfortunately, the interviewer does not follow up on the survivor's fragmentary story in which the experience of sexual violence is merged with liberation, nor does she offer an open ended question along the lines of "what happened next?" Instead, she steers the narrative back into a chronological trajectory. As a result, not only is liberation not narrated as a specific and joyous event, it is not even discussed in detail in the testimonial narrative. Moreover, since Olga's narrative of liberation is prompted by a question about sexual violence and is contains clear references to the threat of sexual violence, it might be suggested that liberation is narrated as a continuation of persecution in terms of sexual vulnerability in her testimony. Thereby, the continuation of persecution is premised on Jewish identity, national identity, and gender identity in the three testimonies analyzed above.

## The narrative framework of glossing over

Narratives that do not offer a detailed account of liberation as an action initiated by external agents, i.e. the liberators, offer a variety of counter-narratives, starting from narratives of self-liberation, through quick allusions to liberation as part of a chronological recollection, and finally to the total omission of liberation as a specific event from the testimony. The variety of these narrative frameworks can partly be attributed to the different life trajectories and Holocaust experiences of the survivors, yet if we take the most extreme narrative type as an example, the omission of liberation, it cannot be said that there was a correlation between a lack of a historical event and its omission from the narrative. Instead, I suggest that the glossing over or outright omission of any references to liberation in

its traditional understanding can be attributed to the recurring themes (such as Jewish resistance and sexual vulnerability) and, broadly speaking, to the Archive's commitment to thematic coherency.

Lidia V. narrates the first day of freedom as a distinct and separate experience from the event of liberation. The first day of freedom for her was the day on which the camp administration fled the area. As Lidia puts it, "we were the conquerors of town" and "we didn't need any liberator" (s. 391). She further develops her conceptualization of liberation by calling it "our self-liberation" (s. 392). This concept certainly acknowledges the agency of Jewish survivors in regaining their freedom by starting to organize life anew. According to the VHA's interpretation "liberation is typically characterized by the arrival of Allied forces."[35] In Lidia's atypical narrative, the first day of liberation included "self-liberation," while the second day brought about the threat of sexual vulnerability, as discussed previously in this article.

In Vladka M.'s testimony, her involvement with Jewish organizations is the continuous thread which links the prewar, wartime, and postwar years. This is equally true of her narrative on liberation, which is part of a chronological recounting of events, an intermezzo before her involvement with the community continues. In particular, the liberation of Warsaw, her return to Warsaw, and her subsequent move to Łódź are all a matter-of-fact listing of events which culminate in her reuniting with the Jewish community and organizing the first events for survivors there (s.28–29). The interviewer, Renee F., does not raise any provocative questions in these segments of the interview, in contrast with their dialogue about the beginnings of persecution analyzed earlier in this article. Instead, she leaves space for the interviewee's thematic focus. Thus, Vladka's narrative points to the conceptualization of liberation as a process instead of a "rapturous moment in time" (to borrow Stone's phrase again). As a result, liberation as an action by the Allied Forces is omitted from the testimony.

The return to the community in Aranka S.'s testimony is even more central to the narrative in which the traditional interpretation of liberation is similarly glossed over. After being liberated from Bergen-Belsen, she joined the men reciting the mourner's Kaddish over the dead (s.34). In so doing, the survivor initiated a double border crossing: she returned to her Jewish community and crossed the gendered boundary to recite the prayer for the dead, from which women are traditionally excluded. At the same time, as Aranka was reciting the

35 https://sfi.usc.edu/content/liberation

Kaddish literally over the heap of dead bodies, she tells of the "first sympathetic caress" by an American Jewish soldier, who put his arm around her in an effort to comfort her (s.35). Aranka's narrative of liberation follows her interpretation of the events, in which the focus is on her symbolic reunion with the Jewish community and her processing of the loss of her loved ones, which is enabled by Leslie B. F.'s attentive interviewing practice.

The topic of liberation is entirely omitted from the discussion in Halina B.'s testimony, which is an out-of-the-ordinary narrative in that it was filmed on site instead of in Halina's home, first at the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and then in front of the entrance to the Auschwitz camp. The interviewer, Adelle Ch., draws attention to the extraordinary choice of location by asking Halina, "please [to] tell us why you chose this place so that there was a cross there, please tell us why that is so important now" (s.114). This question gives an opportunity for Halina to explain her message for future generations, after which she continues her short narrative about her time in Auschwitz, which comes to an abrupt end with her mention of the forced march (s.135). The interview ends with segments shot outside the camp. Any discussion of liberation is omitted from her testimony, which offers an alternative ending to the majority of testimonies recorded by the VHA.

## The narrative framework of spontaneous joy

Associations of spontaneous joy with liberation appear in the testimonial narratives in three variants: joy as a stock-feature of the narrative, joy over the return to the (political or religious) community, and the joy of romantic love.[36] Erzsébet G.'s narrative offers a perfect example of an expression of joy as a stock feature of an account of liberation. Erzsébet exclaims, "[t]hanks may be given to the liberators even after fifty years!" (s.91). This exclamation was part of her testimony written right after the war and part of what she read out loud during her video testimony.[37]

Joy over return to the community is often narrated by survivors who identified with communist ideals. However, their specific life trajectories color

36 Spontaneous joy over liberation as a narrative framework appears with the same intensity and in similar metaphors in the written testimonies from five decades earlier.

37 In this article there are two such testimonies by Margita S. And Erzsébet G. in which the survivors read excerpts from their written testimonies out loud. These testimonies which are indexed as "literary recital" in the VHA.

the narratives in that liberation as joy is narrated in a different way, for instance, by a communist Hungarian Jewish woman who was a concentration camp prisoner (Piroska D.) and by a communist Polish Jewish woman who was a partisan fighter during the Holocaust (Mania G.). In Piroska D.'s[38] narrative, May 1 appears as a repeated reference: "So well it is 1st of May, I would not have thought I would be free then" (s.221). She associates this date, when the camp administration fled, with freedom. Liberation, strictly speaking, happened on May 2. Erzsébet offers the following description of her encounter with the Soviet liberators on this day: "There were three Russian soldiers and these skeletons jumped on them and started kissing them" (s.224). Thus Piroska's narrative about liberation contains an expression of spontaneous joy, which, however, is not depicted as an apolitical feeling or as a genderless one, considering her references to International Workers' Day (May 1) and the women survivors' reaction when they caught sight of the liberators.

Only one survivor in my sample, Gerda K., offers in her narrative an expression of spontaneous joy at the sight of the liberators. Gerda claims to have met the love of her life that day She recounts that after having been told that the war was over, the next day she met two American Jewish soldiers. When one of these two soldiers held the door open for her and restored her humanity, this was "the greatest moment of my life" (s.116). Thus, Gerda's narrative is compliant with the VHA's intended focus on liberation as a joyous first meeting with the liberators and its emphasis on a happy rebuilding of life after the war.

In this article, I offered a "view from below" of the Hungarian Holocaust by examining narratives given by Jewish women survivors. I offer this discussion as a complement to the more prevalent areas of Holocaust research in Hungary, namely that of perpetrator history and the involvement or collaboration of the gentile population. Local and global memory frames meet, merge, and clash in survivor testimonies from the online digital archive that at best provides productive tension between the archival expectations and survivors' testimonial narratives, and at worst results in interpretative conflict. The VHA's volunteer interviewers were trained by the VHA in recording chronological life story interviews for historical and educational purposes, which in some cases

38 Piroska D. offers a rare combination of religious and political identification in her testimony. She considers herself a liberal Jew and a communist who was persecuted because of her political activities during the Holocaust. Indeed, she was incarcerated in Ravensbrück as a political prisoner. However, she is identified as a Jewish survivor by the VHA, and since this does not contradict her self-identification, I also consider her as such.

resulted in their perseverance in asking questions closely following the archive's interpretation of the Holocaust. In contrast, in other cases, they molded the Interviewer Guidelines to the specific survivor's narratives and their styles. The emergence of alternative memories and counter-narratives is reliant on the dialogue with the interviewer and the "impact" of this dialogue on the testimonial narrative in the ways in which they approach the archive's interpretation of the beginnings and the end of the Holocaust.

I argue that the VHA's assumption about change, a turning point in the beginning of the Holocaust, rests on a thesis of historical discontinuity, which is a long debated topic in research on the relationships between anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. The account given by most of the survivors from East Central Europe whose testimonies are analyzed in this article do not fit this interpretative framework. Instead they constitute counter-narratives of the survivors' experiences in the region. The narrative analysis of liberation may contribute to the bypassing of this interpretation inherited from the Cold War, a tradition which still affects Holocaust memory. This analysis offers alternative interpretations to the common understanding of liberation in several ways. In terms of agency, liberation can be conceptualized following survivors' understanding of self-liberation instead of an action via external agents. In terms of temporality, liberation can be approached as a process instead of a "rapturous moment in time." In terms of its emotive impact, liberation was remembered by some of the survivors as the continuation of persecution and sexual vulnerability, rather than as an event of spontaneous joy. Moreover, as the four narrative frameworks identified in this article intermingle in the testimonies, intersectionality as an analytical tool is especially useful in that the categories of Jewishness, gender, and political identification co-create Holocaust memory in the online archive.

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# Hillersleben: Spatial Experiences of a Hungarian Jew in a German DP Camp, 1945*

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The paper focuses on Hungarian Jews who had been deported from Hungary to Bergen-Belsen and ended up in a Jewish displaced persons camp (hereinafter referred DP) before the liberation near the settlement of Hillersleben in the Magdeburg district of Sachsen-Anhalt, one of the states of Germany from April to September, 1945. In the first section of this paper, I explore the historical framework of this Hungarian group based on the current historiography and some narrative sources. In the second (main) part, I offer a case study in which I analyze the spatial experiences of György Bognár, a survivor of this aforementioned group. This camp alone did not play any special role from the perspective of Hungarian survivors. On the contrary, it provides evidence of the typical experiences of Jews in Germany in 1945. Giving voice to ego-documents and mainly to Bognár's diary, I offer an account of how a 16-year old Hungarian Jew perceived and described the space in which he lived in this "half-life" between concentration camp and liberation. Primarily by using his diary entries, I attempt to offer insights into the spatial experiences of the DPs, though I also draw on other sources. I also explore the main markers of the maps he drew of the camp. I compare these sources with the notes I took during a visit to the site in 2016. My primary goal is to use spatial analyzes of the available narrative sources to further an understanding of how someone in one of the DP camps perceived his surroundings. In the last section, I reflect briefly on how the territory and the space of the former DP camp changed function after the camp was closed.

Keywords: Hungarian Holocaust, Bergen-Belsen, Hillersleben, DP camp, concentration camp, diary, deportation, evacuation, mental map

## *Introduction*

The Hungarian historiography hasn't dealt with the history of the approximately 14,000 Hungarian Jewish people who were deported to Bergen-Belsen.[1] International research, in contrast, has focused prominently on this giant camp

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1 British-Canadian troops who liberated the camp referred to it simply as Belsen. This term was then used by the media and in the historiography to refer to the camp, but for the sake of precision, I refer to

complex since the 1990s. ,[2] as well as on the systematic and multi-aspect discussion of the history of the German camps.[3] The evacuation of Belsen, which was in a state of chaos in its final days, was ordered by Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer* of the SS on April 4. Himmler wanted to put people who were still capable of working to effective use for the Nazi cause. These kinds of evacuations, which could also be described as death marches, had already been on the agenda for months when the German state was collapsing. Bergen-Belsen was also an evacuation destination: tens of thousands of people, including several thousand Hungarian Jews, had been brought (or forced to walk) to the camp from the eastern camps close to the front lines (such as Auschwitz and from Gross-Rosen) between December 1944 and early April 1945.[4] The target of the evacuation from Bergen-Belsen was Theresienstadt (today: Terezín, Czech Republic). The SS has initiated three transports on three consecutive days. The first train, later referred to as the "lost transport" in the secondary literature, departed on April 8. It had to return several times, as American bombers destroyed the tracks several times. This train finally stopped on a riverbank to the south of Berlin, on the edge of Tröbitz, and this is where the Soviet forces liberated the "passengers."[5] Another transport departed from Bergen-Belsen on April 10. Its passengers were also almost all Hungarian Jews (mostly from the Hungarian camp, a camp within Bergen-Belsen that was established in July 144, and from the labor camp parts of the larger camp). The latter reached its destination: the train, equipped with three days of food per person, reached Theresienstadt after 12 days with heavy loss of life, where the Soviet forces liberated the prisoners.

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it as Bergen-Belsen. An exception to my contention concerning the Hungarian secondary literature is the literature produced regarding the so-called Kasztner group. Porter, *Kasztner's Train* and Karsai and Molnár, *The Kasztner Report*, 17–49.

2 Concerning the reasons in detail, see: Reilly et al., *Approaching Belsen*, 12–14.

3 Rahe, *Das Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen*, 187–220.

4 For the two classic writings concerning the evacuation of Bergen-Belsen, see: Blatman, *The Death Marches* and Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno.*

5 Concerning the evacuation of the camp primarily building on survivor narratives, see: Kubetzky, *Fahrten ins Ungewisse*, 150–76.

## *Hillersleben as a Space of "Half-Freedom"*

In addition to the abovementioned two trains, there was another one which departed with more than 2,000 prisoners on April 7.[6] Its passengers were brought Hungarian camp of the the Bergen-Belsen camp, which was already overcrowded and where a typhus epidemic had broken out.[7] The train came up against an advancing American armored unit between Farsleben and Zielitz in the Magdeburg area on April 13. The Wehrmacht soldiers who had been guarding the prisoners had fled the previous night, and the prisoners were waiting for the allied units. Of the roughly 2,000–2,500 prisoners on the train, 1,528[8] had been deported to one of the concentration or extermination camps from Hungary.

History instructor Matthew A. Rozell, who has offered an account of the story of the train and the liberation of the prisoners it bore exclusively on the basis of narrative sources.[9] According to the recollections of the American armored soldiers (units 12 and 13 D of the American armored battalion 743) and of the survivors, the prisoners were euphoric when they saw the American "liberators," and this moment became a lifetime memory for all of them.[10]

The Americans accommodated the ex-prisoners in the nearby village of Farsleben for the next two or three days, i.e. April 13, 14, and 15. They moved them into the houses owned by the locals, and they commandeered food and supplies for them. For the first time in months, the roughly 2,000–2,500 survivors were given normal medical care, slept in beds. However, many of the people who recalled the events noted that, as was the case among other Holocaust survivors, the famished liberated prisoners often overate, meaning that they ate the high-caloric foods immediately and as quickly as possible, and this often led to serious medical complications and even death. Sources reveal little about the reactions of the local Germans. The Hungarian memoirs mostly

6 For accurate details and dates (in daily breakdown) of the three evacuation routes on the map, see: Bucholz, *Bergen-Belsen. Kriegsgefangenenlager 1940–1945*, 188.

7 The fact that the term "Ungarnlager" itself was unknown in the Hungarian Holocaust literature until very recently indicates the absence of historical memory. Weiczner, *"Ez most a sorsod kiüldözött zsidó,"* 267. Today, a study an overview of the Hungarian camp is available: Billib, "Infolge eines glücklichen Zufalls...," 92–108.

8 Three of them were died during the evacuation. Thank you for the informations to Bernd Horstmann (Bergen-Belsen Memorial).

9 Rozell, *Magdeburg*.

10 The photograph taken during the event is one of the best-known photographs about the tragedy of the Shoah up to this day. Rozell, *Magdeburg*, 10–15.

note their alleged insensitivity. Their reactions may have been influenced by the fact that the American forces were compelling them to provide accommodation for the liberated prisoners and that the arrival of the Allied forces also meant the inevitable slaughter of their animals and the utilization of their workforce. According to Ingeborg Moritz, a local German woman with whom historian Heléna Huhák and I did an interview (to my knowledge, this is the only source on the events from the perspective of a local resident), her family was shaken by the sight of the survivors and helped them by providing milk, food, and beds, for which the liberated inmates were very grateful.[11]

Over the course of the next few days, the Americans gathered the former prisoners together and transported them with buses and carts to a DP camp established for Jewish survivors in spring 1945 near an adjacent settlement about ten kilometers away, near Hillersleben. The camp was one of the more than one hundred DP camps for Jews, which were in operation for shorter and longer periods of time between 1945 and 1957. The military (and later the administrative) authorities in the zones of the victorious powers uses these camps as places to house liberated prisoners who had survived the holocaust. Hillersleben was one of the at least two dozen DP camps where Hungarian Holocaust survivors waited for their fates to change for the better.[12] While the civilian and POW residents of the postwar non-Jewish DP camps for the most part were forced to repatriate, in the case of the Jewish DPs, there was no consistent policy on this question. In the summer of 1945, tens of thousands of liberated Jews were gathered in such camps in zones of Germany, mostly young adult males under the control of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.[13]

One could refer to Hillersleben as a transit camp if one were to focus on the interim period before repatriation, but one could also consider it a relocation camp, as Hillersleben was where the allied forces placed individuals who had been liberated in each region (mostly from concentration camps) or gathered from the area. The term "relocation camp" indicates the temporary nature of this moment between the two longer periods. (It indicates that this was an interim period of collection and distribution between captivity and freedom,

11 Interview with Ingeborg Moritz, 2016.

12 The most significant books on Jewish DP camp history: Berkowitz and Patt, *We are Here*; Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*; Holian, *Between National Socialsm and Soviet Communism*; Königseder and Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope*; Lavsky, *New* Beginnings; Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory*; Myers Feinstein, *Holocaust Survivors in Postwar Germany, 1945–1957*.

13 Lavsky, *New Beginnings*, 31–33.

which was a phase in the larger process which was already familiar to some of the Hungarian survivors in Hillersleben.) Last but not least, one could also refer to Hillersleben as a refugee camp, as its denizens were refugees in the eyes of the military leadership and the local inhabitants. Most of the time, the survivors' narratives simply describe their temporary habitation as a camp or sanatorium, suggesting that the survivors' primary concern and, later, their strongest memory was recovery and healing.

The Hillersleben DP camp was organized by the American military in April 1945. The camp lay on the confines of the British, American, and Soviet occupation zones, and a peculiar circumstance arose when, in the spring and summer of 1945, the leadership of the camp switched twice within a short period of time. At first, the camp was under the leadership of the Americans who liberated the area. The British then assumed this role in June, and the Soviets took over in early July.

Originally, Hillersleben served as a flight station for the German Luftwaffe (since 1937) and as an experimental site for armored vehicles. Accordingly, the complex consisted of two parts: a barrack and the officers' quarters and the related outbuildings (hospital, kitchen, etc.). It was a lowland camp surrounded by trees and wire fencing and separated from the village only by the ploughlands. There were both functional buildings (the kitchen, the hospital, the commander's premises, a theatre, a cinema etc.) and spaces (a graveyard, a soccer field, and a pool) in the camp. The denizens of the displaced persons camp were placed in the fully equipped apartments which had been use by the officers (the so-called *Beamtenviertel*, or officers' quarter), which, in the absence of reliable data, we can only hypothesize were located in the 20 yellow-painted, single-floor residential blocks. The actual camp commandership has ordered that a private military guard be posted to each house in the initial period (until June).

## *The Spatial Perceptions of a Survivor*

I attempt to offer insights into the experiences of the people who were temporarily accommodated in Hillersleben by using one survivor's diary and, more specifically, examining the author's perceptions of space. The diary of György Bognár is one of the most precious sources on the Hillersleben Hungarian group's history. The manuscript can be found in the Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center's

Repository.[14] The surviving sources reveal little about Bognár himself. We know that he was born in Budapest in 1928 to a middle-class Jewish family and he lived in the eight district of the capital with his parents. He was a secondary school student in 1944 when he was taken from his home, made to wear a star of David to identify him as a Jew, and forced to clean rubble. He ended up on Teleki Square, from where he was deported to Bergen-Belsen in December 1944.[15] He struggled through the phases of camp life alone in the Hungarian camp. He began writing his diary when he was deported, and he wrote entries more or less continuously, sometimes in booklets and sometimes using sheets of paper he had found. Important events occurred of which there is no mention in his entries, suggesting that he was not always able to make entries, and he wrote about many events a few days or in some cases a few weeks after they had taken place, including the evacuation and the treatment he was given in the camp hospital.

Unconventionally, in my analysis of Bognár's diary, I do not offer a "close reading." In other words, I do not provide a careful, focused discussion of specific passages from the text, as I would not be able to do so within the framework of this relatively short article.[16] Instead, I provide an "integrated historical intuitive analysis" of the section of the text between the middle of April and the end of July 1945 in accordance with the sectioning by Éva Kovács, and not a qualitative analysis.[17] I am convinced that, in part because of the dearth of diaries on which we can draw, this kind of analysis of ego-documents best furthers an understanding of the life in this camp and this moment of "transitory existence" at the end of the war.

In this case, I'm mostly confining myself to only one aspect of Bognár's diary. I analyze his space-related approach, through which I can reconstruct the mental map which took form in Bognár mind. In other words, I seek to discover how he perceived and visualized the environment in which he was living. Bognár's drawn maps can be analyzed to give insights into the underlying mental maps that have shaped them. Historians have taken up mental/cognitive maps as theoretical constructs over the course of the last 30 years in their

14 The diary of György Bognár. Holocaust Memorial Center, Repository. 2011. 15.1–2. (Hereinafter I will refer to it as "Diary," indicating the date of entry and the page number from the typewritten script.) Excerpts from Bognár's diary were published in a sourcebook in 1995, but this publication didn't cover the months he spent in Hillersleben.

15 Bakó et al., *Emlékezések*, 432.

16 The parts about the period in Hillersleben come to more than 150 typewritten pages.

17 Kovács, "Post-testimony."

discussion of mental images of physical spaces.[18] In regards to the Holocaust, after the incursion of "spatial turn" into Holocaust Studies,[19] the innovative works[20] of British historian Tim Cole could be considered groundbreaking in this field. Building partly on environmental psychology works, Cole associated the historical examination of the micro- and macro-environments with the most diverse levels of empirical and emotional experience. I confine myself only to some typical representations of space in my discussion. Furthermore, in regards to the text, I do not address issues such as identity,[21] the consumption of food, communication, or the importance of travel and homesickness within the history of perception. Where possible, I have compared Bognár's diary entries with the notes and photographs I took in the area of the Hillersleben camp in April 2016 during my visit to the site.[22]

## *"Hillersleben, the City of Liberated Jews"*

Bognár experienced the evacuation as a trauma, since compared to the compound, he was the denizen of a Sonderlager, which means the circumstances in which he lived in Bergen-Belsen were exceptional. The prisoners received better provisions and they did not have to work. The diary entries offer a portrait of a weary, frustrated, angry teenage boy who didn't let anyone near him during the journey on the train. The negative overtones in the entries did not change with the liberation at Farsleben. The entries give an image of terrible hassle and chaos, showing the uncertainty of the general state of war and also the doubts and the duality of fear and hope which troubled Bognár at the same time. For a long time, he seems to have feared the possible return of the Germans, worrying that they might find the broken, empty wagons. Later, like the others, he managed to beg for food in Zielitz and in Farsleben. "And then," he writes,

18 Götz and Holmén, "Introduction," 158.

19 Fogu, " 'A Spatial Turn'," 218–39.

20 See Cole, *Traces of the Holocaust*, and Giordano et al., "Geographies of the Holocaust," 1–17.

21 Although microenvironments, especially the "home," play the most important role in identity formation. Altman, *The Environment and Social Behavior.*

22 I have made a site visit to the area of the former camp using special permit in April 2016 together with Heléna Huhák. I would like to thank Daniel and Klaus-Peter Keweloh, amateur researchers of the local history of Hillersleben, for their help and advice during the visit and since. We prepared photo documentation of the buildings, and to the extent possible, we identified the buildings recognizable from the diary and other ego-documents.

"the nice Sonderlager-life was over."[23] This entry, dated April 13, 1945, clearly indicates that Bognár did not experience the train trip or even his first "free" day after the train trip as freedom, but he found it much more comparable to the circumstances in which he had lived in Bergen-Belsen.[24] His rather bitter entries from the middle of April confirm that even on the second day of the liberation, "he was still being accommodated in the train car, which otherwise was empty.

Bognár was one of the former prisoners who "overate" during the first days, and he arrived in Hillersleben with stomach pains[25] His situation was worsened by the fact that most of his companions had already been given accommodations in the buildings by the time he had arrived. Over the course of the next few weeks, he changed his dwelling place five times within the camp,[26] which meant that moving remained a constant experience for him. In the first days, he complained that he had to live in a "barrack," i.e. a dwelling established temporarily among the stone buildings for those who were taken to Hillersleben later and couldn't get be given lodging in the stone buildings. The crowded wooden barrack, in which he did not have his own room, reminded Bognár of the Bergen-Belsen barracks, and he "constantly strove to get an apartment."[27] He also wanted to move out of the barracks because in the "technical school" (the former military training school), he was accommodated with some people who stole from him on the first day and even took his gramophone.[28]

At the end of April, with the help of the American camp commandership, he managed to get into an apartment in one of the stones buildings together with two other people, Miklós Frommer (Miki) from Makó, who was about the same age as Bognár, and Iván Pál Medgyesi, who was from Budapest.[29] This was not his final destination, however, because over the course of the next weeks, like the other camp dwellers, he was moved again. This situation was a result of the general lack of organization, as displaced persons from different countries were constantly arriving in bigger and smaller groups from the former concentration camps, and they had to be given accommodations and then grouped according to nationality and, when possible, family. According to Bognár's diary, in the early days, it seemed as if the camp were being pillaged, as the people who were

23 Diary, 13 April 1945, 124.

24 Diary, 134. posterior entry on April 27, 1945.

25 Diary, 14 April 1945, 127.

26 For its analysis, see: Huhák, "Szabadok voltunk."

27 Diary, April 27, 1945, 141.

28 Diary, April 26, 1945, 136.

29 They both were born in 1929. Farsleben name list database. Archives, Bergen-Belsen.Memorial)

arriving were searching for available apartments, and if someone managed to move into a certain dwelling first, he or she acquired a claim to that dwelling. Bognár himself must have been slow to catch on, as by the time he realized what was going on, all the buildings he visited already had denizens.[30] In the end, the American camp commandership provided accommodations for Bognár with two other Hungarian boys in another small room, which already had a bathroom. Bognár notes in his diary that "this is fair enough for me."[31] They were given lodgings in a domicile in which an Orthodox Jewish family had already been given housing, but they lived in the other room. This did not bring an end to the process of moving, however. An American soldier came on April 28 and told them that they had to empty the building by 6 PM because Soviet soldiers were coming from Magdeburg and would be given accommodations in their lodgings. 8 to 10 similar buildings shared the same fate. The dwellers were forced into the street, and they were permitted to take refuge in the attic of the house on the other side of the way. The three of them were allowed to remain in their dwelling places for that night. "We are the wandering Jews," Bognár wrote. The next day, an American soldier came for them. They were shown the buildings in which there were still available lodgings, and in the end, all three of them were moved into a four-room apartment, where nine Spanish Jews had already been housed, including two families.[32] The "Spaniards" moved out on May 6, and they left Hillersleben, so Bognár and the other two boys were able to move out of the kitchen and into the room.[33]

The diary entries offer a vivid image of the surroundings. The first apartment in Hillersleben is described as spacious compared to the number of denizens, with "big rooms." However, when I visited the site, I didn't find any apartments in the block in question which could have had spacious rooms. Rather, they had smaller rooms of only a few square meters. Presumably, Bognár was given a misleading impression on the first day when he saw the apartment with many rooms, despite the fact that he and his companions were given lodgings in an untidy kitchen equipped with a stove and cabinet. A bunkbed was put in the room.[34] Bognár may well have been troubled both by the inconvenience of having to move and by the crowdedness of the dwelling, not to mention the fact

30 Diary, April 27, 1945, 149–50.
31 Diary, April 26, 1945, 137.
32 Diary, April 28–29, 1945, 155–57.
33 Diary, May 7, 1945, 171.
34 Diary, April 30, 1945, 160.

that he had difficulty communicating with the people with whom he shared the spaces, though he did not write about this in a negative tone in his diary entries. After a while, he resigned himself to the necessity of sharing the spaces with others. Indeed, he actually took a liking to them, so much so that, that in the end, they didn't want to be separated. When he moved into his final dwelling place in the camp at Stalin Platz 1 on June 18, he did not do so alone. Rather, Miklós and Pál made the move too. By this time, hundreds of former concentration camp prisoners had left Hillersleben, but the three boys were still only given a room that was 20 square meters, a fact which suggests that the camp was still crowded. The room had beds and furniture which was in decent conditions, however. Once the boys managed to tidy up the room and make it a little bit cozy, Bognár became fond of this station of his time in Hillersleben. Of course, another person had already been given lodging in the other room of the two-room apartment.[35] According to Bognár's diary entries, the first thing which he added to his mental map was the space itself, i.e. the room and the kitchen, and the views from this space. Then came the whole apartment, the building, and then gradually the whole camp. They tried to make the rooms livable and cozy, and they tried to repair the beds as soon as possible. They even put a flower on the table: "First of all, I obtained paper, a fountain pen, and a small notebook. This is important for posterity."[36] In his entries, Bognár describes his dwelling places (the room, later the two-room and the four-room apartments, including the corridor and attic) several times and in detail. One has the impression that, after his experiences in the crowded barrack, the crowded train, and the upheavals of the first few days in Hillersleben, he was beginning to have a different experience of space. The joy Bognár may well have felt seems to have prompted him to note the condition of the main room and of his own room again and again, and in remarkable detail. Almost every diary entry includes mention of the radio, which was part of the interior of the apartment, and of his habit of listening to the radio.

In addition to the furnishings, Bognár also mentions the external space accessible from the room several times. "By the way," he writes in an entry dated April 27, "our room opens onto the square, there is a tree in front of it. The sun shines in beautifully in the morning and one hears the sound of spring birdsong."[37] After a while, his room, the clean air, the sight of the green trees, and the warmth even raised his spirits. The more distant square, the buildings, and the

35 Diary, June 19, 1945, 221.

36 Diary, April 26, 1945, 148.

37 Diary, April 27, 1945, 152.

public spaces also appeared in his entries soon, and Bognár slowly came to know the whole camp. He expressed his thoughts about the whole of the camp:

> It is a small town. As we enter the gates—as there are some gates—we see yellow buildings with several stories. Soon, we see the well-tended square. American motorcycles rush over the surfaced road. People are queueing in front of the canteen for lunch. Milk is being distributed at the hospital right now, the milk and the bread are handed out through the window. Alterkaserne 86, where the American hospital is now, has been completely emptied. New equipment was added, through the window we can see the kitchen, where excellent meals are cooked. The Hungarian delegation's office is in the canteen, it is a very nice, classy room with wooden paneling. And the writing desks [in the office – A. Sz.] are arrangedlike in Pest. The streets are clean, German workers are going out and cleaning every day. Tinned food is now being unloaded from a car near the canteen and the EO [Economic Office – A. Sz.], American cars are bringing food without pause. If we go through the crossing gates, we get to the train station, the technical school, and even the other factories and experimental buildings are found here. Only Americans are here now. The villas are the other way. This is where the liberated Jews live. One-story buildings equipped with the most modern conveniences. They are identical, and they look pretty nice, with a partly gray and partly brown design. To get there, we can go on the motor-road, and then we see container gardens on the one side and a bigger park on the other side. A small footpath runs through it, which continues in Hermann Göring Strasse. The former street is Berkerstrasse. There is a small pond and a small creek in the park, which also has a waterfall. Small gardens are among the villas with flower gardens and container gardens. Everything is nice and green. Hitler Strasse is the first side street. Then comes Siegerplatz, a finely landscaped square. Usually everything is very nice, and one can clearly see that military officers lived here. One hears the sounds of happy footfalls on the street. Jewish women are showing off and flirting with the American soldiers. Others are taking home some lunch. Bicycles are passing us on the flat street. American soldiers are rushing with the fire engine. Everything is game and sports for them. This is an international city. You can hear the slow sounds of Hungarian, then swift Polish, Slovak, and the melodic French one after another, and only the soldiers speak English. I haven't been to the neighborhood yet. I could see the village from our previous apartment, I could see through the train bridge. There are windmills next to the high road. This is typical of this region. The American reinforcements are constantly

> marching along the high road. Thousands of cars every day. We can even see trains passing by. It's possible to travel now. There's great silence and tranquility. The birds are tweeting in the morning, it's like a vacation spot, and we are still kept from home. The Dutch men already got their train tickets to return home. I wish we could be there as well.[38]

Bognár describes the camp as a real multi-national, bustling little town (this image conforms to the spatial experiences of the other Hungarians in the camp)[39], though he may have exaggerated its size. The visit I made to the site in 2016 supports the content of Bognár's diary: what he saw at the time, the partly demolished and ruinous former barracks and DP camp, must have been grandiose and city-like. His diary entries offer an image of a jumble of real squares, streets, and communal and private buildings, some of which had been partly demolished or had partly collapsed and some of which were in an untended condition. This image corresponds with the three undated maps Bognár drew (as he admitted in his diary) during his tranquil hours in his room.[40]

Drawing on the scholarship of Andrea Dúll, Heléna Huhák offers the following observation concerning the complex process of creating a mental map: "During the mental mapping of an environment […], its metric information, the directions, distances, axes, scales etc. might be distorted, and size alteration, position dislocation etc. might occur typically in accordance with emotional significance."[41] In his diary Bognár offers no explanation of why he drew the maps. He may have drawn them after he had settled into the camp. According to his diary, he began working on them on May 6.[42] He did not simply draw the intersections, boundaries, and the most significant sites of the camp. Rather, he drew the geographical layout of the streets with the utmost accuracy and with a fine sense of proportion. This suggests that he had been to the places several times and he knew them well, and he didn't simply map the path from his lodgings to the canteen and the hospital.[43] The precision and detail of Bognár's maps are, perhaps, not surprising. As Ann Sloan Devlin suggests in her discussion of cognitive mapmaking, residents of small towns can acquire remarkably detailed

38 Diary, April 27, 1945, 150–52.

39 For example: George S, interview, 1955; Katalin S., interview, 51127.

40 Their location: Holocaust Memorial Center, Repository, 2011. 25.1.

41 Huhák, "Bergen-Belsen a deportált magyar zsidók élettörténeteiben."

42 Diary, May 6, 1945, 191–92.

43 Beginning with his entry on June 5, Bognár more and more frequently referred to the fact that he had walked to specific locations in the camp which previously had seemed faraway to him or that he went sunbathing to some grass-covered areas of the camp.

knowledge of the human geography of a town in a relatively short period of time.[44] Bognár's mappings of the environment in which he lived indicate the five qualities identified by Kevin Lynch as essential to the mental images in the minds of people who live in a given urban space: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks.[45] Bognár was so accurate that, during my visit to the site, I could easily orientate myself on the streets among the remaining buildings on the basis of his maps.

Some buildings which I was able to identify on the basis of the diary and the name of some of the public spaces deserve particular attention.[46] The functions of the spaces written about in the diary and drawn on the maps have changed. Previously, they served national socialist military purposes; they were workplaces and partly dwellings for hundreds of soldiers, air force officers, pilots, SS-members, and officers.[47] One of the important spaces was the "hospital." which had a key role in the survival of György Bognár and other camp denizens and which Bognár referred to in his diary as an "outpatient clinic," a term he had heard or read in German in the barracks.[48] He realized early on that there was a waiting room and a treatment room in the center and that he had to stand in the queue for an incredibly long time. Initially, patients were treated by physicians recruited from the ranks of the survivors. Bognár had a devastatingly critical opinion of them. But when the Americans took over the management of the hospital, everything changed. Professional medical care was made available.[49] Bognár was taken to the hospital due to high fever on May 10, 1945, and the physicians determined that he too was infected by the typhus epidemic which broke out at the time. The hospital was his new home until June 1. He didn't write in his diary during his treatment and recovery. The first entries in which he mentions his experiences in the hospital were written in the first days of June. During his time in the hospital (when at times he suffered hallucinations), he does not seem to have thought about questions of space (or at least there

44 Devlin, "The 'Small Town' Cognitive Map," 58–66.

45 Lynch, *The Image of a City*. Nowadays, cognitive maps are interpreted as the social relationships of the spaces and the citizens. Wilhelm, "Kognitív térképek," 35.

46 Accordingly, Bognár's entries focus on the natural space as well. Since the "spatial turn," we have known that the natural landscape is not a stand-alone space. It can be interpreted as the unity of natural and social spaces. Torre, "The 'Spatial Turn' in History," 1127–41.

47 Several brochures and postcards which were spread for propaganda purposes beginning in the late 1930s confirm this. Most of the former buildings are now in a ruinous condition or have been destroyed.

48 Diary, April 27, 1945, 145.

49 Diary, April 27, 1945, 147–48.

is no mention of any such reflections in the diary entries he wrote about his time there), but he did reflect, after his period of convalescence had come to an end, on his more immediate environment. He makes mention in his entries of the allegedly dirty halls and small hospital rooms. In his retrospective entry in June, he wrote that, after a while, he "really wanted to get 'home'." This is the first reference in his diary to the modest apartments, rooms, and kitchens described above as "home." His broader home (i.e. the camp) was increasingly empty. He describes the organized departures of prisoners of different national backgrounds (Czech, Slovak, Greek, French, Spanish) in groups or on their own more and more often beginning on June 2.

Toponyms have an important role in Bognár's mental map, although as cognitive linguists have suggested, this is not necessarily so in all cases. The cognitive map and the memorization of toponyms arise from the same cerebration, but the names of the places are not necessarily required for the identification of the places.[50] Bognár uses geographical names in the first entries in his diary. It is strange that this was also true in the period he spent in the DP camp, initially, at least, but when drawing the maps, Bognár used the National Socialist names of the public spaces. Reading about streets named after Hitler or Hermann Göring[51] might be grotesque (some of the street signs were still visible in 2016), but navigating in the crowded space may have been much more important for Bognár, and the names that were in use were of great assistance in this. Bognár himself also lived on Sieger Platz 8, and from here, he moved to Sieger Platz 2 on April 19.[52] The changes in the history of the camp were reflected in the names as well. The use of National Socialist street names started to fade by June, which is when we first come across mentions of Roosevelt Strasse.[53] The change to Soviet control of the camp in early August brought changes in the names of the "small town's" public spaces as well. The new names also had symbolic meanings. Bognár began to refer to what had been known as Hitler Platz as Stalin Platz at this time in the diary. We observe a similar process in the case of the aforementioned "center for ambulatory care " as well.

50 Reszegi, "A mentális térkép és a helynevek," 95–100.

51 There was also a "value-neutral" public space name as well, e.g. Barbara Strasse. In other cases, such as the words indicating certain occupations, the German terms were used in the diary simply as borrowings for no ideological reasons. (E.G. using the word "Schwester" instead of nurse.)

52 Diary, April 28, 1945, 153.

53 Bognár wrote the American president's name incorrectly in the entries. He spelled it "Roosewelt." During my visit to the site, I saw no trace of this sign, unlike the National Socialist signs. This may explain why the Nazi public space names were used for so long in the diary.

Bognár used the term "ambulancia" in German origin, and in doing so, he seems deliberately not to be using the term Belsen hospital, which had had referred to in earlier entries as the "revier."[54] It is also noticeable that he begins to use the term "villa" to refer to what had been the Wehrmacht barracks. The term was probably used by the Americans, but it is also possible that it was used by other prisoners. He never writes about a camp, only about buildings. However, the buildings in the photographs which I took during my site visit are not villas, but simple two-story and three-story residential buildings. It is easy to imagine that after the crowdedness of Bergen-Belsen and the trains, Bognár actually saw his dwelling as nicer than it really was. The case of the word "canteen," or "Kantin," is another clear example of an instance when Bognár used German terms. This word was written on the wall of the former barracks, which explains why it came to be used among the displaced persons in the camp.

Other places are also mentioned, such as the theater, which Bognár mostly refers to with the term "casino," which also matches the Nazi usage. It was an important venue in National Socialist times as well, since this space, which is an odd one out among the buildings used by the military officers, could function as an auditorium. Hitler and Goebbels went to this building in 1942.[55] Bognár mentions in one of his entries from June that the camp staff and the displaced persons organized a so-called "mixed party" here. He grasped the importance of the casino: "The asphalt streets of Hillersleben are slowly being filled at around 6 o'clock, and the people are marching towards the Casino in bigger and smaller groups to have fun, laugh, and forget."

Later entries in the diary from the end of June contain references to the areas set aside for sports, including the place where ping pong tables were located and a space used as sports field, where soccer games were played. The diary offers no details concerning the space where the ping pong tables allegedly were located, and even after having consulted the other potentially relevant sources, I was unable to locate this space during my visit to the site. In contrast, the soccer field is easy to identify on one of Bognár's maps. A memorable match was played here on July 9 between the Italian and Hungarian ex-prisoners, who, unlike the Czech, Yugoslavian, German, and French ex-prisoners, were still present in huge

54 This is the common name of the infirmary of the healthcare part of the camp system maintained for the prisoners. The same term was used for the military infirmaries as well.

55 The surviving photographs testify to this. Today, the images are in the possession of the Keweloh family in Hillersleben.

numbers.[56] Bognár was a witness to the match, and his diary entries suggest that he cheered for the Hungarians who were playing, together with another 1,000 displaced Jewish camp dwellers. He also notes that most of the fans came to the venue from Roosevelt Strasse, which, on the basis of the map drawn weeks before, suggests that the audience consisted of camp dwellers, not the Soviet military commandership or the German villagers. After the overwhelming Italian victory, "the audience marched along Churchill and Eisenhower Strasse in compact order, almost endlessly—in accordance with the local dimensions, of course—to participate in the dance tonight where the very best of Hillersleben [camp] appeared."[57]

In Bognár's text, space-related experiences are often connected to concrete emotions. Like in the case of his earlier cited entry from April 28, when he mentioned the sounds of birdsong in his room, he noted that the mood "resembles a vacation." Many texts have been written about Bognár's experiences of space and his experiences of cooperation with his roommates during the long days and weeks spent organizing, idling, and healing. For example, they had to agree on who would walk the one kilometer to the "canteen" to get lunch at a given time, as this was considered work, or who would do the washing up and when.[58]

If we read the diary from the perspective of experiences and perceptions of space, the perspective of the entries changes with the passage of time. Initially, Bognár was writing carefully, often about the negative aspects of life in the camp, irrespective of the fact that he gradually discovered every corner of his new dwelling place. However, from the end of May and especially in and after June, when he presumably had grown accustomed to the circumstances and had finished moving and had recovered from his treatment in the hospital, he seems to have accepted the conditions in Hillersleben. Partly due to the summer heat, partly due to his health, and also because the camp became a psychological inland, he spent a lot of time outside, and even his descriptions of healing and eating, which in earlier entries had been lengthy, are comparatively short. He seems to

56 Approximately 1,343–1,458 Hungarian survivors remained until the early August in the camp. Arolsen Archives 3.1.1.3. Reference Code: 849000. List of former deportees in camp Hillersleben, 30. 7.1945. (World Jewish Congress, London); Arolsen Archives, 3.1.1.3. Reference Code: 261000. List of liberated Jews in Hillersleben, 3. 8. 1945 (World Jewish Congress, New York); Arolsen Archives 3. 1. 1. 3. Reference Code: 8805610. Hungarian and Yugoslavian Jews at Hillersleben, 8. 8. 1945. (AJDC, Paris)

57 Diary, July 9, 1945, 241–42. A Soviet-Hungarian soccer match was played in the same place on July 9. Idem, 247–48.

58 Diary, April 26, 1945, 142.

be thinking more and more about the past, and he begins to wonder how he will get home and what will be waiting for him at home, and his perceptions of space begin to change. With the passage of time, the camp increasingly becomes a space of relaxation and cogitation, thus losing its earlier significance. "Life continues in Hillersleben" he writes on June 8.[59] He got used to his situation, his "small town" life. There are no references to the world beyond the camp fence on the map drawn in early May. However, once the typhus outbreak had passed, the camp dwellers were free to move about. In early June, Bognár began going to the village regularly. He has also visited the buildings of the adjacent former Wehrmacht barracks.[60]

## *Instead of Conclusions: The Continuity of Absence*

The narrative descriptions of space in György Bognár's diary and the maps he drew of the camp in which he was lodged offer a solid foundation on the basis of which we can construct an image of the whole DP camp. Bognár's expressive entries, which are rich with data and are based on observations he made over the course of months, suggest a detailed cognitive map of the spaces, and as far as the accuracy of this cognitive map is concerned, my visit to the cite suggests that it was precise and reliable. The actual physical maps which he drew and his narrative maps (his diary entries) provide an important source for the study of this DP camp and a source on which studies of similar camps can also draw. In this article, I have drawn primarily on this source in my discussion of the conditions in the Hillersleben camp in 1945 (or at least one person's perceptions of these conditions). This discussion, used alongside other ego-documents and archival sources, could provide a good basis for a more comprehensive study of the circumstances of Hungarian Jewish groups in DP camps.

Liberated prisoners arrived in Hillersleben continuously over the course of the summer, and as time passed, more and more people left to return home or to continue their journeys as survivors of the war and Holocaust.[61] Bognár's last diary entry was written on July 20, the day when he left the camp.[62] By the end

59 Diary, June 8, 1945, 197.

60 Diary, June 11, 1945, 210. This was the first entry about the "walks" Bognár took in the village and the contacts he made with people outside the camp.

61 The sources on which my following comments are based are private individuals living in Hillersleben (April 2016) and the website of the settlement (http://www.hillersleben.eu)

62 Like most of the Hungarian prisoners in Saxony, Bognár , and on July 30, 1945, he made it to Magdeburg, where he was entitled to ration cards on the basis of the displaced persons ID he was given

of August 1945, the camp was empty, and the short-lived DP camp was closed. As part of the history of the war and the Holocaust, Hillersleben was largely forgotten for decades, as were the histories of many displaced persons. The area of the former Wehrmacht barracks became a military training ground for the German Democratic Republic in the 1950s and people were therefore not allowed to visit it. After German reunification in 1990, it was occupied by the allied German army *(Bundeswehr)*. The *Bundeswehr* sold the area, together with the decaying and ruined buildings, to a Hamburg-based private firm in the 1990s, and this firm established a field of solar panels in the area. In the spring of 2016, half of the former camp's buildings were still standing, with equipment which had been used by the GDR military therein. The last buildings were demolished in October 2018.

The small Jewish cemetery in the area of the camp and its commemorative plaque and the commemorative plaque in the Farsleben town cemetery' commemorate the Jewish dead and the Jewish survivors of the DP camp. Local remembrance of the Hillersleben camp has been practically marginalized. Were there any call for remembrance or commemoration, any attempt would hindered by the fact that much of the site has been destroyed. The area can never become a cultural heritage space, as the connection between the community and the space has been severed.[63] However, spaces are still opening up for different forms of historical recollection. For this, however, it would be necessary to explore the history of the camp, which has survived several periods (including discussion of the history of the Hungarian displaced persons). Furthermore, one would also need to see more research on the fates of postwar displaced persons in regards to the Holocaust and the issue of the refugees.

by the Hillersleben camp management. He managed to take the Leipzig train with his mates, and he then took a cargo train which was going to Dresden, but the train under Soviet authority went to the town of Doberlug-Kirchhain, where he got to the local DP camp. From here, he finally managed to get to Hungary through Prague with the help of the Red Cross. Cf. for example DEGOB-protocol no. 2208. Bognár resettled in Budapest and started a family. He was later involved in the activity of Nácizmus Üldözötteinek Országos Egyesülete (National Association of Victims of Nazi Persecution). His date of death is unknown. Bakó et al., *Emlékezések*, 432.

63 Uzzell, "Where is the Discipline in Heritage Studies," 328–29.

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# Budapest Butchers, the Jewish Question, and Holocaust Survivors

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This article focuses on a denazification procedure within the professional group of the Budapest butchers. Through the retelling of wartime anti-Jewish incidents and other conflicts, these processes reveal a complex picture of how a certain professional group tried to cope with the upheavals of the war and the attempts of outside interventions. In the framework of the anti-Jewish exclusionary atmosphere of the epoch, I investigate questions about professional competition, leadership, respectability, professionalization, and the marginalization of Jewish professionals. By answering these questions, I reconstruct a wartime internal dynamism within the butchers' trade, where meat gradually became a scarcity, and therefore ousting Jewish colleagues was understood more and more as an urging necessity. In these circumstances, I am interested in the ways of solidarity and animosity showed by the Budapest butchers towards persecuted colleagues and towards Jews in general. By using a micro-historical method, I detail the professional problems of Budapest butchers, and I explain how the denazification check interestingly took over some functions of the "master's exam," after the Second World War.

Keywords: Transitional justice, occupational groups and the Holocaust, denazification, respectability, microhistory of Holocaust, individual help during the Holocaust, food ration, Jews and Gentiles during the Holocaust

This paper explores the ways in which Jewish origins and political affiliation mattered during the Second World War in an urban setting if one happened to work as a butcher, or when meat was needed as foodstuff. Among Budapest butchers, as in most of the professional clusters in Hungary, Jewish and leftist colleagues found themselves marginalized starting from 1939. Butchers were not unique in this sense, yet this professional group may have been particularly important simply due to the scarcity of meat in the later phase of the war, which mixed this ideological side-lining with a bitter fight against professional competition.

Considering the bigger picture, the marginalization of Jewish professionals and political opponents was, of course, a phenomenon that could be observed in several Central European countries. Jews in Germany were segregated from the rest of the urban communities in which they lived years earlier than in

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Budapest. Nevertheless, just like in Hungary, in 1945, "the collapse of the Third Reich reversed social hierarchies, with former Nazis losing their privileges and their erstwhile victims having the power to decide on their fates."[1] In a similar vein, following the war in the Hungarian capital, in spring 1945, some of the previously marginalized butchers came back and staged an anti-Nazi purge in this occupational cluster.

A key tool in taking vengeance was the immediate post-war denazification process which was organized as part of a larger screening of Hungarian public life. This obligation followed from the truce agreement Hungary had signed with the victorious Allied powers at the end of the Second World War, and it aimed at a sort of spiritual and ethical turn in public life.[2] Organized by the professional chambers and trade unions, beginning in the spring of 1945, a denazifying check took place which was based in no small part on the wartime behaviour of individuals working in specific trades and professions. The members of the justificatory committees included labour union officials, legal experts, and the delegates of the democratic political parties of the so-called Hungarian National Independence Front, a Soviet backed umbrella organization of the anti-Fascist political powers.[3]

On the following pages, I am going to analyse the documentation of the transitional justice procedures recorded by the justificatory committee of the Budapest Butchers' and Slaughtermen's Chamber, and I am going to complement my findings with discussion of the wartime primary sources. By analysing the minutes of the meetings of this justificatory committee and the declarations which were submitted, I am able to reconstruct microhistories of the Holocaust on the basis of immediate post-war sources. While doing this, I want to ask questions about (1) the non-Jewish individuals' wartime choices, including whether or not they sought to benefit from the anti-Jewish regulations?; and (2) whether the butchers of Budapest had any chance to provide help for Jews?; also (3) in what ways and from when did one's Jewish origin matter in an everyday trade such as meat selling and processing?; and, finally, (4) how did

1 Jarausch, *Broken Lives*, 238.

2 This truce agreement was signed in Moscow on 20 January 1945. See Barna and Pető, *Political Justice in Budapest*, 14.

3 The Magyar Nemzeti Függetlenségi Front [Hungarian National Independence Front] was formed on 2 December, 1944 in Szeged, south-east Hungary. It was founded by the following political parties: the Independent Smallholders Party, the Hungarian Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the National Peasant Party, and the Civic Democratic Party [Független Kisgazdapárt, Magyar Kommunista Párt, Szociáldemokrata Párt, Nemzeti Parasztpárt and Polgári Demokrata Párt].

market control and internal group cohesion evolve during the Second World War among the Budapest butchers?

## *Persilschein, George Mosse, and the Budapest Butchers*

Writing about the immediate German post-war situation, Konrad H. Jarausch describes the 1945 phenomenon of *Persilschein*, alluding to the papers issued by the few German Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, who were continuously nudged by German petitioners "to provide an affidavit, called *Persilschein* after a laundry detergent, that would prove their [the German petitioners'] innocence."[4] Files left behind by the justificatory committee of the Budapest Butchers' and Slaughtermen' Chamber provide proof that this piece of paper often featured in transitional justice processes in other countries as well, which not long before had belonged to the Axis alliance. Nevertheless, while in Germany possessing a *Persilschein* often put an end to any further investigation, in the Hungarian context, denazification was sometimes taken more seriously.[5]

The denazification related archival material of the Budapest butchers' professional chamber contains various other types of documents. This makes it easier for the researcher to differentiate between people who actually provided help and those wrongdoers who only arranged similar supporting statements to avoid post-war retribution. Most typically, numerous butchers got into trouble after the war because they had been taking steps to deny their Jewish colleagues' access to meat during the war. On 10 May, 1942, the deputy leader of the meat industry workers' association delivered a speech at this organization's assembly. Speaking about the problems faced by this professional group, he offered his opinion concerning the Jewish colleagues, whose effective exclusion from the pork- and veal market had brought the unwanted result of Jewish dominance in beef commerce.[6] One representative of the slaughterhouse workers, Mr. Dancs, suggested ousting the Jews also from the beef market.

The issue was addressed in a short while, when still in 1942, a nine-member committee was set up at the cow slaughterhouse, the members of which

4 Jarausch, *Broken Lives*, 266.

5 Dan Stone claims that, in general, the Allied occupiers of Germany did not want to criminalize the German masses because of their concerns over future Western European security. Yet with regards to the process of denazification, there were differences, since it was "far more energetically pursued in the American zone than in the French or British…" Stone, *Goodbye to all that?*, 54–55.

6 See Ferenc Bukovszky deputy president's speech in the periodical of the *Hungarian Meat Industry Workers* [Magyar Husiparosok Lapja], 15 May, 1942, vol. 4, no. 21, 1–3.

monopolized the distribution of live animals arriving through their contact with MÁSZ, the state agency for selling and buying animals.[7] Contemporaries saw the role of MÁSZ as making sure that Christianity as a cultural trait prevailed even at the slaughterhouses.[8] Run by state officials, it tendentiously preferred members of extreme right organizations when it came to distributing the best-looking animals for slaughtering, which is why, for example, Árpád Horváth slaughterman had joined the National Socialist party in the early 1940s.

Historian George L. Mosse reminds us that "we must understand the actions and commitments of people as they themselves saw them and not project ourselves back into history."[9] Mosse, who himself had to escape from the Nazis in 1933, suggests that on the one hand, "a historian in order to understand the past has to empathize with it, to get under its skin, as it were, to see the world through the eyes of its actors and its institutions,"[10] while, on the other hand, he claims that "understanding does not mean withholding judgement […] but understanding must precede an informed and effective judgement."[11] Keeping this in mind, it is worth mentioning that although butcher Árpád Horváth had become a member of the National Socialist party only to get access to meat, he cancelled his membership once this party united with the Arrow Cross Party, a move after which he did not receive proper meat for a longer period of time. His case should be evaluated differently than those of his colleagues who remained Arrow Cross Party members even in autumn 1944 (some of whom will be mentioned later), when it was already evident that the party had become a driving force behind the campaign waged against Jewish Hungarians.

Nonetheless, back in 1942, there were more sophisticated ways of eliminating Jewish competition from the meat market other than simply checking one's political affiliation. Selling fresh beef was the job of Dezső Szamek at the cow slaughterhouse, where on 1 May, 1942, he was offered more than the official maximum price for half of a freshly slaughtered cow. By then, the authorities

7 The abbreviation stands for *Magyar Állat és Állati Termékek Kiviteli Szövetkezete*.

8 As one reminiscent recalled, "the role of MÁSZ was to make sure the Christian idea prevailed in the slaughterhouse" [In the original it reads: "A MÁSZ-nak az volt a szerepe, hogy az ún keresztény gondolatot juttassa érvényre a vágóhídon." HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no 1., A Budapesti Mészárosok és Hentesek Ipartestületének Igazolóbizottsága Iratai [Documents of the justificatory committee of the Budapest Butchers and Slaughtermen], the case of Brzezanszky. Hereafter I reference this material merely by the archival number HU BFL XVII. 1597.

9 Mosse, *Confronting History*, 108.

10 Ibid., 53.

11 Ibid., 172.

had realized that the circumstances of total war, the limited availability of livestock, and the almost unlimited needs of the army required much more control over meat products than what a peacetime market mechanism could provide. Therefore, they introduced a cap on the number of animals selected for slaughtering and put another cap on the prices as well.[12] In this specific case, butcher Dezső Szamek, who was of Jewish descent, had been offered a higher price than this set maximum, and he did not realize the catch in the situation. Once he accepted the offer, he was almost immediately arrested by policemen and was held behind bars for approximately a year because of his carelessness.[13]

His was not a unique case, as several unwanted Jewish or leftist butchers were eliminated with the use of similar tricks. Obviously, they lost not only their licenses to work but were also subjected to severe fines. Somewhat more general and much more violent actions against Jewish butchers happened only sporadically, when for example the meat bought by Jewish retailers was simply confiscated at the slaughterhouse by radical extremist butchers from the Garay market hall.[14] Witnesses claimed that Károly Dancs belonged to the leaders of the radicals, who had by force attempted to put their Jewish colleagues into an untenable situation as early as 1942–43.[15]

## *Discussions among the Budapest Butchers and Their Anachronistic Apprentice System*

Placing these anti-Jewish incidents into the internal discussions held among the members of the meat industry, I could identify three major themes that occupied the thoughts of these people in wartime Budapest. Quite clearly, the above mentioned anti-Semitic acts belonged to those topics which evolved around the so-called Jewish question, but there was equally a lot told about the distribution

12 It was decree no. 2760/1941 of the Ministry of Public Supply [Közellátásügyi Minisztérium] in April 1941 that announced the maximum number of animals for slaughter per settlement. It also named the MÁSZ as the authority that was responsible to supply the Hungarian capital with meat.

13 HU BFL XVII. 1597, Find this in the case of Flórián Gyurasits, within this case see especially the statements of Mr. Kapay, recorded on 6 October, 1945.

14 The confiscation is mentioned, for example, in the discussion of József Bors's case (BFL XVII 1597, box no. 1), on 1 October, 1945, but also in the case of Sándor Varga, BFL XVII 1597, box no. 6.

15 Sándor Varga claimed that he could not speak up against the violent confiscation of meat because of Dancs's aggressive, commanding style. See on this BFL XVII 1597, box no. 6, an appeal from Sándor Varga to the People's Court, arrived on 12 June, 1945. A certain László Tóth, a member of the Arrow Cross Party allegedly also belonged to this violent group. See his case at BFL XVII 1597, box no. 5, and within his file a document numbered 3221/1945.

of meat between the butchers and, finally, the members often discussed issues related to the apprentice-system as well. Understanding the butchers' individual decision-making processes would be a difficult task without dwelling a bit around these three themes.

Starting at the end, the apprentice-system was chiefly about the next generations of butchers, but it was also connected to the existing businesses. Professions such as butchering had traditions which stretched back to the late medieval guild system, where a member of a guild would train a young apprentice who worked for him for years. Small modifications were often made to this traditional on-the-job-training system, but it remained fundamentally unchanged for centuries. One of the features which did not change was that it demanded enormous sacrifices, especially from the apprentice.

Typically, one would enter apprenticeship at a well-established butcher's around the age of 14 and stay there for some three to four years, working almost as an in-house servant. Only after this challenging three-year-long learning process had been completed would the apprentice become an assistant butcher. This stage in a career usually lasted many years in order to give the assistant butcher the chance to gain experience and the savings necessary to open his own butcher shop. Nevertheless, before an assistant butcher could officially become a member of the professional group of butchers, he had to take the "master's exam," an examination with which the professional group could also control the number of incoming competitors. Take the example of András Krizsán, who was born in 1865. At the age of fourteen, young Krizsán became a butcher apprentice in 1879, and he remained in this position for three years.[16] As a next step, he was then promoted to assistant butcher, a position he held for no less than eight years, and only in 1890 was he able to pass the master's exam for butchers and subsequently open his own shop. Thus, it took Mr. Krizsán some eleven hard years to become an independent butcher.

Understandably, the young men of interwar Budapest were able to find much easier career options than this. In this growing metropolis, even unqualified factory workers could sometimes count on immediate sizeable incomes and they could also retreat for paid holidays. Butchers were not always able to compete with the salaries and benefits offered by manufacturers, public transport companies,

16 See Mr. Krizsán's obituary published in the periodical of the *Hungarian Meat Industry Workers* [Magyar Husiparsok Lapja], 26 March, 1943, vol. 5, no. 13, 3.

or the growing Budapest nightlife to young workforce.[17] In addition, opening a new butcher shop required a substantial investment. At the same time, modern industrial developments created a need for fast and specialized workforces, meaning that the tradition of passing all the knowledge about a specific profession became increasingly difficult from one generation to the next one.

Nevertheless, the butchers of Budapest organized master's exams every year, and they even held these exams in 1943-44, simply because this exam had a crucial double function. On the one hand, it separated competent from incompetent, on the other hand, it provided an entry control to the profession for the association of Budapest butchers. The further downfalls of the apprentice system in the modern era is a subject that remains outside of the focus of the present paper. It was an issue which caused problems in the professional cluster under discussion, nevertheless, in the next section of this essay, I am rather going to turn my attention to the details of the remaining two themes of the Budapest butchers' frequent discussions, namely the anomalies of meat distribution and its interplay with the so-called "Jewish question."

## *Meat Distribution and the "Jewish Question"*

When in 1941, the Hungarian government placed restrictions on the purchase and sale of meat products, the decision was made to tie meat distribution to the size of businesses within the meat industry. In theory, the authorities wanted to protect employees this way. In practice, this meant that the amount of meat a butcher could get at the slaughterhouse depended on the number of assistant butchers and apprentices he was employing, and the number of shops he was running. However, the quality of the meat was no less important than the quantity, therefore connections and political affiliation greatly mattered at the slaughterhouse, and it appears that those distributing the meat happened to be almost exclusively the followers of right-wing Hungarian nationalism. Butchers whom they disliked were doomed to wait until the end of the day, when high-quality meat was no longer available and even low-quality meat was not available in adequate quantities. At least this is how Konrád Fischer recalled the situation. He was a butcher who had regularly stood in line from early morning until late

17 The periodical of the *Hungarian Meat Industry Workers* blames explicitly the technical and industrial expansion that damaged in general the interests of artisans. "A tanonckínálat fokozása," *Magyar Husiparosok Lapja*, 1943, vol 5, no. 22, 1.

evening for some 50 or 60 kilograms of meat.[18] Those who had better access to fresh meat and better treatment from the slaughtermen were members of the right-wing organizations and representatives of big companies.

Following the war, Mihály Fejes from Visegrádi utca, in a letter dated 5 March, 1945 and sent to the denazification committee, tried to explain his membership in the Arrow Cross Party, which he had joined in 1942.[19] His explanation included wartime threats, according to which, had he refused to join the Arrow Cross, he would have gotten less and less meat, which outcome could have led to the closure of his shop. Mr. Fejes attached a *Persilschein* signed by one of his Jewish Hungarian customers declaring that he had always sold him meat (even in 1944) and he had also sent some food for the customer to a Yellow star ghetto house.[20] It is noteworthy that Mr. Fejes submitted these documents in 1945 from an internment camp which was a regular post-war destination for people who had been accused of having been members of the Arrow Cross party. It is also revealing that in the spring and summer of 1945, this kind of wartime affiliation was enough for someone to lose his or her job and his or her freedom for some time.

However, less than two years after the war, when the People's Court had to reach a decision in a similar case where the condemned butcher had appealed against the verdict reached by the immediate post-war denazification committee, the evaluation process was much more lenient. This difference had something to do with the impending leftist switch in Hungarian public and political life. To get a sense of this, one needs merely read the arguments used by the judges in the case of Károly Dancs, who was mentioned earlier and who had been accused of robbing the Jewish butchers of their meat in 1942 at the slaughterhouse. For this misconduct in August 1945, the justificatory committee banned him for life from working in the meat industry, while the People's Court changed this ruling and reduced the term of the ban to one year. In its verdict issued on 20 September, 1946, the People's Court maintained that butcher Dancs had only joined the Arrow Cross party because of the pressing economic circumstances, which were a consequence of the war. According to the judges, Dancs's anti-

18 HU BFL XVII. 1597, See the appeal of Konrád Fischer addressed to the People's Court on 2 October, 1945.

19 HU BFL XVII. 1597, See the case of Mr Fejes discussed by the Justificatory committee on 15 May, 1945.

20 HU BFL XVII. 1597, See this in the Fejes case, and within that the statements signed by Ferenc Kuzért and Lipót Mandel.

Jewish actions were caused by the misleading extreme-right propaganda, which as a simple worker, he had been unable to resist. Furthermore, in any case, his actions allegedly had originated primarily from a just social class struggle against the big businesses, and these actions only had a secondary anti-Jewish character.[21] This reasoning illustrates how, paradoxically, wartime anti-Jewish sentiment was at times transformed into a post-war antisemitism. In these instances, even in a denazifying procedure, the leftist anti-capitalist propaganda could create a common platform between former Nazis and new leftist candidates for power.

True, being a butcher in Budapest became an increasingly difficult profession during Second World War due to the lack of food stuff, however, the situation had not been much easier in the pre-war years. Already in 1936, there were no less than 920 individual entrepreneurs in this trade in the city, and they had to compete not only with one another, including the bigger companies, but also with the state-run food selling chain. This enterprise, the *Községi Élelmiszerüzem*, inevitably had advantages in accessing foodstuff and setting its prices, as it did not have to bring in much profit.[22] The situation was manageable as long as the government did not start to restrict the butchering of animals due to the war. Once there was not enough meat, it became obvious that the shrinking supply could not keep all the individual butcher shops of Budapest profitable.

The fact that there was not an adequate supply of meat to provide an income for all the members of this industry puts the anti-Jewish acts described above into perspective: they were part of the broader debate which could be formulated vaguely as "whom should be eliminated from the Budapest butchers in order to secure the survival of the rest of the businesses?" And one growingly popular answer to this question was the word "Jews." To be sure, the so-called "change of the guards" [in Hungarian *Őrségváltás*] notion, i.e. the Christian takeover of Jewish positions in economy, was widely present among large segments of Hungarian society.[23] The first anti-Jewish regulations were popular among the gentile population, and these measures resulted in significant gains for the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross movement in the parliamentary elections of 1939.

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21 HU BFL XVII. 1597, People's Court decision under the number 5094/1945/2, issued on 20 September, 1946.

22 The so-called *Községi Élelmiszerüzem* [Municipal Food Store Network] was founded in 1911, and to give an idea of its size, in 1937 it had 600 employees and its trading was estimated in the region of 13 million pengős. See on this the speech of Ferenc Vály at the Budapest City Assembly quoted in *Magyar Országos Tudósító*, 1937/257. 3.

23 See on the notion of the Change of the guard or, in Hungarian, on *Őrségváltás* most recently Linda Margittai's dissertation: Margittai, *Zsidókérdés a Délvidéken*.

In line with this, the periodical Hungarian Meat Industry Workers' Journal *(Magyar Husiparosok Lapja)* regularly pointed out, for example, the Hungarian settlements where no Christian butcher shops were available, suggesting by this not just career options in the provinces but also that there was a need to counter the alleged "Jewish influence." Yet, for the purpose of this paper, it is much more crucial to point at the Christian and rightist preferences that were practiced on a daily basis at the slaughterhouses in the Hungarian capital. Knowing this, the wealthy Zeidl butcher company, for instance, always sent an employee who had an affiliation with the Arrow Cross to do the wholesale shopping.[24]

According to people's recollections after the war, several similar buyers had worn the Arrow Cross badge, and names were even mentioned of meat distributors who had been known for giving better quality products to those who had openly supported the Arrow Cross leader Szálasi and, in general, the Nazi German war efforts.[25] Slaughterman István Varga declared that Jewish butchers should not even try to buy meat at the slaughterhouse, but rather should go to Palestine.[26] Another slaughterhouse worker, Mr. Somody, reportedly wore both the green shirt of the Arrow Cross uniform and the movement's badge every day.[27] The Kozma brothers had been producing various types of meat products for years, however, in 1942, realizing that due to their Jewish background they had hardly any access to fresh meat, they decided to lease their workshop and shop in Rökk Szilárd utca. Two years later, when the lease contract was about to expire and the Jewish owners did not intend to prolong it, the non-Jewish butcher threatened to hand them over to the Nazi Germans, who in the meantime had occupied the country.[28] Those affected also remembered that soon after the original business takeover in 1942, photos of Hitler and Mussolini were displayed in the shop window.

And these pictures lead us to the issue of the choices made by customer, as in its practical way, these choices can be understood as expressions of opinion within the debate on the Jewish question. It should be stated that in wartime Budapest,

24 HU BFL XVII. 1597. See the case of István Zeidl in box no. 6, especially see the discussions on 29 September, 1945.

25 HU BFL XVII. 1597. Find this in the case of Gyula Kelemen.

26 HU BFL XVII. 1597. The case of István Varga, see the records of the hearing held on 8 December, 1945.

27 HU BFL XVII. 1597. See the case of Árpád Somody in box no. 5.

28 HU BFL XVII. 1597. See the case of András Várszegi/Winkhardt who after the war was arrested because in 1944, he had blackmailed the owners to renew the rental contract. The denazification authority withdrew his license for five years, and banned him from working as a butcher.

there was clearly a need for trusted extreme right-wing meat sellers first. Only after this need had emerged did the butchers begin listing themselves in selective trade organizations that ensured the seller's political "trustworthiness" for the politically conscious customers. For instance, a case was recorded of a lady from district VI, who stopped shopping for meat at the nearby butcher only because this butcher had not taken her advice and had not joined the Arrow Cross Party or the Alliance "Marok", an organization of the rightist suppliers.[29] The extreme right "Marok" even published its own yellow pages for right-wing consumers.[30]

Therefore, when attempting to understand the behaviour of butchers, we need to keep in mind the mounting pressure on the macro level, where masses of Hungarians related their nationalist aspirations to a Nazi German-led new world, including in this a racially inferior judgement over their Jewish fellow-citizens. The growing popularity of antisemitism on the macro level was present in the butchers' everyday lives because of the influence of the clientele. Yet on the micro level of the meat industry workers, there was much stronger group pressure, where political belonging mattered the most when butchers needed to do wholesale meat shopping. Through the strong extreme right mentality of the dozens of slaughtermen and butchers working at the slaughterhouses, the community was able to influence the political preferences of the Budapest butchers. This serves as a crucial factor when one attempts to understand how these individuals functioned and made their decisions in the first half of the 1940s. Under these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that onto the window of another butcher shop on Szív utca, in 1942 an announcement was placed with the following text: "Here we do not serve Jews."[31]

## *The Jewish Question and Respectability*

Let us return to the group of Budapest butchers and consider some of the other ways in which the so-called "Jewish question" was understood by them during the Holocaust. The advantage of microhistory is exactly that it "provides more compelling insights into the events that contemporaries faced in their day-to-day lives" and "it gives increased attention to the categories of actors, the strategies of

29 HU BFL XVII. 1598. The files of Justificatory Committee no. 291/a of the Hungarian Concierges and Assistant Concierges, district VII, the case of Mrs. János Hofgart from Barát utca 9, see the hearing of Mr. Jenő Branstadler on 22 August, 1945.

30 See more on this in Markó, *"Marok" kereskedők és iparosok szaknévsora*.

31 Hadas and Zeke, *Egy fölösleges ember élete*, 100.

individuals and small groups."[32] One aspect of the meat industry workers' group strategy in connection to the so-called "Jewish question" was exercised again and again through meat distribution, where those butchers who belonged to the extreme right—those with a dislike towards Jews— had the upper hand. But the "Jewish question" was also raised in the sense of respectability within the group of the Budapest butchers. Generally, respectability is created by social morals, manners, the way someone is expected to behave, look, and represent something or someone. Thus, respectability in short is and was about social acceptance and respect. To draw on the ideas of George L. Mosse again, respectability is the "cement holding society together," and because of the Nazi movements and anti-Jewish laws, during the Second World War, "it had not been considered respectable to be a Jew."[33] To borrow a term from Erving Goffman, the "social identity" of Jews due to the anti-Jewish campaigns became stigmatized, which appeared to be "deeply discrediting."[34]

In this respect, within the micro world of Budapest butchers, we have a prominent example in the person of Mr. Damásdi, who prior to the war had held the deputy leader position within the Budapest meat industry association. Being of Jewish decent, he had been removed from his post in 1939–40, however, after the end of the Second World War, Mr. Damásdi came back and became the president of the very same organization. As president, he oversaw the activity of the justificatory committee entrusted with the denazification of the professions of butcher and slaughterman, and he often reflected on how becoming an outsider at the beginning of the war had hit him. His reflections on this wartime outsiderdom can help us reconstruct when and why being Jewish started to matter among the Budapest butchers.

The first notable event in this process occurred in 1939, when in the Valeria coffee house there was a discussion in the course of which influential butchers like Mr. Schadutz and Ferenc Gábriel expressed their concerns over the leaders of the Budapest butchers' professional chamber. They claimed that their leaders had had their demands rejected by the authorities far too often, allegedly because of the Jewish presence within their leadership. This discussion led to the initiative to "politely ask" Damásdi, who at the time was the deputy head, to leave his

32 Zalc and Bruttmann, *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, 2–3.

33 Mosse, *Confronting History*, 180, 211.

34 Goffman, *Stigma*, 2–3.

position.[35] Thus, Mr. Damásdi and other Jewish Hungarians were found unfit to represent the Budapest butchers in public, and, here clearly, being Jewish started to matter in a negative way. This moment was also perceived as an occasion for a change in the elite within the meat industry workers' community on the pretext that Jews could not represent effectively enough a professional trade anymore in a world in which Jewishness is perceived as inferior. Later, when the leadership of the meat workers' chamber was re-elected, the lawyer of the Budapest Butchers' and Slaughtermen's Chamber was not permitted to enter the room where the actual meeting took place because of him being a Jew. He was, however, allowed to keep his position.[36]

It is even more telling that in early 1943, another butcher at the official gathering of the meat industry workers' leaders recommended having the portraits of those colleagues from the "hall of fame" of the Budapest butchers' trade chamber removed, who came from Jewish families.[37] It is fascinating that the periodical of the meat industry workers found the proposal something worth reporting, but it is even more striking that these Budapest butchers wanted to eliminate the Jews even from the historical memory of their profession by removing these photos from the walls of their chamber's building. Although this proposal still belongs to the realm of social prestige, there is a shift here towards internal stigmatization: since the premises of the Budapest butchers' chamber were used exclusively by the meat industry workers, the question did not concern what the group displayed towards the society. Rather, it was about expressing and reinforcing an already internalized prejudice. Thus, initially, the group's aim was to maintain respectability due to the perceived expectations of outsiders, while these later actions were driven by the already internalized prejudice.

Let us not forget about the tragedy of the members of the Hungarian Second Army who were taking part in the Nazi Garman attack against the Soviet Union. Thousands of these Hungarian soldiers died in the winter of 1942–43 at the Don river bend, while trying to fight the Red Army without proper equipment. Was removing the portraits of Jewish butchers from the wall a reaction to the tragic losses, or did it rather have more to do with the future envisioned by

35 HU BFL XVII. 1597, the case of Ferenc Gábriel box no. 2, see the minutes of the Justificatory Committee dated 5 June 1945.

36 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 1. This lawyer was Miksa Leipnik, who recalled this election during the discussion of Antal Ihász's case in October 1945.

37 This initiative came from Gyula Kádár, and it is mentioned in the periodical of meat industry workers, *Magyar Husiparosok Lapja* vol. 4, no. 9, 23 February 1943 under the title "Elöljárósági ülésről készült beszámoló" [Report about the meeting of the board].

the Budapest butchers? It is difficult to answer these questions, but surely in a more radicalized society with the ongoing war, Jewish butchers were more and more side-lined, and soon the exclusion affected Jewish customers and business partners of the non-Jewish butchers as well.

However, the general situation in the meat industry was also in sharp decline in Budapest. Livestock from the provinces was rarely sent to the Hungarian capital, as farmers could already sell the animals at a high price at nearby locations. This triggered further governmental interventions into the businesses of butchers. By 1 January, 1943, rationing of meat products was introduced in Budapest, where every inhabitant of the city was entitled to just 0.4 kilograms of beef and 0.1 kilograms of pork weekly. Yet, setting these limitations did not solve all the problems.[38] As a representative of the butchers' chamber phrased it in the city council of Budapest when complaining about the fact that only very poorly fed animals had been sent to the slaughterhouses in the summer of 1943, "certainly enough meat ration cards have been issued, but there is not enough meat available."[39]

## *Some Changes, Options, and Decisions among the Budapest Butchers during the German Occupation and the Reign of the Arrow Cross Party*

For Jewish Hungarians, the situation worsened the most radically with the Nazi German occupation of Hungary in March 1944. Soon after this, Regent Horthy appointed Döme Sztójay as the new prime minister, and from April the same year, Jewish Hungarian individuals were marked with a yellow star badge on their clothes. On 22 April, the government issued new regulations on the supply of Jews, which effectively excluded Jews from meat consumption: order 108.500 K.M. reduced their meat ration to 0.1 kilogram of beef or horse meat per week.[40] As a young Jewish Hungarian mother, Mrs. Dévényi noted in her journal after learning about the new food access limitations: "[t]he Jews' food ration is

38 It was decree no. 114.070.1942 of the Ministry of Public Supply [*Közellátásügyi Minisztérium*] that from January 1, 1943 introduced food ration cards as the only "currency" for which meat products could be sold. *Magyar Husiparosok Lapja*, vol. 5, no. 1, January 1943, 1. Find here also the exact numbers for weekly consumption per capita on p. 6, in an article entitled "Értekezlet a husjegyrendszer bevezetéséről" [A meeting about introducing the rationing].

39 *Magyar Husiparosok Lapja* vol. 5, no. 27, 2 July 1943, 3, a quote from Béla Usety's speech.

40 Decree number 108.500 K.M., entitled "about regulating the food supply of Jews" [*a zsidók élelmiszerellátásának szabályozásáról*].

decreasing. We are not allowed to consume milk, eggs or butter. […] They want to starve us gradually."[41]

Once the Sztójay government came into power, it took only a little more than three months to ghettoize and deport to Nazi concentration camps more than 432,000 people from the Hungarian provinces, the vast majority of whom were tragically murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Budapest, ghettoization was a later and more complicated process than in the countryside. In the capital, a dispersed ghetto was established in June 1944, which in practice meant individual apartment buildings, so-called "Jewish houses" or "Yellow star houses," in which groups of Jewish Hungarians were confined.[42] Therefore, in the capital city, apartment buildings became the basic units of the ghetto, at least until November, 1944.

Deportations were halted in early July, thus most of the Jews in Budapest at least were not removed outside of the country, but their living conditions were harsh, with only one member per family permitted to leave the "Yellow star house" for the daily food-shopping for a short period of time. In June 1944, this period was first set between 2 p.m. and 5 p.m., which later was changed to 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., but this still meant that by the time the ghetto inhabitants reached the markets, the non-Jews had already purchased much of what was available.[43] Therefore, a lot depended on alternative sources of food and on how many resources and savings Jewish Hungarians still had.

I want to introduce here the case of Mr. Béla Kling, a butcher from Csányi utca in district VII, who after the war was falsely reported for improper wartime behaviour. As Gideon Hausner, the chief prosecutor of Adolf Eichmann sees it, every trial offers more than just a forum for justice, as it can also set moral examples, it can tell a story, etc.[44] Butcher Kling could not read Hausner's words, yet he used his denazification procedure for more than just the opposition of a false accusation, but for telling how he had confronted the anti-Jewish campaign. He has showed the ways how he had resisted when Nazi Germans and extreme right nationalists had been piling pressure on Jewish Hungarians in 1944. Kling used invoices issued in April and May, 1944 to prove that he had ordered services from Jewish Hungarian mechanics even after the Nazi

41 Huhák et al., *Kismama sárga csillaggal*, 44.

42 Cole, *Holocaust City*, 101–29.

43 Decree numbered 1920/1944.M.E., while on the changes of shopping schedules, see Czingel, *Szakácskönyv a túlélésért*, 99.

44 See Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem*, 76.

Germans had taken control of Budapest. As late as on 26 May, 1944, while trains filled with Jewish Hungarians were running towards Auschwitz, butcher Kling paid a massive sum, 626 pengős, to a Jewish Hungarian mechanic named Mr. Reichard to repair and maintain his refrigerators.[45] From another Jewish mechanic Kling ordered the instalment of an electric neon advertisement.[46] At a time when Jewish Hungarians were already a highly stigmatized group, these were brave acts. This holds true even if we take into consideration the fact that Kling was in a better situation than other butchers. Since he had been selling meat to army units for years, he could more easily afford to make humanitarian gestures than most of his colleagues during the war.

Nevertheless, there were other Budapest butchers who showed solidarity in this period. The butcher shop of Mr. Winter, for example, sold bigger portions of meat to Dr. Dezső Erdész in district VIII even after the governmental decree forbade Jews to purchase meat products.[47] Another butcher, János Szladovits, had an agreement with the neighbouring shoe-repair shop: for his Jewish Hungarian customers, he always took some of the meat to the shoe-repair shop for the transactions. His Jewish customers were able to enter the business without much risk, since it was not forbidden for Jews to have their shoes fixed.[48] After leaving the money, the customers quickly walked back to their "Yellow star house" with the food they had purchased. This method demonstrates that if a butcher wanted to sell meat products to Jewish Hungarians, he was able to circumvent anti-Jewish decrees and regulations concerning food rations. Another way was to deliver meat directly to the ghetto house, as Vilmos Szabó did. Szabó and his wife took turns delivering food to their client, Mrs. Engel, in Wesselényi utca.[49]

On 15 October, 1944, Horthy attempted to withdraw from the Axis alliance, however this attempt was aborted shortly after the radio announcement of his plan. The Regent was held by the Gestapo, and on the next day the extreme right Arrow Cross movement's leader, Ferenc Szálasi formed a government with the support of the occupying Nazi German forces. Shortly after this, Adolf Eichmann arrived in Hungary and requested the "loaning" of 50,000 able-bodied Jewish Hungarians from Budapest to the Third Reich. Jewish Hungarians were

45 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no 3, the case of Béla ifj. Kling. See the invoice issued by László Reichard on 26 May, 1944.

46 Ibid., see the invoice issued by Mr. Unterberger.

47 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 6, find this episode in the case of Mrs. Jenő Winter from Lujza utca 2.

48 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 5, the case of János Szladovits from Róbert Károly krt. 34–36.

49 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 5, the case of Vilmos Szabó, see the statements of Mrs. Engel, Mr. Blau, and Mrs. Klein.

then soon moved from the "Yellow star houses." Those who had protective papers like the ones issued by Raoul Wallenberg, could settle in the buildings of the so-called international ghetto, whereas the majority was moved to the "main ghetto," which was set up in district VII, around Klauzál Square.

The changes in the Hungarian political leadership provoked changes at the top of the Budapest butcher's hierarchy as well. A certain Mr. Gruber became the head of the professional chamber, and he created a new list of the Arrow Cross-affiliated butchers. It was this list of people who from now on were to receive proper supplies of meat.[50] Since the popular market hall on Klauzál Square became part of the newly established main ghetto, non-Jewish meat sellers originally located there started to request new butcher shops from Mr. Gruber. The aim was to relocate outside of the ghetto to those several empty business premises that had been confiscated from Jews. Among those requesting new shops was Mrs. Czakó, who was remembered as having publicly shown her husband's Arrow Cross party membership card to the new leader, Mr. Gruber.[51] It is interesting from a gender point of view how Mrs. Czakó, whose husband had been recalled by the army took the initiative within this patriarchal society and went to the head of this male-dominated professional cluster to present her requests in the late autumn of 1944.

However, it is even more interesting how butchers and other ordinary tradesmen intended to profit from the anti-Jewish rules and get themselves better shops, positions, etc. at the expense of the excluded Jews. Again, we have some positive examples, like the aforementioned butcher Kling. Several survivors of the Holocaust spoke about how, during their time in the closed ghetto (December 1944–January 1945), Mr. Béla Kling had brought them meat, animal fat, etc., which meant putting his own liberty and life at risk.[52] Elsewhere, the non-Jewish Pál Tóth, who normally ran a butcher business at the Garay market hall, survived the Soviet siege of Budapest in a building, where Jewish Hungarians lived under the protection of the Swedish embassy. He took meat to the building and even cooked it and offered it to the ghettoized people.[53]

50 HU BFL XVII. 1597, See for example the case of Antal Schwalm on this.

51 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 1, the case of Balázs Czakó, see the testimony of Lenke Illyefalvi on 9 June, 1945.

52 HU BFL XVII. 1597, the case of Béla ifj. Kling, box no 3. Find the declaration of the former inhabitants of Nagyatádi Szabó / Kertész utca 35, dated 28 March, 1945.

53 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 5, the case of Pál Tóth, Kárpát utca 3.

## *Conclusion*

These last examples prove that for many everyday Hungarian tradesmen, such as the Budapest butchers, there were some options available to help their Jewish neighbours' survival. When helping, butcher Kling was potentially saving his customers' lives, and thus his acts could be seen as having been motivated by personal interest. Still, the manner in which he maintained his business relations with Jewish handymen after the German invasion of the city suggests that he simply cared about others. Because Kling hired these Jewish men, they were able to earn money at a time when their own government was already limiting their space of existence and their opportunities. For some of them, at times, the signs of humanity could have meant more than the actual economic reward.

However, the real value of these micro historical cases is not in their representativeness, but in the "additional information generated by analysis conducted on the microscale."[54] In fact, the role of micro history is to describe how individuals or small groups manoeuvre within a normative social set-up: their actions and decisions tell a lot about the cracks and the contradictions of the given social system. They also give us an idea of the extent of freedom in which these individuals could make their choices.[55]

Reading these archival sources results in the impression that generally in 1942–43, there were very strong intentions within the butchers' trade to make it impossible for the Jewish butchers to continue to pursue their trade. The deep professional crisis with which the Budapest meat industry was confronted during the Second World War certainly played a part in this, but targeting systematically the Jewish Hungarian colleagues, nevertheless, suggests that anti-Jewish sentiments were widely shared within this professional cluster. The tendentious pro-extreme right preference at the slaughterhouses clearly had been influential in reinforcing these trends in the micro world of the Budapest butchers, but other, more macro factors were important as well.

One such factor was, for instance, the changes in social respectability, which led to a change as early as 1939–1940 in the leadership of the butchers' professional chamber. Thus, the anti-Jewish tendencies in the history of the Budapest butchers could be explained partly by the group's aim to maintain social respectability in a society in which Jews were stigmatized, partly by

54 Zalc and Bruttmann, *Microhistories of the Holocaust*, 4.

55 Levi, "On Microhistory", 93–95.

the internalized anti-Jewish prejudice, but as a third explanation, self-interest undoubtedly played a crucial role here as well. Governmental meddling into the affairs of the meat industry through food rationing, efforts to stock up on meat, and regulations concerning the number of slaughtering activities, etc., made things even worse.

However, butchers like János Szladovits, Mr. Winter, and Mr. Kling demonstrated that it was always possible to bend the rules and provide meat for Jewish clients, even after the Hungarian government had made this a rather difficult task to achieve. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the denazification check interestingly took over some functions of the "master's exam," as through this process it was possible to control the re-entry into the profession of butchers after the war. Consequently, this denazification check provided an excellent opportunity not only for retribution, but also for the vengeance of wartime insults. In the end, approximately 93 percent of the Budapest butchers got the green light to continue practicing their profession following the denazifying check, while some 7 percent of them were either banned or suffered even harsher punishments.[56] One example of the latter group was Mr. Károly Jánossy, who had a butcher shop at Népszínház utca 27 in district VIII. Although his wife had requested his denazification following the war in March 1945, this request was rejected due to an ongoing investigation of the People's Court.[57] The investigation established that Jánossy had treated Jewish Hungarian forced labourers cruelly during the war by beating them, and even causing fatal injuries to some of them, while also calling them "stinky Jews".[58] This Budapest butcher was sentenced to death in June 1946 and was executed as a war criminal on 17 February, 1947.[59]

56 HU BFL XVII. 1597, box no. 6, a complaint letter of a Communist Party official.

57 HU BFL XXV.1.a-1945-2185 the case of Máté Kele and other defendants.

58 Ibid., a sentence numbered Nb.VI.2185/1945, dated 25 June, 1946.

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# Neglected Restitution: The Relations of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property and the Hungarian Jews, 1945–1948

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This paper deals with the restitution provided to Hungarian Holocaust survivors by the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, in the first post-war years (1945–1948). This commission was the first national institution, which handled and took care of the assets of Holocaust victims and which was supposed to give compensation to the survivors. By investigating the cases conducted by the local representatives of the institution, this paper gives insight into certain aspects of Jewish–non-Jewish relations after the war, as well as how these relations and the restitution process were affected by other actors, such as the government commission itself, the political parties and the government. Additionally, the attitude of the most important Jewish associations toward the government commission is also scrutinized.

Keywords: restitution, Government Commission for Abandoned Property, Jewish property, property transfer, post-war

"On April 21, due to the approaching Russians, we evacuated. We were all brought to Sachsenhausen. […] From Sachsenhausen, the healthy were taken, only the weak and seriously ill were left there. Among them, me. At noon next day the Russians liberated us. I was taken to hospital and taken good care of for three months; they managed to feed me up to 42 kilograms. My future plans depend on the homecoming of my mother and siblings."[1]

Usually recollections recounted in front of the National Committee for Attending Deportees[2] ended like the story above. However, this was not the actual end of the stories of survivors, as the Holocaust and its consequences had an impact on their later lives. The damages caused to the persecuted were categorized into two groups by Stephen Roth: damages to the person and

1 HJA, DEGOB protocol no. 2055, K. H. DEGOB

2 DEGOB – Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság (National Committee for Attending Deportees); a Jewish relief organization which collected the testimonies of survivors who returned in 1945. The testimonies are kept at the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives and are available online at: http://degob.org/.

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material damage.[3] As a result of their ruined health, the psychological trauma they suffered, the loss of their relatives, the violation of their human rights (the loss of professional and personal freedom, human dignity, social security, etc.), and the confiscation of property, returning survivors had to rebuild their lives from scratch. The governments tried to aid the survivors in various ways, first and foremost by returning material assets or providing compensation instead. Often rehabilitation was needed, while many perpetrators were tried and condemned alongside. However, as Ágnes Peresztegi points out, it was impossible to compensate the survivors for damages to the person. Only symbolic acts could be made in this case, such as providing state annuities.[4]

At the end of World War II, Hungary became a democracy and the government abolished all previous anti-Jewish laws and decrees. The process of restitution, however, started slowly, and the question of compensation was not raised. The new laws condemned the anti-Semitism of the previous regimes, but they did not accept the responsibility of the Hungarian state. It was thus not immediately obvious that the persecuted would receive any compensation at all.

Like many of the other harms suffered by Jews, the effects of the theft of their property and belongings did not disappear without a trace; the survivors faced additional difficulties due to the lack of proper restitution, and these hardships accompanied them for years and had a grave influence on relations between Jews and non-Jews. Local authorities struggled to make just decisions in these legally and ethically difficult situations, since in the absence of the original owners, many of the properties in question had been given to people in need, including poor families with many children.

In the postwar chaos, initially there was political will for settling property issues. As a result, the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, the task of which was the handling of "abandoned" goods, was founded in 1945. However, the institution did not manage to fulfill its assigned role, as was expected by the reestablished Jewish community. Thus, the survivors often had to try to pursue their own interests on a local level in a field interwoven by the political, economic, and social interests of the government, a governmental institution, and their own representative organizations. Besides high politics, the inner life of micro-communities (Jews, non-Jews, local civil servants, members

3 Roth, "Indemnification of Hungarian Victims of Nazism," 736.

4 Peresztegi, "Reparation and Compensation in Hungary 1945–2003," 677–79.

of the authorities) also had an influence on whether any restitutions would be made in a given locality.

This article attempts to uncover how the functioning of the government commission influenced the lives of the survivors and what kind of relationship evolved between the Jewish community and the institution. "Jewish property" is thus a focal point of this text, and it therefore needs clarification: first and foremost, it refers to properties that were confiscated during the Holocaust and belonged to persons who had been defined as Jews according to act IV of 1939, one of the major anti-Jewish laws. According to this law, anyone who was Jewish by faith or who had one Jewish parent or two Jewish grandparents was defined as Jewish. Since I draw on cases involving private individuals, I consider instances involving personal property, not collective property. The government commission used the term "abandoned properties" to refer to property that had neither an honor nor a legal heir. This included valuables that had belonged to Jews or non-Jews and the original owner of which could not be found at the end of the war.

## *The Legal Background of Confiscations and Restitution*

Hungarian Jews became quite successful in an economic sense after emancipation in 1867. Nonetheless, they gradually began losing their wealth from the end of the 1930s as the acts XV of 1938 and IV of 1939 restricted the proportion of Jews to 20 percent and then to 6 percent in economic and intellectual occupations. As a result, approximately 90,000 people lost their jobs.[5] Act IV of 1939 and XV of 1942 limited the right of a person defined under law as Jewish to own private property by allowing for what was referred to as the "Aryanization" of agricultural and forest estates owned by Jews. Act XV of 1941 prohibited the marriage of Jews and non-Jews.

After the German occupation in March 1944, the confiscations were accelerated with the assistance of the Döme Sztójay government. In April, Jews were obliged to declare assets worth more than 10,000 Pengős. During the process of ghettoization, they were allowed to take only 50 kilograms of personal property based on the order of the 6163/1944. BM. VII. res. confidential decree. In the approximately 200 ghettos in the country and in the course of the

5 Kádár and Vági, *Aranyvonat*, 23.

deportations, the gendarmes and German guards confiscated the last valuables of the victims.

The government tried to control the redistribution of "abandoned" Jewish properties with little success.[6] After the authorities had taken inventories of the items left in locked-up Jewish houses, the gendarmes and policemen, who were in charge of the process of redistribution, often took these items.[7] Members of the authorities, civil servants, and private individuals all made claims to real estate which had been owned by Jews. Houses and shops which had not been redistributed were often plundered by the locals.[8] As all layers of society profited from the process of "Aryanization," Róbert Győri Szabó calls this aspect of the confiscations "institutionalized robbery."[9]

In November of 1944, Ferenc Szálasi's Arrow Cross government introduced a new decree (3840/1944. ME.) which meant the culmination of the confiscations. According to the decree, anything owned by a Jew was to be nationalized, and thus everything that was confiscated became the property of the state. This decree also prescribed that these assets were to be used to cover the costs of war efforts and war pensions.

After the war, the exclusion and stigmatization of the Jews were abolished by the fifth point of act V of 1945.[10] In the short democratic period, the Hungarian governments tried to reestablish the rights of Jews and to regulate property rights and issues connected to confiscated Jewish property with several laws and decrees. Decree no. 300/1946. ME. constituted a milestone in this process, as it provided survivors the right to reclaim their "Aryanized" properties. Act XXV of 1946 repeated and thus strengthened the withdrawal of every anti-Jewish law. At the same time, according to the act, any property which had been owned by

6 Many decrees were introduced for this reason. See for instance: Benosofszky and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen*, vol. 2, 146–50, document 38/a, planned decree about utilizing Jewish shops (later this plan was accepted as decree 2120/1944. ME. on June 10, 1944), and Benosofszky and Karsai, *Vádirat a nácizmus ellen,* vol. 3, 221–25, document 109b, Government decree regulating certain issues concerning Jewish property (decree 2650/1944. ME.).

7 Ungváry, *A Horthy-korszak mérlege*, 562.

8 Braham, *A népirtás politikája,* vol. 1, 616. Concerning the plunder of Jewish homes, see: MNL PML, V.1075 Db Monor municipality documents 2249/1945. Dr. Jenő Klein's appeal to the Housing Office about reclaiming her own house, Monor, June 10, 1945.

9 Győri Szabó, *A kommunizmus és a zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon*, 121.

10 Act V of 1945 concerning the ratification of the armistice agreed upon in Moscow, January 20, 1945. Decree no. 200/1945. ME. withdrew the anti-Jewish laws, thus making a basis for restitution.

a Jew but which had been left without an heir was to be given to a fund which would use its income to aid needy survivors and their institutions.[11]

Act XVIII of 1947, which ratified the Paris Peace Treaty, consolidated the previous achievements: among the political ordainments of the treaty, one obliged Hungary to provide legal equality to all of its citizens and take the responsibility to restore every asset confiscated due to the owner's origins or religion after September 1, 1939. If restoration was not possible, compensation was to be provided instead. The law also stipulated that goods that had not been claimed by their owners or heirs within half a year would be automatically given to organizations which represented the persecuted and would be used to help provide support for survivors.[12]

This law strengthened act XXV of 1946, based on which the National Jewish Restitution Fund was founded under the control of the government and the two major Jewish organizations, the National Bureau of Hungarian Israelites (*Magyar Izraeliták Országos Irodája*, hereafter referred to as MIOI) and the Central Bureau of Orthodox Denominations (*Magyarországi Autonóm Orthodox Izraelita Hitközség*, hereafter referred to as MAOIH). However, the Fund was established only in 1947, and by the time it started functioning, the Government Commission for Abandoned Property had been liquidated. Thus, in the four years after the war, the latter institution handled heirless properties.

## *The Government Commission for Abandoned Property and its Functioning*

The Government Commission for Abandoned Property was a national institution which functioned under the supervision of the prime minister's office from May 1945 until 1948. According to decree no. 727/1945. ME., which established the institution, it was supposed to take care of properties without an owner, to aid "persons who lost their wealth or livelihood; seek and bring home the deported."[13] It had to give at least partial restitution to those concerned.

Though most of the sources produced by the commission were burnt during the 1956 revolution, it is clear from the leftover fragmented material that, of the

11 The two paragraphs of the law dealing with this were abolished in 1997, with act X of 1997. This law created a fund the task of which was handling the pensions of survivors, namely the Jewish Heritage of Hungary Public Endowment (*Magyar Zsidó Örökség Közalapítvány,* MAZSÖK). The capital of the National Jewish Restitution Fund created in 1947 was also transferred to MAZSÖK.

12 Cseh, "Az Országos Zsidó Helyreállítási Alap létrehozásának körülményei és működése," 22.

13 Quotation from the first paragraph of decree no. 727/1945. ME.

abovementioned tasks, it fulfilled only the handling of "abandoned" properties. This is underpinned by the fact that a later decree, which also regulated the role of the institution (10.490/1945. ME.), did not even mention restitution. The government commission was in charge of establishing whether an item was "abandoned." It had to find these objects, rent them out, supervise the caretakers, and make decisions concerning the claims of the original owners or heirs. The costs of the institution's functioning were covered from the rental fees paid for the rented goods and the wealth handled.

The Ministerial Council elected the government commissioners and came to decisions regarding the institutional structure.[14] The first government commissioner was Dr. Rudolf Legéndy. He was followed by Gyula Zombory[15] and, then, Jenő Molnár. Their work was supervised by the national Court of Auditors and the presidential council of the government commission. The latter was created by the same decree that established the commission itself. It acted as a court of appeal, so clients who were displeased with the decisions of the government commissioner could turn to it for assistance. The leader of the council was also appointed by the prime minister, while its members were invited by the president from the member parties of the Hungarian National Independent Front,[16] the ministries, the council of trade unions, and other authorities.[17]

Several factors affected the work of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property. First and foremost, efficient administration was hindered by frequent reorganizations, an overly-bureaucratic inner system, and frequent changes of the staff.[18] This went hand in hand with a decreasing work morale; moreover, the colleagues of the institution had to take care of so many cases that it was impossible to handle all of them. As a result, the files accumulated and only half of them were dealt with.

14 Gábor, "Elhagyott Javak Kormánybiztossága," 120–21.

15 Social Democratic politician Gyula Zombory led the government commission from September 17, 1945 to June 14, 1946. See: Szűcs, *Nagy Ferenc első kormányának minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvei,* vol. 1, 812.

16 The Independent Agrarian Workers Party, the Hungarian Communist Party, the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, the Hungarian Peasant Party, and the Civic Democratic Party.

17 Gábor, "Elhagyott Javak Kormánybiztosa mellett működő elnöki tanács," 119; and *Magyarországi rendeletek tára*, 932. (*Magyarországi rendeletek tára* was the official collection of governmental decrees published annually between 1867 and 1945).

18 Kardos, "Az Elhagyott Javak Kormánybiztossága," 54–56. About the inner structure of the government commission, see: MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, unit I, 8324/1946. Concerning the preparations of the necessary restructuring of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, October 1946.

In addition to its center in Budapest, the government commission's network had agents all over the country: there were representatives present in every county and bigger city.[19] The work of the representatives was helped by local civil servants, who were chosen specifically for this reason, altogether approximately 400 individuals.[20] These "trustworthy civil servants"[21] were appointed by the municipalities at the order of the *főispán*,[22] and they were prepared for their tasks at meetings that were held in every district.[23]

Initially, two decrees regulated the fate of "abandoned" properties.[24] According to these decrees, the objects had to be declared at the central office of the government commission or in the municipalities, even if someone only knew about them but did not own them, or if someone had obtained them as a result of the discriminatory measures.[25] Banks were obliged to declare the wealth of those who "departed due to deportations or fled for political reasons."[26] Not fulfilling this obligation counted as theft or embezzlement and could result in a penalty of 8,000 Pengős or internment.[27] Anyone who "searched for and declared a significant number of abandoned objects, will be rewarded [by the prime minister]."[28]

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19 The authority of the representatives was regulated by decree no. 10.490/1945. ME. Gábor, "Elhagyott Javak Kormánybiztosa megbízottja," 120. See the list of local representatives: MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, unit K, 7/1947. The list was written in April 1946.

20 Kardos, "Az Elhagyott Javak," 54. See also: MNL PML V.1018 Db Bugyi municipality documents 520/1945. Letter of the Alsódabas district leader to the municipality leadership on the establishment of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, Alsódabas, June 5, 1945.

21 MNL PML, V.1009 Db Aszód municipality documents 501/1945. Concerning the establishment of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, Aszód, May 29, 1945.

22 The *főispán* was the administrative leader of a county.

23 See, for instance, the letter of the *főispán* of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County (May 23, 1945), MNL PML, V.1018 Db Bugyi municipality documents 520/1945.

24 Decree no. 2490/1945. ME., and order 471/1945 of the government commissioner.

25 MNL PML, V.1010 Db Bag municipality documents 556/1945. Announcing the letter of Károly Bartoss, local representative in Aszód, Aszód, August 23, 1945 (the number of the original letter is 46/1945).

26 MNL PML, V.1014 Db Budajenő municipality documents 719/1945. Letter of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property to the representatives, Budapest (the number of the original letter is 15/S-1945).

27 MNL PML, V.1010 Db Bag municipality documents 556/1945. Announcing the letter of Károly Bartoss. As a reference, according to the data of the Hungarian National Bank, the sustainment index in October-November 1945, increased from 3396 Pengős to 16724. See: Botos, "A pengő megsemmisülése, a forint születése," 180.

28 MLN PML, V.1024 Db Dány municipality documents 2428/1947. Announcement of the notary of the Gödöllő district, Gödöllő, September 1, 1947.

## *The Functioning of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property in the Light of Specific Cases*

Cases based on source analysis offer insights into the functioning of the government commission on a local level, the actions of the representatives, the kinds of problems which arose in the course of the processes, and the ways in which the representatives, party members, civil servants, and the clients themselves could deepen them. In short, the case studies may reveal whether the government commission could fulfil its obligations prescribed by the decrees.

In March 1946, Rezső Ernszt sent a letter to Tibor Papolczy, the representative of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property in Kiskunhalas. His request was the following: "For my 20-acre vineyard, please allocate me a cart. Considering that during my deportation my equipment was looted, completing the necessary work is impossible without a cart."[29] It becomes clear from the quote that during the processes of ghettoization and deportation, the farm was either plundered by the locals or the local government redistributed the properties found there. Ernszt received the following answer on the same day: "The representative of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property complies with this request and rents out the accessories of a cart wreck to be built up from the provision at his disposal: 3 wheels, 2 bottoms, 1 side and bottom built together, 1 shaft. The monthly rental fee is equivalent to the price of 4 eggs, which sum must be paid at my office between the 1 and 5 of every month."[30]

The rapidity with which this reply was given suggests that the letters were written as a formality and in order to provide documentation for the decision, and Ernszt probably had already spoken with the representative of the government commission in person. The case illustrates the limited success the government commission had in providing the survivors with efficient solutions: it had existed for a year already, during which time the local representative and the civil servants helping him should have had time to search for the "abandoned" properties. However, they obviously did not know what had happened to Rezső Ernszt's equipment. Therefore, the representative offered Ernszt parts of a wreck which he himself then had to use to build a cart. Moreover, he was not given these parts. Rather, they were rented to him for a monthly fee.

29 MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property 284/1946. Rezső Ernszt's letter to Tibor Papolczy, Kiskunhalas, March 16, 1946.

30 Ibid. Verdict of the representative, Kiskunhalas, March 16, 1946.

Naturally, Rezső Ernszt was not content with this solution. Two days later, he wrote another letter to the representative: "As I have rented out my vineyard, I do not need the allocated cart wreck anymore."[31] This case is an example of how Jews were given access, at a price, to objects instead of having the property which had been stolen from them restored to them or receiving some form of restitution. This did not lead to constructive and permanent solutions to their cases, and it did not help relieve social tensions, as in villages and smaller towns the fate of the properties and belongings which had been stolen from Jews was often an open secret.

During the early phase of restitution, the authorities frequently did not manage to find a good solution. Not getting back their properties was perceived as a violation of property rights by the Jews, while non-Jews regarded it as a legal offence if they had to return goods that they had come to consider their own. The latter reaction is illuminated by several cases. In January 1946, Mrs. Sándor Bancsi from Vámosatya visited the government commission's representative in Kisvárda and complained that on January 22, the representative and the police lieutenant of Vásárosnamény took her cow and gave it to Nándor Gottdiener. According to the protocol written about the case, "at that time in June 1944, she swapped her cow for another one in good faith, which had to be turned in. […] The cow, which she gave in exchange for this, was also good, and they turned that in instead of the one she owns now. Now she is there with five children, her husband is dead, she does not have anything, even her last cow has been taken; the milk, which means life, has been taken from her children's mouths."[32]

Then Mrs. Sándor Bancsi pleaded for the cow to be given back, and she asked Nándor Gottdiener to "turn to the Treasury, because she cannot lose her only cow as a consequence of the measures of that time, which would mean irreplaceable damage to her, as she would not have strength to get more or another."[33] The final verdict in this case remains unclear from the sources, but it is characteristic that the woman rejected the representative's first decision and a change to a situation which had come about as a result of the confiscations. In 1944, many others were in similar situations when they received certain goods which were necessary for the livelihood of their family at a normal price or for free. Moreover, when the

31 Ibid. Rezső Ernszt's answer, Kiskunhalas, March 18, 1946.

32 MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, 3826/1946. Protocol of the verdict of the Kisvárda representative, January 23, 1946.

33 Ibid.

new owners paid for the Jewish goods or invested money in reparations, they were more inclined to consider this property their own.

Among the documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, other types of cases can also be found. In a letter written in September 1946 in Nyíregyháza and sent to the central office of the government commission by the local representative Dr. Tibor Fábián, Fábián enumerated the cases of the "Aryanized" livestock of Jews, which all ended in different ways.[34] Two clients managed to reach an agreement concerning the fate of a cow, and the verdict reached in one case had to be annulled and the survivor had to give his cattle back to the widow who had obtained them during the confiscations. This case was decided based on the 12th paragraph of decree no. 300/1946. ME., which stated that the basic right of survivors to reclaim their properties could not be applied to livestock and agricultural equipment. The decree had been published in *Magyar Közlöny* in January, but rural representatives had not been informed about how it should be applied in cases of restitution. Fábián complained about this in his letter: "It is a pity that the government commissioner did not notify us about the correct interpretation of decree 300/1945. ME. at the time of its introduction, thus we made decisions referring to that."[35]

At the same time, according to the representative, some of the new owners willingly gave cattle back to returning survivors; but some others, upon hearing the news that the son of the original owner had come back, sold the animal which they had obtained during the confiscations. In the latter case, the representative put a ban on the sale of the cow and ordered the clients to go to court.[36] The description offers an example of the chaos of the process and the complexity of the relationships among the people involved, which frequently generated strong tensions. The attitude of the non-Jews, which was driven by various feelings and motives ranging from understanding and flexibility to greed, often influenced and was influenced by the behavior of the returning Jews.

There are sources which shed some light on the ways in which political parties tried to intervene in the functioning of the government commission. The county secretariat of the National Peasant Party *(Nemzeti Parasztpárt)* in Nyíregyháza, for instance, turned to the central office of the government commission because the local representative, "without any compensation, took

34 MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property 1543/1946. Letter of representative Tibor Fábián, Nyíregyháza, September 20, 1946.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

the cows of inhabitants of Nyírjákó, which they had bought at regular auctions, and gave them back to the relatives of the previous owners returning from deportation."[37] Following this complaint, the deputy department leader Tihamér Téri sent a letter to the local representative, in which he warned him that such livestock "are not to be considered abandoned and thus they do not belong to the authority of my government commission. The representative's procedure does not have any legal basis, it is lawless and illegal and a severe transgression of your authority."[38] At the same time, he informed the representative that, according to decree 300/1946. ME., such livestock could be reclaimed only through the court, and if the livestock in question belonged to an agricultural estate, it could not be reclaimed at all. Attached to the letter is the protocol of the public auctions held after the ghettoization on May 10, 1944.[39]

This letter demonstrates how the confiscations took place on a local level. As soon as the Jews were segregated, their properties were seized; their livestock was sold at auction before the deportations had even begun. At the same time, robberies were committed after the war, as the original owners or their heirs could not get their property or some share of their property back according to the law. Moreover, the case emphasizes two features of the functioning of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property. First, the local representatives of the parties actively participated and intervened in the procedures, which seems to have been an accepted practice, which is proved by the letter of the deputy department leader.[40] Second, colleagues of the government commission and especially rural representatives were uncertain which paragraphs of the laws and decrees should be applied in certain cases, which led to further legal complications.

37 MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property 17316/1946. Letter of Tihamér Téri to the Nyíregyháza representative, Budapest, May 24, 1946.

38 Ibid.

39 Ghettoization started at the end of April in Szabolcs County, and the deportation began on May 15, therefore the auction was organized between the ghettoization and the deportation. See: Braham, *A népirtás politikája*, vol. 1, 573, 575.

40 Among the government commission's documents, similar cases can be found. See for instance: MNL OL, XIX-A-5 documents of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property 10258/1946. The case of József Mermelstein.

## *The Attitude of the Jews towards Restitution and the Government Commission for Abandoned Property*

During the short-lived democracy, the Hungarian governments made it clear through laws and decrees that they condemned the politics of those who had been in charge before and during World War II. Nonetheless, they did not manage to meet the expectations of the Holocaust survivors. The shortcomings in restitutions can be traced back to complex economic, social, and political reasons, though the explanations lie for the most part in the postwar economic situation. The political leadership was supposed to provide aid for hundreds of thousands of destitute survivors, and they had no previous experience in such a situation.[41] An adequate arrangement was hindered by the fear of anti-Semitism: politicians feared that by giving back properties to the original owners, they would incite hatred against the Jews which would lead to pogroms.[42]

Furthermore, Hungarian radical forces, which included the Hungarian Communist Party *(Magyar Kommunista Párt)*, the National Peasant Party, and the Social Democratic Party of Hungary *(Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt)* together with the Soviet authorities, advocated new directives, and the importance of restitution was overwritten by the necessity of the economic recovery of the state. They paid particular attention to providing support for the poorest social strata, which had benefitted considerably from the confiscations.[43] Misuse of Jewish properties only made things worse. The representatives of political parties had claimed Jewish houses as party offices or had demanded their share of the loot in other ways.[44]

The central organizations which represented the interests of Jews were displeased with the situation. They voiced their opinion at meetings with government representatives, as well as in petitions sent to the prime minister and on the pages of *Új Élet* (New Life), the biggest Jewish newspaper. The editors regularly informed the readers about the new laws and decrees, and they gave accounts of the meetings held by MIOI, MAOIH, and government representatives.

41 Győri Szabó, *A kommunizmus és a zsidóság,* 57–58.

42 Blood libels appeared again in the postwar years, and pogroms were organized in several places, such as Kunmadaras and Miskolc. See Vörös, "Kunmadaras – Újabb adatok a pogrom történetéhez," 69–80; Varga, "A miskolci népítélet, 1946," 293–314; and Braham, *A népirtás politikája*, vol. 2, 1502–5.

43 Braham, *A népirtás politikája*, vol. 2, 1491, 1494. See also: Botos, *A magyarországi zsidóság vagyonának sorsa 1938–1949,* 67, 72.

44 Cseh, "Az Országos Zsidó Helyreállítási Alap," 120.

In December 1945, the paper started a discussion of the issue of restitution with a strong, one-page-long article. It voiced criticism of the slow process of bringing home the deported and government policies concerning restitution of stolen property: "The declaration of the government representative […] cannot satisfy the Jews in the sense that it leaves an open question: when and to what extent will these obligations be fulfilled. […] The returning [survivors] find ravaged homes, houses, looted shops; they are deprived of everything and cannot cover even the most primitive living conditions."[45] The paper emphasized the fact that the survivors were given aid by international Jewish organizations and the International Red Cross,[46] and "without the appropriate foundations, they cannot join in productive work."[47] Referring to law and national feeling, the national bureaus representing the Hungarian Jews believed that "the honor of the Hungarian nation requires that crimes shall be punished; justice, recompense and reparation shall be provided […]. Recompense and reparation are not only in the interests of Hungarian Jews, but are in the interests of the entire Hungarian nation."[48]

Concerning the decrees that aimed at returning the properties of Jews, the journalists emphasized more than once that "we do not seek 'privileges,' but an arrangement according to justice which would help the thousands of robbed, impoverished people get back their necessary properties."[49] They most probably tried to take the wind out of the sails of anti-Semitism with this argumentation. They objected to the fact that, according to decree no. 300/1946. ME., "things

45 Anonymous, "A magyarországi zsidóság küzdelme elégtételért és jóvátételért," *Új Élet,* December 11, 1945, 1.

46 International organizations, first and foremost the International Red Cross, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the World Jewish Congress aided destitute survivors and the institutions helping them between 1945 and 1948. The Joint Distribution Committee established a whole network of soup kitchens and health care institutions, and they organized courses to provide education for survivors. About the constructive aid of the Joint Distribution Committee, see: MZSL, XXXIII-4-A, documents of the Hungarian division of the American Joint Distribution Committee, unit 46. Announcement, Budapest, November 10, 1945.

47 Anonymous, "A magyarországi zsidóság küzdelme," *Új Élet,* December 11, 1945, 1.

48 Ibid. This article echoes the petition of the leaders of the Neolog denomination (April 20, 1945), which also referred to the honor of the nation and the international situation: Hungary "can be shown understanding by the foreign democratic powers if it shows serious will for the compensation of grave crimes and choosing new paths." MZSL, XXXIII-5 documents of the National Organization of Hungarian Israelites, unit 26. Account of the measures brought for the interests of the Jews by the Israelite Denomination of Pest and the MIOI, Pro memoria, July 23, 1945.

49 Anonymous, "A zsidóság 'elvesztett' ingóságai," *Új Élet,* February 7, 1946, 2.

necessary for a living," namely things on which the livelihood of the new non-Jewish owners depended did not have to be returned to the original owners.[50]

At the same time, "the decree deals with the question of the life circumstances of the Jew, who happens to have survived the persecution, ghetto, or the hell of deportation, the *aggrieved party* [emphasis in original article], merely by sending him to the Government Commission for Abandoned Property, where he can claim objects 'for use' before others."[51] But the paper called attention to other controversial legal practices as well: "This measure of the decree invokes severe legal complications, because in the cases described in the third paragraph, it respects the measures of the fascist and Arrow Cross 'authorities,' thus giving immunity and privilege to the lucky obtainers, which Hungarian law or general civil law does not recognize."[52] The article depicted the confiscations and the lack of restitution as one continuous process from a legal point of view.

In February 1946, *Új Élet* gave an account of a meeting between representatives of the government and Jews. At this meeting, the Jewish representatives proposed again that goods the original owners of which (or heirs to) could not be found should be transferred from the treasury to a "Jewish fund" which would be used to provide aid for impoverished survivors. They criticized the misuses which had taken place during the administrative processes of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property.[53] Ernő Munkácsi, the secretary of the Israelite Denomination of Pest and the Jewish Council, expressed dissatisfaction because "the properties of the fascists and the deported Jews are treated in the same way."[54]

Government representative and state secretary István Balogh emphasized that the government wanted to give the Jews the moral and material compensation which they deserved, but it was not in a position to do that. He referred, for instance, to the dangers of anti-Semitism, while with regards to the concerns of Jews, he answered that the Jewish organizations received special representation in the government commission. Gyula Zombory, the then government commissioner, added that Jews should set up cooperatives which would then put them in an advantageous position when it came to the

50 See paragraph 3 of decree no. 300/1946. ME.

51 Anonymous, "A zsidóság 'elvesztett' ingóságai," *Új Élet,* February 7, 1946, 2.

52 Ibid.

53 Anonymous, "Mit követel a magyar zsidóság," *Új Élet,* February 14, 1946, 2.

54 Ibid. The properties of "relocated" Germans and war criminals also counted as "abandoned," and they were handled by the Government Commission for Abandoned Property.

redistribution of properties.[55] Therefore, the leaders of the Jewish community and the representatives of the government talked about two different topics: the Jews found it logical that they would claim their property back and use property which went unclaimed to provide support for needy survivors, while the politicians and the government commissioner avoided addressing these issues and made it clear that restitution would not happen in the way that the Jewish organizations were demanding.

In May 1946, Munkácsi collected the grievances of the Jews in an article. In addition to the abovementioned grievances, he also found it unfair that "they made numerous decrees which consider us, with good will, but usually these were made without asking us in advance." Moreover, these measures "feared to state openly and without limitations that whatever was taken from the Jews must be given back." This caused "numerous loopholes, excuses and a hurdle-race everywhere; everywhere the acceptance of 'irreversible facts' and forcing Jews to accept this."[56]

According to Munkácsi, one of the main offences committed against the Jews was that survivors could not even get their estates back: "True, in theory they could get an estate in exchange, but this happened only in a small number of cases. On the other hand, many times a Jew who had just returned from deportation or military labor service and started to work his old land had to leave it."[57] He stressed again that it was a grave error that the Government Commission for Abandoned Property handled the wealth of Jews and Arrow Cross members together. "Moral reasons rule out the possibility that the democratic Hungarian state be a beneficiary of the mass murder in any form!" he claimed.[58] Finally, he called to the attention of his readers the fact that the Jews were not merely seeking restitution of their properties but were also entitled to get compensation for the suffering they had endured.

55 Ibid.

56 Ernő Munkácsi, "Nyíltan megmondjuk…," *Új Élet,* May 2, 1946, 1–2. The same worries and grievances were expressed by the MIOI in its August 1945 petition sent to Prime Minister Béla Miklós, as the leaders of the denominations were not involved in the law-making processes, the government handled the properties of leftist and Jewish persecutees differently, and "Aryanized" shops could only be reclaimed, if the relatives of the deceased owner had trade certificates. See Lévai, *Fekete könyv a magyar zsidóság szenvedéseiről*, 270.

57 Ernő Munkácsi, "Nyíltan megmondjuk…," *Új Élet,* May 2, 1946, 2. With decree no. 600/1945. ME. the government ensured that Jewish owners got their land properties back, with the exception of properties that had been subject to exchange. Though according to the decree those who received the land had to pay the original owners, this did not happen. Compensations were later extended to livestock and agricultural equipment. Thus, most of the Jewish communities and survivors lost their estates.

58 Ernő Munkácsi, "Nyíltan megmondjuk…," *Új Élet,* May 2, 1946, 2.

*Summary*

Due to the persecution, the postwar life of the survivors changed dramatically. In addition to losing relatives and friends, upon their return, they also had to face the fact that, during the processes of ghettoization and deportation, they had been left penniless. Getting back their properties (or properties which had been owned by family members) depended on local and national factors, i.e. on relations with non-Jews, the benevolence of the local municipality and its civil servants, government politics, and the functioning of the Government Commission for Abandoned Property.

The Hungarian government did not initiate a centrally controlled restitution program during the few years in which the country was under the administration of relatively democratic governments after World War II. Instead, the Government Commission for Abandoned Property was assigned to make decisions concerning the property issues of Jews and non-Jews. This process and the functioning of the government commission was met with dissatisfaction among the central organizations of the Jews, all of which kept the topic on their agendas in their petitions, during meetings with politicians, and on the pages of the most widely read Jewish newspaper. The lack of restitution of every previously Jewish-owned piece of property which had been owned by a Jew and the suppressed interests of Jews meant that survivors were often only able to restart their lives with the help of international Jewish organizations.

It is typical in the process of restitution that the terminology that was used in 1944, during the confiscation of Jewish properties, was still used in the years of democracy. The properties were referred to as "abandoned," and this euphemism suggested that anyone in possession of this property had not illegally acquired it or stolen it. Continuity can be observed even from a legal point of view, as the redistribution following the confiscations was not annulled by the government, and thus it accepted and maintained the previous injustice. Thus the governments which were in power in Hungary between 1945 and 1948 can be said to have failed the surviving Jewish community not simply because of the failures in policies concerning restitution, but also by failing even to apologize or give compensation for the non-material damages suffered by Holocaust survivors.

The responsibilities of the National Jewish Restitution Fund created in 1947 ranged from starting and revising inheritance lawsuits, searching for unclaimed Jewish property, and renovating or selling the acquired buildings to support Jewish

social institutions. Though it seemed like a genuine effort towards restitution for Holocaust survivors, in the emerging communist system the government maintained the institution only for formal reasons to ensure that Hungarian Jewish wealth was transferred back from Western Europe. In 1955, the Fund lost its independence and was merged with the National Church Office.

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# From Collaboration to Cooperation: German Historiography of the Holocaust in Hungary

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This article provides an overview of German research on the Holocaust in Hungary. Its first part sketches four larger contexts of the professional study of the Holocaust in Germany to show why, though it was one of the major chapters of the genocide against European Jews, the Holocaust in Hungary has not emerged as a preoccupation among German historians. The second and longer part examines the premises, conclusions, and reception of the three most relevant German-language monographs on the Holocaust in Hungary and immediately adjacent subjects. I argue that the Holocaust in Hungary has only been discovered in German historiography as a result of larger shifts starting in the mid-1980s, and the number of specialists in Germany dedicated to its study and the level of cooperation between scholars in the two countries has remained surprisingly limited. Nonetheless, German historiography has been responsible for path-breaking and widely discussed monographs regarding Hungary, with the publication of Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach's *Das letzte Kapitel* in particular serving as the subject of a transnational quarrel among historians in the early years of this century. I close with the stipulation that, with the further development of all-European perspectives on the Holocaust and growing interest in the last stages of World War II, the Hungarian case might be a more frequent subject of discussion in scholarly contexts that would ensure increased international visibility and attention in the future.

Keywords: Historiography, Hungary, Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, German-Hungarian relations

## *Introduction*

This study offers an overview of German-language research on the Holocaust in Hungary with a focus on historical monographs published in Germany (but not in other countries where German is the most spoken or one of the official languages). Its core section analyzes the methods, conclusions, and reception of three major monographs on relevant subjects.[1] The books in question are,

1 Regina Fritz's more recent monograph *Nach Krieg und Judenmord* on Hungarian history politics related to the Holocaust constitutes another seminal German-language contribution which analyzes its topic in greater detail than any of its Hungarian-language counterparts. See Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord.* As this paper was originally conceived and written as part of a Yad Vashem project entitled *Trauma and Rehabilitation*,

first and perhaps most importantly, Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's *Das letzte Kapitel: Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/45*. Originally released in 2002, Gerlach and Aly's book has been widely discussed internationally and, especially since its translation in 2005, also in Hungary.[2] German-language publications on Hungary with clear bearings on our subject also include two perhaps somewhat lesser known but similarly substantial monographs from the late 1980s, namely Margit Szöllösi-Janze's history of the Arrow Cross, entitled *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn. Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung und Herrschaft*,[3] and Rolf Fischer's study of Hungarian anti-Semitism until shortly before the genocide against Hungarian Jews, entitled *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939: die Zerstörung der magyarisch-jüdischen Symbiose*.[4] I chose these works in part because they are arguably the most significant recent scholarly accomplishments in the field, but also because the focus on monographs enables the study of their varying receptions and the occasional interaction between scholars in the two countries.

After offering a brief summary of the key arguments of the major scholarly contributions in question and a discussion of their transnational reception, I embed the German scholarship on the Holocaust in Hungary in its broader contexts. I begin by sketching four such larger contexts to explain why the Holocaust in Hungary did not emerge as a more important subject in German historiography.[5] These contexts are the emergence and changing priorities of contemporary history writing in postwar (West) Germany; the increasingly

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where a separate paper was meant to tackle the case of Austria, Regina Fritz's book, which was written by an Austrian scholar not based in Germany, shall not be discussed below. (I have reviewed the book in Hungarian in *Korall*, 53, 212–15.)

2 Gerlach and Götz, *Das letzte Kapitel*. The book has appeared in Hungarian translation as Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet – a magyar zsidók legyilkolása*, trans. by Gábor Kerényi (Budapest: Noran, 2005). More on its reception below.

3 Szöllösi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung*.

4 Fischer, *Entwicklungsstufen*. The history of anti-Semitism may have received monographic treatment in Hungary in the 1970s, but the focus was on its early manifestations in modern times. See Kubinszky, *Politikai antiszemitizmus Magyarországon*.

5 Tellingly, only one edited volume devoted to the topic has been published in German: Mihok, *Ungarn und der Holocaust*. Based on a conference held at the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung in October 2003, this rather brief volume included, with the expection of Wolfgang Benz's "biographical notes" and editor Brigitte Mihok's reflection on patterns of Hungarian remembrance, only scholars from outside Germany, most of them from Hungary. Beyond this volume, the German-language contributions of Franz Horváth on the Holoucast in Northern Transylvania merit mention. Revealingly, in important German-language volumes such as the pathbreaking *Dimension des Völkermords*, the chapter on Hungary was, exceptionally in the context of the volume, penned by László Varga, an author from the country in question. See Benz,

detailed and nuanced explorations of Nazi mass violence; growing attention to the main settings of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe in recent decades; and the place of Hungary in the regional-comparative study of Central and Eastern Europe.

What this paper cannot offer (though the subject would certainly merit a similarly detailed study) is an exploration of German public remembrance and its evolution over time with a focus on the various roles Hungarian actors have played in shaping it, for instance by contributing to major postwar trial as witnesses or experts or critiquing key German products of self-documentation and self-examination (see, perhaps most notably, Krisztián Ungváry's response to the first major exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht in the mid-1990s). Nor do I intend to sketch the reverse of my current subject here, i.e. the role Hungarian historians have played in Germany and how their research has drawn on and may have influenced German scholarly discussions.

## *Major Contexts*

The early postwar years saw the institutionalization of contemporary history writing *(Zeitgeschichte)* in the Federal Republic of Germany.[6] The intention to deal with the Nazi past served as a major impetus behind the establishment of a decentralized field, with the Munich-based *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* founded in 1949 emerging as its key institutional setting.[7] Though (unsurprisingly) more attention has been devoted to the postwar period since the early postwar years, the twelve years of the Third Reich have remained one of the central *foci* of German contemporary history writing in the seven decades since.

The agenda of dealing with the Nazi past has generated a multifaceted process over time. However, despite the central location of Nazi Germany within

*Dimension des Völkermords*. German historiography's treatment of various Hungarian historical topics has been the subject of a valuable German-language collection by Márta Fata, *Das Ungarnbild*.

6 *Zeitgeschichte* was famously defined by Hans Rothfels, a major agent of the institutionalization of the field, as "the epoch of contemporaries and its scholarly study." On Rothfels, see Eckel, *Hans Rothfels*. The officially anti-fascist communist state of East Germany may have heavily invested in acts of symbolic politics related to the Nazi past, including at major Nazi concentration camps within its territory such as Buchenwald, but it had not developed an internationally noted tradition of research into the history of the Holocaust and will therefore not be treated separately here.

7 The Institute, originally launched as the *Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Zeit* (German Institute for the History of the National Socialist Time) in 1949, was renamed *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute of Contemporary History) in 1952. For a monograph focused on the activities of the institute in a critical manner, see Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker*.

historiographical discussions of the contemporary era in the Federal Republic, the attention devoted to Nazi mass crimes has shown significant variation over time, with more recent decades seeing a massive increase. As Ian Kershaw insightfully remarked, long into the postwar period, West German historians seemed more interested in accounting for 1933 than attempting to explain 1941–42. In other words, they tended to devote much more attention to the origins of the Nazi dictatorship than to the origins or crimes of the Holocaust.[8] As Frank Bajohr has put it, in the first decades after the war, German scholars preferred merely to interpret rather than actually research the history of the latter.[9] Important scholarly accomplishments from earlier decades notwithstanding, the emergence of the Holocaust as a seminal subject in German historiography can be considered a relatively recent phenomenon which began no earlier than the mid-1980s.

Due to the presence of significant numbers of Jewish "displaced persons" in Germany after liberation, documenting and interpreting the Holocaust *(avant la lettre)* on German soil actually started practically immediately at the end of World War II.[10] This exceptional situation in the immediate aftermath of the war was soon over though, and it is fair to state that no major early Holocaust historian with longer-term international impact was active in the two Germanies of the early postwar period.[11] Despite its devoted and professional focus on Nazi Germany, when it came to research on the Holocaust, the discipline of history in Germany thus lagged significantly behind the study of history in other countries, including the writings of a number of prolific "survivor historians" in Poland, France, Hungary, the United States, or the newly established State of Israel.[12]

Triggered by a new generational constellation and partly also by the Eichmann trial and especially the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963–65,[13] both of which had

8 Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship.*

9 Bajohr, "Elvont rendszerviták."

10 On this, see Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*

11 Joseph Wulf, a Jewish immigrant from Poland, constituted a significant but only partial exception. As Klaus Kempter has shown in his detailed biography, Wulf could at times be rather visible and successful in the German public sphere, but he nevertheless remained on the margins of the German historical profession. Kempter, *Joseph Wulf.* On "Survivor Historians and the Holocaust" (with my contribution on Jenő Lévai), see the special issue (no. 1–2, 2015) of *Holocaust Studies. A Journal of Culture and History* edited by Boaz Cohen and Tom Lawson.

12 It is rather telling that within Germany, jurists had for decades been more actively engaged with the subject. On this, see Pohl, "A holokauszt, mint német és kelet-európai történelmi probléma."

13 See Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial,* and Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann.*

significant though understudied connections to the new understandings of the implementation of the Holocaust in Hungary and the experiences of survivors, the 1960s and 1970s brought about a first wave of substantial scholarly works on Nazi mass violence.[14] Even so, German historians continued to devote—in retrospect, surprisingly—little attention to the genocidal aspects of Nazi rule, and key aspects of the Holocaust continued to be practically ignored.[15] The breakthrough of Holocaust historiography did not take place until the 1980s and especially the 1990s.[16] In his recent overview of the development of what he has called a difficult field, Ulrich Herbert identified the years between 1985 and 2000 as the period of most intense engagement with this darkest chapter of German history.[17]

Perpetrator research has remained one of the special strengths of local historiography. Inspired partly by the groundbreaking works of scholars from outside Germany such as Christopher Browning,[18] the 1990s saw a whole host of refined and detailed research projects into concrete aspects of the implementation of the Holocaust and elaborate debates regarding its major and more "ordinary" perpetrators.[19] These research endeavors led to a substantial transformation of the image of Holocaust perpetrators from within German society and across the continent, not to mention an expansion of their numbers. No longer was this group reduced, in the scholarship, to a small minority of fanatical Nazis. The category of Holocaust perpetrator now came to be applied to hundreds of thousands. The process has also resulted in a reconceptualization of the context of and motivations behind the perpetrators' deeds.

In this period (between 1985 and 2000), several new subfields of professional Holocaust historiography also emerged. Perhaps most importantly, in contrast to the previous decades, German scholars started to devote themselves to

14 As a major example, see Broszat et al., *Anatomie des SS-Staates*. The late 1970s also saw the release of a major monograph on the treatment of Soviet POWs: Streit, *Keine Kameraden*.

15 Rather characteristically, a major exception from the 1970s studying the Reinhardt murder facilities was based on documentation from German trials. See Rückerl, *Nationalsozialistische*. A first major German-language monograph on the Reinhard death camps was published no earlier than 2013. See Berger, *Experten der Vernichtung*.

16 The airing of the American series *Holocaust* on German television in 1979 brought the term Holocaust into widespread use in West Germany. The shock waves it sent indirectly also generated much new interest among researchers. For a transatlantic study on such matters, see Eder, *Holocaust Angst*.

17 Herbert, "Holocaust-Forschung in Deutschland," 31–81.

18 Browning, *Ordinary Men*.

19 Innovative works on perpetrators include Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien* and Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten*.

the study of the perspectives of the persecuted as well.[20] Such a boom in Holocaust research in the late twentieth century notwithstanding, the fact that for a long time the massive growth of German scholarship did not lead to the establishment of major centers or independent chairs devoted to Holocaust Studies remained rather conspicuous in international comparison.[21] While there have been attempts to develop such centers in recent years, German historians of the Holocaust continue to be active at diverse institutions, and the established historians of contemporary times, unlike in North America, for example, have rarely been exclusively or even primarily devoted to the study of this subject.[22]

In the meantime, the end of the Cold War and the fall of communist regimes not only resulted in the unexpected and sudden unification of the two Germanies but also brought crucial changes in the basic circumstances of the study of the Holocaust. The postwar decades, when, from a West German point of view, the central locations of the Holocaust had practically all been "behind the Iron Curtain," were now over. Crucially for historians, the new accessibility of the major theaters of World War II and the Holocaust meant that local archival materials were now much more easily available. The dramatic political changes would thus lead to a new temporal and geographical focus in the study of Nazi Germany too: a profound interest in the second six years of the regime and the appearance of numerous publications which offer nuanced local contextualization of its major crimes.[23] Such attempts at local contextualization have often (and with direct bearing on our subject) also highlighted the pronounced roles played by non-German perpetrators.[24]

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20 See, for example, Löw, *Juden im Getto*, and Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*.

21 German historical studies of the Holocaust tend to be intimately connected to and are typically embedded in the study of Nazi Germany and World War II, even though several recent institutional changes, notably the creation of a department for Holocaust Studies at the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich and the establishment of the first chair for Holocaust Studies in Frankfurt a.M., have pointed toward the emergence of a largely independent field. This, however, has not made Germany entirely comparable to the United States or Israel, where rather large and separate institutions and programs in Holocaust Studies have emerged, and have done so significantly earlier.

22 Such institutions include university departments, research centers, and memorial sites *(Gedenkstätte)*. I ought to add that this decentralization does not mean that the level of institutionalization would be unsatisfactory. See Gerlach, "A tömeges erőszak nemcsak politikatörténet."

23 See the discussion of this trend in Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust*.

24 To mention only some of the most important publications: Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde;* Tönsmeyer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei;* Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik;* Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*. In more recent years, the case of Romania has been the subject of several important works: Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust;* Geissbühler, *Blutiger Juli;* Glass, *Deutschland und die Verfolgung*. Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's *Das letzte Kapitel* can be usefully placed alongside these works.

Despite this notable "eastward" shift to the actual settings of the implementation of the genocide, much of the German historiography has not only continued to insist on the allegedly "unique" features of the Nazi period, but has remained primarily interested in the history of the German state and society during those twelve years.[25] In other words, the increasing internationalization of Holocaust research and the Europeanization of the subject of research notwithstanding—processes to which German scholars have actively contributed—comparative and transnational approaches to the Nazi period have been rather slow to develop.[26]

In this context, new specialized studies on the involvement of East European states and actors offered a significant corrective to the practically exclusive focus on German Nazis familiar from previous decades. As Dieter Pohl put it, the new "common sense" among scholars is that East European states pursued radical programs of ethnic homogenization during World War II, and these programs included an "anti-Semitic consensus" which, however, aimed at realizing somewhat different goals than Nazi Germany: whereas a politics of extermination was being implemented by the latter, the policies of the former typically aimed for expropriation, exploitation, and expulsion under Europe-wide circumstances largely but not exclusively created by Germany.[27] As Pohl has added, in practice, there was substantial overlap between the two agendas though, which eventually meant that the East European states and societies became actively involved in perpetrating genocide.

In more recent years, the very term "collaboration" has also been contested, partly because of its clear moral undertones but also because it implies a rather strict hierarchy among actors. The more neutral-sounding concept of cooperation, which also allows for more impactful forms of local initiative, has repeatedly been suggested as a potentially more adequate alternative. The discussion among German historians regarding the relative merit of the two terms is ongoing. Its outcome is likely to have important consequences for the ways in which the deeds of East European actors will be conceptualized in the future, and the history of the Holocaust in Hungary could potentially provide intriguing evidence

25 For a major recent effort to compare beyond the totalitarian model, see Geyer and Fitzpatrick, *Beyond Totalitarianism*.

26 Such a transnational turn has been proposed in Patel, "In Search of a Second Historicization." Comparative fascism studies have also been pursued outside Germany more than within. This was partly due to the rather prevalent thesis on the uniqueness and incomparability of the National Socialist regime and its crimes. On comparative studies, see Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*.

27 See Pohl, "A holokauszt mint német és kelet-európai történelmi probléma."

for discussions and debates concerning this question.[28] However, Hungary's trajectory and transnational connections admittedly continue to occupy rather peripheral places in German historiography of the Holocaust; as a matter of fact, German historians continue to draw on Hungarian-language primary sources and scholarship originating in Hungary only in rather exceptional cases.

To move to the fourth major context of German historiography on the Holocaust in Hungary, German historians often prefer to place Hungary into a broader regional perspective. In this perspective, Hungary, like Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia, figures as a state in the Nazi sphere of influence with notable levels of independent agency.[29] A key interpretative thrust concerning these countries has aimed to explore the connections between their foreign policy considerations and their "Jewish policy" during World War II.[30] The gist of the argument here could be briefly summarized as follows: their trust in a German victory after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union made these countries cooperate avidly with the Axis, partly in order to curry favor with the imperial giant at one another's expense. Their trust also made them swiftly radicalize their anti-Jewish drive in 1941–42 to the point of active involvement in genocide. However, the change in the tide of the war in 1942–43 turned them into much more cautious or even unwilling satellites.

This interpretation is, by and large, applicable to both Romania and Slovakia. However, the special timing of the main phase of the Holocaust in Hungary in 1944–45, i.e. after the main phases of the Europe-wide genocide and the clear reversal of fortunes on the Eastern Front, means that such links are rather tenuous in the case of Hungary. Hungarian actors had on several occasions committed mass murder against Jews in Hungary or in Soviet territory before 1944, and they had initiated deportations from Hungary shortly after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941,[31] but the main phase of the Holocaust in Hungary (the deportation of approximately 437,000 persons from Hungary, the very large majority of them to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the course of less than

28 For an elaboration of this point, see my article, "The Radicalization of Hungarian anti-Semitism."

29 This statement applies to Slovakia and Croatia as well, two countries that have often been conceived as mere "puppet states." See especially Tönsmeyer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei,* and Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs.*

30 See, perhaps most characteristically, the recent monograph by Case, *Between States* which is admittedly not a German work of scholarship but reflects transnational approaches.

31 See chapter two of Kádár et al., *The Holocaust in Hungary* in particular.

two months) coincided with the beginning of what turned out to be the last year of the war in Europe.[32]

1944–45 amounts to a highly specific phase of World War II and of Nazi German history too. As compared to the impressive efforts historians made to account for the origins of the Nazi *Endlösung* decades ago,[33] these last waves of Nazi violence have begun to be studied in comparable detail only recently.[34] The further radicalization of the Nazi regime in the last stages of the war could indeed be usefully studied in combination with the most similar case of Hungary, not to mention the need to uncover in more detail the decisively important interactions among the representatives of the two countries and the members of the two societies in the same period.

To summarize, contemporary history writing emerged early in postwar West Germany, and this growing field has produced substantial and increasingly nuanced explorations of Nazi mass violence. However, only in recent decades has there been a closer focus on the actual settings of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, though without the Holocaust in Hungary emerging as an important preoccupation for German historians.

## *Key Contributions*

Having sketched four major contexts of the German study of the Holocaust in Hungary, let us now turn to the most significant achievements of German historiography regarding this subject. Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's *Das letzte Kapitel* is in my assessment the towering achievement in this regard. In his most recent volume, Tim Cole, a leading British authority on the Holocaust in Hungary went so far as to place *Das letzte Kapitel* next to Randolph Braham's seminal *The Politics of Genocide*,[35] calling the book one of the two comprehensive,

32 By this time, Auschwitz-Birkenau had emerged not only as the main center of the Nazi concentration camp system but also as the main annihilation camp and central stage of the Holocaust. Now see Wachsmann, *KL. A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*.

33 See, among many other works, Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*. See also Gerlach, "The Wannsee Conference."

34 See Kershaw, *The End. Hitler's Germany*. On the concentration camps in the last year of the war and thus with special relevance to the scholarly study of the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry, now see Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno*. On the death marches (which were closely connected to the deportations from Hungary), see Blatman, *The Death Marches*.

35 See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

internationally available histories.[36] At the same time, Cole contrasted these two major works in several respects, pointing out that whereas Braham drew "in the main on national level Hungarian state archives," the German authors drew "primarily on German documents."[37] Perhaps more importantly, Cole asserted that the two overviews crucially diverge in their understandings of why the Holocaust was carried out in Hungary: "In what approaches the playing out of the so-called intentionalist vs. functionalist debate that dominated Holocaust Studies in the 1970s and 1980s in miniature, these authors differ over whether a Nazi master plan for deportations was implemented in Hungary, or greater importance should be assigned to the local dynamic in the radicalization of measures."[38]

*Das letzte Kapitel* not only constitutes the sole monographic study on the subject in German, it can also be considered innovative in several respects. Gerlach and Aly's book devotes substantial attention to the prehistory, motivating factors, and background of the Holocaust in Hungary. Following a theoretically- and methodologically-oriented introductory chapter, the book analyzes Hungarian–German relations in the interwar years, the socioeconomic situation of Hungarian Jews, and the anti-Semitism of the Horthy era. The coverage of these themes is in turn followed by a discussion of the key reasons behind and an analysis of the concrete manner of implementation of the German occupation; the composition and functioning of the occupying apparatus; state-organized economic expropriation and redistribution; and the decision-making process and policies of annihilation. Last but not least, the book covers the persecution of Hungarian Jews after the major wave of their mass deportation in May, June, and July 1944 as well as their main survival strategies, including their sufferings as slave laborers.

*Das letzte Kapitel* was authored by two well-recognized German scholars who have published several other important works on Nazi rule, the Holocaust, and extreme forms of violence.[39] Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach were first recognized for their studies on the planners of annihilation and the connections between the German war economy and genocide, respectively, which were

36 The years later saw the release of Kádár et al., *The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide*.

37 Cole, "Prologue."

38 Ibid., 3.

39 See Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*; Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*; Aly and Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*; Aly, *"Endlösung"*; Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat*; Aly, *Die Belasteten*; Aly, *Europa gegen die Juden*. Alongside Aly's coauthored book on the case of Hungary, another three of Götz Aly's books have also been translated into Hungarian.

published in the late 1980s and 1990s.[40] In recent decades, Aly has arguably come to shape the German debates on Nazi mass violence and its origins perhaps more than any other author.

In her review, Heidemarie Petersen highlighted that their joint monograph from 2002 might be viewed as Aly's and Gerlach's attempt at combining their previous explanatory models.[41] Their monograph indeed approached Hungary as a case study to explore political, socioeconomic, and military historical connections, and it provided the first such complex study of a much neglected major chapter of the Holocaust. As it was written by two prominent scholars with established reputations, *Das letzte Kapitel* was arguably bound to be rather widely received in Germany and to shape the reigning conceptions of the Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust. Several scholars with important contributions of their own to the historiography, such as Frank Golczewski, Thomas Sandkühler, Tatjana Tönsmeyer, and Michael Wildt, have indeed offered summaries, contextualizations, and assessments of the book on the pages of scholarly journals and in major daily newspapers.

The book has also been widely received and debated in Hungary. Upon its release in Hungarian translation in 2005,[42] it was reviewed in various scholarly forums, including non-historical venues such as the journal on social policy *Esély* (Opportunity) and *Közgazdasági Szemle* (Review of Economics), as well as Hungarian mainstream dailies and weeklies, such as *Népszabadság* and *Élet és Irodalom*. Gerlach and Aly's approach, furthermore, could be usefully compared to those used by some of the most promising young Hungarian historians of the Holocaust of the time (who now belong to the middle generation), such as Gábor Kádár, Zoltán Vági, and Krisztián Ungváry.[43]

Tellingly, social policy expert Dorottya Szikra reviewed Kádár and Vági's book on the economic annihilation of Hungarian Jews alongside the Hungarian translation of *Das letzte Kapitel* (the two were published at almost exactly the same time), lauding them as milestones in the secondary literature which mark the start of a new epoch in the study of "social policy."[44] As Szikra maintained, such innovative works explore the links between questions of foreign and domestic

40 See, in particular, Aly and Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung,* Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde.*

41 Petersen, "Rezension von: Christian Gerlach / Götz Aly: Das letzte Kapitel."

42 Gerlach and Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet.*

43 By the latter, see especially Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, which significantly draws on Götz Aly's pathbreaking explorations.

44 Szikra, "Új ablak a magyar szociális ellátások történetére," 110; Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás.*

policy as well as sociological and political economic factors, on the one hand, and racial policy and persecution, on the other, to reveal the dark side of modern social policy.[45] At the same time, Szikra contrasted the works of the two author duos by highlighting that Gerlach and Aly remained focused on states and their international relations, whereas Kádár and Vági also devoted attention to the actual mechanisms of expropriation and violence on the local-societal level.[46]

This important difference was arguably the key factor behind the criticism leveled against *Das letzte Kapitel* by Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági in their review, entitled "'Racionális' népirtás Magyarországon" ("Rational" Genocide in Hungary).[47] Kádár and Vági praised *Das letzte Kapitel* for its presentation of the Holocaust as a complex series of events and for its elaboration of a multicausal explanatory scheme. They categorized the book as a post-functionalist synthesis, which asserted the primacy of pragmatic considerations but integrated elements of both the functionalist and the intentionalist schools of interpretation. Kádár and Vági by and large agreed with Aly and Gerlach that the plan and the implementation of the Holocaust in Hungary were generated, above all, by unsolved problems related to the economy and financing of the Third Reich and a looming crisis in supplying German society. At the same time, a key aim of their review was to offer a critical assessment of Gerlach and Aly's conception of German and Hungarian intentions and their depiction of the steps taken by the two sides to acquire the wealth of Hungarian Jews. Drawing on their own research, Kádár and Vági concluded that the persuasive power of the book was weakened by significant interpretative mistakes. In other words, they maintained that the approach was persuasive, but the authors' specific interpretations were less convincing.

Kádár and Vági claimed that there was a tremendous gap between plans and their actual implementation, and they contended that by failing to address or explain this gap, Gerlach and Aly had not succeeding at grasping the practical mechanisms of expropriation.[48] As specific agencies, such as ministries and local administrations, were ultimately responsible for the exact manner of implementation, cases of embezzlement and theft proliferated,

45 More specifically, Szikra recommended the study of the two sides of social redistribution (the "contributors" and the "recipients"), with particular attention to "racial" distinctions.

46 Ibid., 113.

47 Kádár and Vági, "'Racionális' népirtás Magyarországon."

48 As they explained, the Hungarian government may have declared principles of redistribution, but it proved unable to develop comprehensive legal framework in 1944.

enabling significant segments of Hungarian society to profit from robbing the persecuted without the Hungarian government managing to inject the decisive part of so-called "Jewish wealth" into the "Hungarian" economy or channel it into the state budget.[49] Moreover, Kádár and Vági challenged Aly and Gerlach's contention that the occupying German forces had remained largely uninvolved in this dimension of the genocidal process: instead of a neat division of labor as postulated by them, the Germans' actions to acquire "Jewish wealth" in Hungary led to numerous conflicts and raised serious tensions between them and their local partners, according to Kádár and Vági.

Beyond such criticisms of a more empirical bent, Kádár and Vági also complained that Gerlach and Aly had interpreted the events through somewhat narrowly defined concepts of rationality and irrationality. As the reviewers pointed out, "Christian Hungarians" may have aimed to make economic gains, but the mass deportations in fact significantly damaged the Hungarian economy and disrupted public supply. As these aspects were neglected in their book, the German authors did not realize or address the fact that the deportation of hundreds of thousands caused a decline in production and had a deleterious effect also on the economic situation of "non-Jews" in Hungary.

Beyond Kádár and Vági's review of the German original of *Das letzte Kapitel* in *Buksz,* the leading Hungarian-language journal devoted to scholarly reviews, Gerlach and Aly's key theses were also scrutinized by László Karsai, one of the doyens of Hungarian Holocaust historiography.[50] If "'Racionális' népirtás Magyarországon" was penned by scholars explicitly sympathetic to Gerlach and Aly's post-functionalist agenda even if they also questioned the more specific interpretations in their book, Karsai proved much more critically disposed: he essentially argued that Gerlach and Aly's ambition of reinterpreting the Holocaust in Hungary failed to yield convincing results.[51] In his "A holokauszt utolsó fejezete" (The last chapter of the Holocaust), Karsai explained that the two key novelties of the book were, first, its arguments that the Sztójay government played the role of initiator and actively shaped the implementation of the Holocaust and, second, that the stolen wealth of Hungarian Jews significantly

49 In other words, they claimed that the state-led campaign of robbing the dead had been executed much more efficiently than that of redistributing wealth.

50 Karsai, "A holokauszt utolsó fejezete."

51 Rather characteristically for Karsai's "rejectionist" take on the book, a section of his elaborate critique was entitled "A List of Mistakes." The pages that followed were meant to demonstrate Karsai's profound knowledge of key primary sources, sources he claimed Gerlach and Aly often misread.

contributed to financing the war economy and stabilizing the quality of life for the rest of the population.

Karsai agreed with Gerlach and Aly that the Germans may not have arrived with a detailed plan of deportation in March 1944, but he emphasized that it must have seemed unnecessary to them to prepare such an elaborate blueprint in writing. In other words, the lack of evidence regarding detailed German planning did not imply that the Germans had not been preparing to murder as many Hungarian Jews as they possibly could. Karsai thereby contested the claim that ideological factors had played only secondary roles in the genocide, and he made considerable efforts to demonstrate that a comprehensive plan of deportation was formulated early on during the German occupation. In his assessment, the fact that the Germans and Hungarians responsible for deporting Hungarian Jews created six zones of deportation before the end of April 1944 contradicts Gerlach and Aly's conception of the three main stages of interactive decision making.[52] Moreover, like Kádár and Vági, Karsai emphasized that registering, storing, and "redistributing" so-called "Jewish wealth" in an orderly manner proved beyond the capacity of Hungarian authorities, and that *Das letzte Kapitel* failed to survey Holocaust-related costs incurred by the authorities to arrive at a more precise balance sheet.[53]

Karsai concluded that the explanation according to which the Hungarian authorities practically forced the deportation of the large majority of Hungarian Jews on the Nazi Germans amounted to no more than "baseless speculation" and "a harsh accusation." In short, the primarily intentionalist interpretation that Karsai reiterated went hand in hand with his suggestion of the clear primacy of German responsibility, whereas Kádár and Vági's greater appreciation for the (post-)functionalist position also implied more ready acceptance of the Hungarian side's grave culpability.

It is worth comparing these critical Hungarian-language assessments with the reception of *Das letzte Kapitel* in German. Frank Golczewski, German and Eastern Europe expert and professor at the University of Hamburg, thought the book offered a radical reinterpretation that presented the Hungarian Shoah as

52 It is worth noting that Kádár and Vági have released a volume on the stages of Hungarian-German interactive decision making in the spring of 1944 since. See Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*.

53 His line of reasoning was that the deported masses were simply too large, the time period too short, and the property left behind too enticing for thieves on the lower levels of power hierarchies, so the Hungarian state could not succeed in acquiring and putting to new use the otherwise notable wealth that the Holocaust might have generated.

an act "largely justified and implemented" by Hungarians save for the actual acts of murder.[54] Intriguingly, Golczewski asked whether access to further sources in Hungarian would have made Gerlach and Aly reconsider some of their conclusions, claiming that this was "difficult to judge," but then adding that "this might not be the case to a large extent."[55] Thomas Sandkühler, a noted expert on the Holocaust in East Galicia and, as of 2009, professor for *Geschichtsdidaktik* at Humboldt University in Berlin, similarly explained that Gerlach and Aly's book revealed a division of labor between Hungarians and Germans which was used due to partly overlapping and partly divergent motives when short-term German calculations met longer-term Hungarian plans.[56] Sandkühler also thought that one of the main findings of the book was how eagerly Hungarians participated in the genocide, and he expressed no reservations or qualifications concerning this conclusion. His only notable criticism concerned Gerlach and Aly's strong emphasis on "reformist social policy." Sandkühler thought that, in this respect, the authors effectively reproduced contemporary Nazi propaganda slogans.

Unlike his aforementioned colleagues, Jürgen Zarusky, a researcher at the Institute of Contemporary History, formulated more encompassing criticisms of *Das letzte Kapitel*. Zarusky shared the view that anti-Semitic obsessions alone could not account for the Holocaust and questions regarding the economic rationality of the genocide deserved to be raised.[57] However, he took serious issue with Gerlach and Aly, claiming that the connections on which their book was meant to focus were not properly illuminated: they did not really manage to explain the relationships between various causes and impacts, Zarusky asserted, nor did they explain which motives were of decisive importance for different actors. Zarusky's review ultimately argued that "economic rationalizations" played a limited role in Nazi policy making towards the end of the war, and there could be talk neither of the primacy of production logics over anti-Semitic considerations nor of the efficient use of the labor force.

What all the aforementioned German reviews have in common is that none of their authors could claim research expertise regarding the history of the Holocaust in Hungary.[58] The criticisms they offered thus tended to be milder

54 Golczewski, "Das letzte Kapitel."

55 Ibid.

56 Sandkühler, "Arbeitsteiliger Massenmord."

57 Zarusky, "Lag dem nationalsozialistischen Judenmord."

58 The only scholar with expertise in Hungarian history to have reviewed the book in German is Árpád von Klimó. However, Klimó is not a Holocaust researcher either. See von KIimó, "Der ungarische Judenmord."

and diverged from the detailed empirical rebuttals made by Kádár and Vági or Karsai by focusing more on questions of theory and overall interpretation. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the general assessments of Aly and Gerlach's approach and explanations ranged from positive to negative in both countries.

As Regina Fritz recently remarked, the history of fascism and that of the Arrow Cross movement, party, and regime in particular have long remained rather poorly researched within Hungarian historiography, despite or perhaps because of all the political discourses surrounding them.[59] It may be true that around the time of Fritz's writing in 2013, two new Hungarian-language monographs were just about to be published that arguably substantially improved the situation.[60] Until then, however, Margit Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn. Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung und Herrschaft* (The Arrow Cross movement in Hungary. Historical context, development and rule) could be considered the only major work of history on the Arrow Cross in any language, other than Éva Teleki's somewhat dated work from the 1970s.[61] Based on the author's dissertation from 1986 and awarded the prize of the German Society for Southeast European Studies *(Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft)* in 1987, Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* was eventually published in 1989.

More specifically, Szöllösi-Janze's book offers an original exploration of German, British, and American archival materials as well as documents drawn up or used by key Arrow Cross functionaries, while also drawing on the secondary literature in German and Hungarian. The book devotes some eighty pages to describing the socioeconomic and political scene of interwar Hungary to illuminate the broader context of the emergence of the Arrow Cross. Szöllösi-Janze subsequently provides more focused analyses of the sudden rise, social support, changing fortunes, and major failures of the Arrow Cross movement between 1935 and 1945.[62]

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59 Fritz, "Zwischen Dokumentieren," 30. As a significant exception, Regina Fritz could refer to Zoltán András Kovács's study of the Interior Ministry of the Szálasi government. Kovács, *A Szálasi-kormány belügyminisztériuma*. Important Hungarian scholarship on fascism from earlier decades include works by Miklós Lackó and Mária Ormos. See Lackó, *Nyilasok, nemzetiszocialisták,* Ormos, *Nácizmus – fasizmus*. The prolific Ormos also published biographies of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler.

60 Paksa, *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták,* Paksy, *Nyilas mozgalom Magyarországon*. There are now also two Hungarian-language biographies of Ferenc Szálasi, one by Paksa and one by Karsai.

61 For Teleki's earlier work in Hungarian, see Teleki, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon*.

62 The years 1935 to 1944 receive slightly more attention than the months of Arrow Cross rule in late 1944 and early 1945 (180 as opposed to 150 pages).

As Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller argue in their overview of the evolution of fascist studies, Szöllösi-Janze's book might be viewed as part of a third wave of research into fascism when researchers began to explore indigenous movements outside the "core Axis states" of Italy and Germany in greater depth.[63] However, as Schlemmer and Woller highlight, such important additions to the study of fascism could count on significantly less public interest in West Germany than those that were originally published during the great wave of the 1960s and 1970s.[64] At the same time, the German reception of Szöllösi-Janze's work was generally positive, as illustrated by Hungarologist Holger Fischer's review, which praised *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* as an impressively documented and logically structured work "entirely worthy" of the prize it had been awarded.[65] Gyula Borbándi, one of the leading personalities of the Hungarian émigré intellectual scene in Germany, also praised the work as "the most detailed" and "best documented" one on its topic which thus filled a significant gap in the scholarly literature.[66] Borbándi's review highlighted two original aspects of Szöllösi-Janze's approach in particular, namely its detailed analysis of the social bases of the Arrow Cross and its descriptive-analytical tone, i.e. an absence of evaluative statements (with which Borbándi did not take issue).[67]

Szöllösi-Janze had a familiar connection to her subject which could potentially have made the international reception of the monograph's neutral approach and tone more polemically charged (even if this family relationship was not explicitly highlighted in the scholarly discussions). Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, a leading expert on Central and Eastern European fascism at the time, for instance, found Margit Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* to be an "impressive study."[68] At the same time, Nagy-Talavera not only pointed to the special and rather unfortunate timing of Szöllösi-Janze's research during the last phase of

63 See Schlemmer and Woller, "Politischer Deutungskampf," 11. *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* could thus be seen as the Hungarian counterpart to Armin Heinen's *Die Legion "Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, a near contemporaneous German-language monograph on the Iron Guard. See Heinen, *Die Legion*.

64 See Schlemmer and Woller, "Politischer Deutungskampf," 11.

65 Fischer, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze."

66 Borbándi, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze."

67 More specifically, Borbándi was unsatisfied with the categorization of certain Hungarian political forces, maintaining that Szöllösi-Janze's characterization of Gömbös' attempt as "fascism from above" was unconvincing. Indeed, this label struck him as a contradiction in terms.

68 Nagy-Talavera, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze," 456–57.

the Cold War and communist rule, i.e. shortly before much sensitive archival material would have become available. As a witness to the events depicted in the book, he was also convinced that, no matter how commendable Szöllösi-Janze's detachment may have seemed from a professional point of view, she had thereby unduly neglected crucial aspects of the period.

Leading British Habsburg historian R. J. W. Evans thought that, beyond providing a reliable but not terribly innovative description of the advances of fascist organizations and of the supporters and breakthrough of the Arrow Cross in the Hungary in the 1930s, Szöllösi-Janze managed to break new ground in two areas in particular: by providing a balanced appraisal of the Arrow Cross worldview and by examining the party's attempts to implement its policy ideas.[69] However, like Nagy-Talavera, R. J. W. Evans found Szöllösi-Janze's dispassionate approach insufficient to convey a real sense of key personalities and a convincing account of the horrible drama they unleashed. It might be worth noting that, rather differently from the recognized country and regional experts Nagy-Talavera and Evans, German-British historian Francis L. Carsten praised Szöllösi-Janze's book for providing a mass of original detail and a thorough description of Arrow Cross rule in 1944–45, and his only major criticism related to what he saw as Szöllösi-Janze's insufficient explanation of the temporary decline of the Arrow Cross during the years of World War II, when Germany still appeared victorious.[70]

Rolf Fischer's *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867-1939*, the third major German-language monograph on Hungary with a bearing on the history of the Holocaust, was published in 1988 and could thus be seen as part of the same broader wave of interest in the persecution and extermination of European Jewry observable after the mid-1980s.[71] Like Szöllösi-Janze's history of the Arrow Cross, Rolf Fischer's book received some international attention. Soon after its release, *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* was reviewed by both István Deák and Hillel Kieval, two eminent authorities

69 Evans, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze," 260–61.

70 See Carsten, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze," 363–64. It might be worth adding that, despite such reservations from abroad regarding her award-winning dissertation and unlike Christian Gerlach (who has been appointed to a tenured position at the University of Bern in Switzerland) and Götz Aly (who has established himself as an extraordinarily successful independent historian in Germany), Margit Szöllösi-Janze, who has subsequently specialized in the history of science, became a professor first in Salzburg and then also in Germany, in Cologne and more recently in Munich. Her dissertation on the Arrow Cross may not have been a decisive reason behind these appointments, but it clearly has not constituted a hindrance either.

71 Herbert, "Holocaust-Forschung."

on Habsburg and post-Habsburg Jewish history in the United States.[72] The contemporaneous international reception of this book in fact seemed less critical than that of *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn*, though its reviewers did not appear convinced of the true originality of Fischer's approach or findings.

István Deák thought Fischer's key thesis concerned the abrupt end of a Hungarian-Jewish symbiosis in 1918–19, which inaugurated a process of officially supported dissimilation and supposedly culminated in the Holocaust of Hungarian Jews. Deák called Rolf Fischer's book a "well-documented study," but he also had several critical remarks. He thought Fischer did not quite give an adequate impression of the phenomenal rise of Hungarian Jewry under the Dual Monarchy, and he noted that some of the crucial roots of a Hungarian revolt against capitalism, liberalism, and modernity lay in the period before 1914.[73] Moreover, Deák saw Fischer's work as unduly one-sided in some of its critical insights: he thought Fischer overemphasized the anti-Semitic thrust of right-wing counter-revolutionary violence in 1919 without illuminating the larger context. Deák also questioned what he saw as Fischer's construction of a straight path leading from Horthy-era anti-Semitism starting in 1919 to the deportation and murder of Hungarian Jewry's large majority in 1941–45.[74]

Hillel Kieval also argued that the narrative of *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* revolved around the decisive turn when Hungary pivoted away from being an inclusive country, in which a "liberal national consensus" reigned, to one that committed itself to a "Christian-nationalist" course and threatened to exclude its Jews, irrespective of their levels of assimilation.[75] As Kieval is primarily an expert on Jewish history in the Czech lands, it should perhaps come as no surprise that he commented on specifically Hungarian matters somewhat less elaborately than Deák. Nonetheless, he went on to offer more frontal criticisms of Fischer's book, complaining about its lack of originality, even predictability, and rather narrow source base. Again in contrast to Deák, Kieval assessed the overall interpretation of the book as laudably balanced: he thought Fischer focused on the internal dynamics of Hungarian anti-Semitism while also emphasizing what he called "partial pressure" from

72 Deák, "Rolf Fischer," 712–13.
73 Ibid., 712.
74 Ibid., 713.
75 Kieval, "Rolf Fischer," 1236–37.

Nazi Germany and the impetus deriving from the Nazi *Anschluss* of Austria and the Munich accords of 1938.[76]

Even so, the main impression one gains from the reception of Fischer's *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* is that, unlike the two monographs discussed above, this solid work of scholarship fell short of exerting a significant impact on wider discussions of its topic. Whereas the historiography of the Holocaust in Hungary and the Arrow Cross movement would be significantly poorer without *Das letzte Kapitel* and *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* (their debatable aspects notwithstanding), the interpretations of the history of Hungarian anti-Semitism are likely to have proceeded along rather similar lines without its most important German-language exploration to date.

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion, our assessment of the contribution of German historiography to the study of the Holocaust in Hungary has to be rather mixed. On the one hand, for partly understandable reasons, this major chapter of the Europe-wide genocide has not emerged as an independent preoccupation among German historians. The Holocaust in Hungary and adjacent topics, such as the history of Hungarian anti-Semitism or the Arrow Cross, have only really been "discovered" in German historiography as a consequence of a larger temporal and geographical shift of focus which began around the mid-1980s. However, even today, there are no experts employed at German universities or research institutions whose primary research focus concerns the Holocaust in Hungary. Moreover, there has been only limited direct cooperation among researchers of the Holocaust in Germany and Hungary, and cross-fertilization among their scholarly works has also remained surprisingly modest.

On the other hand, for a historiography that lacks specialists and seems interested in the Holocaust in Hungary only as part of larger debates on the genesis of the Holocaust and questions of collaboration and cooperation in its implementation, German historiography has produced two path-breaking and rather widely received monographs. Margit Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* from 1989 can be considered one of the major works on the history of the Arrow Cross in any language. Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's towering *Das letzte Kapitel* from 2002 has exerted an even greater

76 Ibid., 1237.

impact both internationally and within Hungary. Even if some of its specific arguments have been contested by leading local historians of the Holocaust, Gerlach and Aly's book, published at the beginning of the twenty-first century, succeeded for the first time in making the case of Hungary a reference point in broader discussions on the Holocaust among German scholars.

Based on ongoing attempts to Europeanize the historiography of the Holocaust as well as current discussions regarding the latest phases of the war in 1944–45,[77] one might reasonably expect growing interest in the Holocaust in Hungary. If so, a puzzling paradox of postwar German approaches to the Holocaust could finally be overcome: even though postwar German discussions have recurrently used the name Auschwitz as a metonym for the German-led destruction of European Jewry, German scholarship has not yet devoted earnest attention to the single largest group of victims of this most infamous camp complex, Jews from Hungary.

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77 See, for instance, Kershaw, *The End*; Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno*; Blatman, *The Death Marches*.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

## Eastern Europe in Icelandic Sagas. By Tatjana N. Jackson. Amsterdam: ARC Humanities Press–Amsterdam University Press, 2019. 228 pp.

The series, *Beyond Medieval Europe* (published by ARC Humanities Press), targets topics previously neglected in Anglophone scholarship which are related to the history of the peripheries of medieval Europe. In this regard, Tatjana Jackson's new book, her first in English, is a big success, as it presents what people on one edge of the continent, medieval Iceland, knew about the other fringe, Eastern Europe. Jackson is one of the leading Russian experts on medieval Scandinavia and its relations to the Early (or Old) Rus', and she offers now a reworked and updated version of her findings previously published for the most part in Russian. The title of the book, *Eastern Europe in Icelandic Sagas*, is a little misleading, as it mostly discusses information pertaining to ninth-eleventh-century Rus', whilst one would expect to find details in the book about other territories too, such as Poland or Hungary, even if these territories feature less frequently in the Old Norse Icelandic corpus.

Jackson begins with an introductory chapter on her aims, sources, and methodology (pp.1–17). The book is then divided into two major parts, the first and longer of which presents the place of Eastern Europe (actually modern-day European Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus in geographical terms) in the Old Norse worldview (pp.19–114), while the second focuses on the stay of four Norwegian kings in Old Rus' (pp.115–70). The research questions in both parts are clearly formulated: what do the Old Norse sources reveal concerning knowledge of Eastern Europe, and how much of this information is historically reliable? Given the nature of the source material, namely that the Icelandic sagas usually describe events from the Viking Age (or earlier) but were committed to parchment only beginning in the twelfth century (and most were written down in later centuries), the methodology section is indispensable for an understanding of the whole argument.

Jackson introduces the three main types of sources of which she makes use: skaldic poetry, sagas, and runic inscriptions. Of these, the first two receive the most attention. Skaldic poetry was usually produced by eyewitnesses or first-hand informants, and due to its metrical complexity, it hardly changed until it was written down in later centuries and thus is usually regarded as authentic. Sagas, on the other hand, are viewed today with much criticism as historical

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sources due to their literary nature, the fact that they were recorded significantly later, and the fact that their authors included narrative interventions (or least to the consensus in the secondary literature). According to Jackson, the early kings' sagas, written down before the great compendium of 1220–1230, preserved authentic knowledge of the ninth-tenth-century Scandinavians about the geography of the "east" in the form of place names and navigable river routes. The later sagas, however, continued to rely on the ninth-century and early tenth-century conditions when describing events in Eastern Europe (simply copying the earlier compendium) and did not follow up on the southward advancement of the Scandinavians. In Jackson's view, this explains why places names such as Kiev (*Kænugarðr* in the sagas) do not receive prominence in the sagas and Novgorod (*Hólmgarðr*) is displayed as a capital of the Rus'.

The first part of the book vividly illustrates with a sound handling of the source material how information was transmitted and could change shape (media) during its formation from orality to literacy. More importantly, it shows that the Icelandic sagas reveal details about Eastern Europe left unmentioned in other documents. We learn that Ladoga's presentation in the sagas as a possible toll and control station where foreigners were checked and safe conduct was issued was a remnant of historical memory, as was Polotsk's strong fortress and defense system.

In the second part, the logic of applying the methodology twists a little. The Russian sources make no mention of the four Norwegian kings who visited Rus' (Olaf Tryggvason, Olaf Haraldsson, Magnus Olafsson, Harald Sigurdarson). Jackson, however, feels that their presence in Rus' cannot be cast into question, since it was confirmed by the skaldic poets. It would thus be inconceivable that they did not travel to Rus'. However, any other information in the sagas which is not confirmed by skaldic poets (Jackson suggests) is either falsification or the projection of later medieval conditions on the Viking Age. Thus, the goal is not really to squeeze out every useful bit of information from the sagas (as in the first part), but to call into question anything from the prose narrative which is unconfirmed by contemporary reports. Jackson questions saga accounts with rigorous source criticism and demonstrates how the great influence and deeds of a "later-Norwegian king abroad" are exaggerated by saga authors.

Jackson notes that in a few cases not all information found in the sagas is unreliable (e.g. Harald Sigurdarson's stay and activity in Rus', such as his use of Jaroslav the Wise to bank his amassed Byzantine wealth). I would suggest that by less strict with her methodology, Jackson would have had even more positive

results. First of all, skaldic poetry was usually produced precisely to meet the demands made by the kings (and always with the intention of praising the ruler) and thus should not be taken at face value. The magical healing skill of Saint Olaf's body as recorded in skaldic poetry (p.137) is just one example of overstatement. Second, skaldic poetry was not produced about every event in a saga. This does not mean that every detail of a political history in a saga is *de facto* a fabrication. The details may not always be accurate, but sagas often present what we call "potentially believable stories," i.e. situations which probably occurred Even if it is not possible to link them, on the basis of other sources, to a precise person or situation . In this regard, I would not immediately dismiss the possibility that a Scandinavian warlord was exacting tributes (or mustering forces) among the Chuds for a tenth-century prince in Rus', nor would I see Olaf Tryggvason's imprisonment as a reflection of fear from thirteenth-century Estonian pirates (pp.121–23), especially since the slave childhood of a future Norwegian king hardly adds anything to the "building-up" of a glorious character and thus could easily have been omitted by a saga author had it not been a well-known fact to other contemporaries.

These critical remarks notwithstanding, the book is a welcome contribution both to the wave of studies which aim to illuminate the Eastern sphere of the continent and to the branch of sagas studies that turns back to the historical reality behind this literature. Although its specialist nature possibly makes it a hard read for scholars untrained in Old Norse philology, Jackson's work reminds us of the value of consulting Russian scholarship when dealing with Icelandic sagas and the Vikings.

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Účtovné registre Bratislavskej kapituly 1417–1529 [Account registers of the chapter of Bratislava, 1417–1529]. By Rastislav Luz. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2018. 288 pp.

Historians usually approach the history of the medieval ecclesiastic chapters by using the prosopography, focusing on the personnel of the chapter, and drawing on the methods used in archontology. These methods and the findings they yield are no doubt valuable. However, to understand the ecclesiastic chapters entirely, historians should also study their economic and administrative systems. In this sense, the sourcebook edited by Rastislav Luz constitutes a significant contribution to the secondary literature. A young Slovak archivist and a doctoral student at the Comenius University of Bratislava, Luz has published the transcribed account registers of the medieval chapter of Bratislava. It was published as a first book in the framework of the series *Documenta Posoniensia*. As Luz explains in one of the chapters of the book, the transcription of these sources is not a simple task. Since the registers were subsidiary documents which were usually disposed of immediately after they had fulfilled their purpose, this directly reflected on the way in which the canons fashioned them. They were thus written in the Gothic cursive script, which is difficult to read, and many abbreviations were used, though not uniformly. Even the way in which the registers were bound and folded makes them difficult to read. The book itself consists of two main parts. In the first part (pp.15–51), Luz deals with the chapter of Bratislava and its personnel. He also describes the fond of the chapter of Bratislava in the Slovak National Archive, where the sources he transcribed are kept. Furthermore, he gives a short paleographic and diplomatic analysis of the registers. To make the study of the accounts easier, he has included a chapter on the monetary system which appears in the registers. In the second part (pp.53–242), he presents the transcription of the thirty-three account registers. In the end, the edition includes an index of the names (pp.245–58), places (pp.259–68), items (pp.269–83), and items that appear in German (p.284). The chapter of Bratislava was a collegiate chapter. Its personnel ranged from 10 to 15 canons in the late Middle Ages (the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century). The specificity of the chapter's personnel was that two canons of the chapter were the rectors of the parish churches in Bratislava. Though the chapter was small, it owned large estates and had the right to collect different incomes, from census and tithes to tolls and parish fees. This led to the development of an elaborate administrative system which relied on written account registers for

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more efficient administration. The chapter divided the incomes into communal, individual, and those belonging to the provost. The mention of the oldest register, which is not preserved, is from 1400. However, Luz presumes that the account registers had begun to be written earlier, around the second half of the fourteenth century, when the whole institution became more bureaucratized. The canon who supervised the incomes and expenses and wrote the registers was the dean. He had to present the accounts two times a year, on St. George's Day (April 24) and St. Michael's Day (September 29), after which the canons distributed the incomes among themselves. The thirty-three account registers which Luz has transcribed in this edition cover the period from 1417 to 1529. Luz put the registers chronologically, but they are not continuous, since not all of them were preserved. Luz endeavored to keep the original distribution of the text as much as possible. He also kept the Roman letters for the numbers and abbreviations for the currencies. The canons originally wrote all the registers on paper, and Luz was able to identify 24 different handwritings, indicating that they were written by 24 different people. The account registers list the incomes and expenses in the span of one or two years and the distribution of the incomes among the canons. The expenses could be both communal and individual. Those could be money for travel, transportation, collectors of the tithe, gifts, lunch, shows of hospitality, new clothes, etc. Since the registers are not uniform, some list all the elements and some only list the expenses. The most significant change noticeable in the inventory management is that from the second half of the fifteenth century, the dues were also paid in kind, not just in money. Accordingly, some of the inventories also list the inhabitants who gave the dues, while the earlier registers note only the amount of the due given for the whole settlement. All in all, historians can use the account registers transcribed by Luz with confidence in further historical analysis. To list just several possibilities: the everyday life of the canons, the social history of the chapter, the administrative and economic system of the chapter, the trends in economic production, environmental history, e.g. the system of dams and fishing on the estates of the chapter. Finally, this edition also makes possible comparative analyses of similar material from different European ecclesiastic chapters.

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Media and Literature in Multilingual Hungary (1770–1820). Edited by Ágnes Dóbék, Gábor Mészáros, and Gábor Vaderna. Budapest: Reciti, 2019. 285 pp.

*Media and Literature in Multilingual Hungary (1770–1820)* presents the proceedings of a conference held under the same name in April 2018, organized by the Momentum Research Group Literary Culture in Western Hungary, 1770–1820 (Institute for Literary Studies of the Research Centre for Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). The volume is bilingual, with the contributions written either in English or German. The eighteen studies comprising the book reflect the various research interests and goals of the Research Group, making it clear to the reader the study of the culture of historical western Hungary at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constitutes an academically relevant if challenging scholarly endeavor.

After the Holy League defeated the Turks in 1687 and thus brought the more than 150-year-long dominance of the Ottoman Empire in Hungary to an end, the Habsburg Monarchy (which had ruled the western third of the country since 1526 as a result of a marital contract with the Jagiellonian dynasty) felt entitled to claim the liberated Hungarian territories. The end of the seventeenth century thus marked another turning point for Hungary, with Austria extending its political power over the country and adding another layer to its already immensely rich culture. It was during the reign of Maria Theresa that the Age of Enlightenment (ca. 1750–1820) came, and new ideas swept through Hungary. As Gábor Vaderna explains in the introductory study of the volume ("Language, Media and Politics in the Hungarian Kingdom between 1770 and 1820"), this era was characterized by remarkable cultural innovation, which brought about the strengthening of Habsburg Hungary both as a political and as an economic power in the region. Development naturally triggers institutional changes, one of which was the expansion of the press and its synergy with other literary media. The period witnessed the emergence of new journalistic genres and the specialization of the press: alongside the conventional economic and political newspapers, readers now had access to scientific periodicals covering specific disciplines. As the press enabled greater accessibility to information, new types of readers and reader behaviors appeared, as did novel forms of editorial attitudes and strategies. Interestingly though, these changes were fueled by the interests of the aristocracy, in part simply because the bourgeoisie was virtually nonexistent in Hungary at the time. In other words, as the smallest yet most

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privileged and dominant social class of the country, the aristocracy made it possible for the literate population to access information.

One can see from this brief overview that the political and cultural atmosphere in Enlightenment Hungary was peculiar by European standards and, at the same time, unique in that it represented great diversity. The principal aim of the volume is to investigate how media developed and functioned in multilingual and multicultural western Hungary in the approximately fifty years of this period. Such complex research calls for the crossing of disciplinary boundaries. It is therefore natural, if not necessary, that the contributions to this volume focus on the different aspects of life on which the revolutionization of journalism left its mark. The major themes covered in the volume include cultural development (generalization of information, periodicals, and dictionaries), regional outlooks (Croatia, southern Slovakia), language planning, political journalism, literary criticism and publishing, and, last but not least, religion.

Cultural development and the foregrounding of Hungarian identity were tightly connected to the promotion of Hungarian dictionaries and Hungarian-language periodicals. The question of language choice was particularly important in a country in which the official language of administration and education was Latin and German was starting to take over this role. There was an increasing need to write and publish in Hungarian and to balance out the dominance of Latin and German in the media. István Fried's study, entitled "Mehrsprachigkeit in den ersten Jahrzehnten der ungarischen Zeitschriftenliteratur" examines multilingualism in the press in western Hungary in relation to nationalist movements and language planning endeavors in the 1810s. He concludes that multilingual publishing promoted the use of Hungarian and the spread of knowledge in the regions which were parts of historical Hungary. In a similar vein, Réka Lengyel ("The Newspaper as a Medium for Developing National Language, Literature, and Science"), Margit Kiss ("Magyar Hírmondó and Dictionary Proposals"), and Eva Kowalská ("Die erste slowakische Zeitung Presspurské nowiny zwischen Journalismus und Patriotismus") all highlight the importance of disseminating information in the vernacular in the strengthening of national identity. The rise of nationalism in the non-Hungarian speaking regions of the kingdom is further discussed in Suzana Coha's discussion of journalism in the Croatian territories ("History of Journalism in the Croatian Lands from the Beginnings until the Croatian National Revival").

Language planning went hand in hand with a desire for cultural revival. It is thus no surprise that Hungarian intellectuals were striving to enable the

broader diffusion of Hungarian cultural and scientific products. Gábor Vaderna emphasizes József Péczeli's (1750–1792) merits in organizing intellectual life in Komárom (today Komárno, Slovakia) and publishing *Mindenes Gyűjtemény*, which is considered by many as the first Hungarian scientific journal ("Möglichkeiten der Urbanität in der ungarischen Zeitschrift *Mindenes Gyűjtemény*"). Further contributions made by, among others, Rumen István Csörsz ("The Literary Program of István Sándor and the Periodical *Sokféle* [1791–1808]"), Olga Granasztói ("The Paper *Hazai Tudósítások* and the Beginnings of the Cult of Monuments Through the Lens of Ferenc Kazincy's Articles [1806–1808]"), and Béla Hegedűs ("Literary History as an Argument for the Existence of Literature. Miklós Révai's Call in *Magyar Hírmondó* and *Költeményes Magyar Gyűjtemény*") all provide evidence of the fervent and productive cultural work that was taking place among the Hungarian upper circles at the time. Speaking from a more literary perspective, Piroska Balogh gives an account of the emergence of critical journalism at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Katalin Czibula reflects on German-language and Hungarian-language theater criticism in western Hungarian newspapers. Norbert Béres presents the most frequent distribution strategies of novels ("'Roman, und was besser ist, als Roman.' Über die Vertriebsstrategien des Romans"), providing insights into advertising and selling literature as a form of cultural product. Ágnes Dóbék takes a glance at how the western Hungarian press viewed European journalistic practices, and András Döbör analyses political articles by pro-Enlightenment publicist Sándor Szacsvay in "Magyar Kurír" (Sándor Szacsvay's Underworld Dialogues as Political Publicisms in the 1789 Year of the Enlightenment-Era Newspaper *Magyar Kurír*"). From a more Austria-focused perspective, Andrea Seidler investigates the presence of the imperial couple in the *Preßburger Zeitung*, a German-language newspaper in Bratislava (Pressburg, the capital city of today's Slovakia), published twice a week from 1764 (until 1929). The final contribution to the volume, Zsófia Bárány's "Catholic and Protestant Union-Plans in the Kingdom of Hungary between 1817 and 1841," provides insights into the emergence of what we today call "public opinion" in relation to religious tolerance and freedom in the region.

The versatility of the papers published in *Media and Literature in Multilingual Hungary (1770–1820)* bears testimony to the complexity and richness of the subject. Through close and detailed examination of how the press evolved and functioned in western Hungary in the fifty years that were crucial to the unfolding of the ideas of the Enlightenment in the region, one can understand the role

the press played in the wide distribution of knowledge and the promotion of national identity. With its illuminating contributions, the volume serves as a helpful source of information for any scholar or student venturing into this vast territory of Hungarian cultural studies.

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## The Secular Enlightenment. By Margaret C. Jacob. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019. xi+339 pp.

The concept of secularization is without doubt one of the most paradoxical notions within eighteenth-century and Enlightenment studies. Although the notion of secularity and the Enlightenment seem to make strange bedfellows, secular tendencies, such as profanation and laicization, have been widely disputed phenomena in early modern scholarship. As far as the history of the concept is concerned, it should be noted that, alongside the predominant ecclesiastical interpretation (canon law), the eighteenth century witnessed a significant expansion in the semantics of the notion. Therefore, secularization and the notion of secularity became counter-concepts of religious life and tended to describe both the distance from monastic life and those persons who were freed from vows and lived at liberty in the world (*Cyclopædia, or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences,* 1728, vol. 2, 45). In this respect, this semantic extension *per se* covers two approaches with regard to the Enlightenment. First, it stands for a religious movement which, in the course of the eighteenth century, became more and more profane by putting religious sentiment in the background. Second, it is identified with the stance of the so-called "High Enlightenment," which by no later than the mid-eighteenth century had irrevocably distanced itself from the religious and spiritual *Weltanschauung*. From among the two diffuse interpretations, *The Secular Enlightenment* seems to choose the second path. The position of the author on this matter is clear. Jacob, however, tends to see enlightened secularism as also having had religious sources, and her book only aims to register the shift when this religious agenda gave place to a secular setting.

Margaret C. Jacob (University of California) is one of the few prominent scholars who has made significant contributions to the intellectual history of the Enlightenment in the past half century. Jacob's view expressed in this book seems to synthesize her results in the volumes on Newtonianism (1995, with Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs) and Enlightenment Radicalism (1981). In her book published in 2019, she attempts to provide a panoramic account of the secular tendencies of the Enlightenment. From a historiographical point of view, Jacob's perspective, on which she reflects in the Prologue (p.5), can be taken as a fresh addition to the ongoing debates (David Sorkin, John Robertson) on Enlightenment modernity. *The Secular Enlightenment* is in multiple ways connected to this traditional historiography forged by leading historians, such as Peter Gay, Franco Venturi, Daniel Roche, and John Marshall.

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First, it upholds the "radical thesis," which proclaimed that the Enlightenment project fundamentally impacted the cultural, social, and political basis on which modernity was built. However, Jacob seeks to find the balance between the religious initiations and the social and political circumstances. Second, in the Epilogue (pp.263–65), Jacob attributes to the notion of the "secular Enlightenment" a long-lasting impact on the twentieth-century European and American liberal project of democracy when she claims that, "[w]here enlightened principles survived the repression of the 1790s and beyond, democracy had a greater chance of emerging."

As for the roots of these intellectual initiatives, Jacob's central question is concerned with the redefinition of the narrative of secularization by displaying the transition from the religious antecedents to the secular period: "The Enlightenment was an eighteenth-century movement of ideas and practices that made the secular world its point of departure. It did not necessarily deny the meaning or emotional hold of religion, but it gradually shifted attention away from religious questions toward secular ones" (p.1).

In addition to the historiographical implications, Jacob lists other arguments central to the thesis throughout the eight chapters. The first three chapters explore how human life changed in the eighteenth century. Chapter 1 ("The Setting: Space Expanded and Filled Anew") focuses on the question of how, beginning in the seventeenth century, colonial experience reshaped the existing narratives on the role of God's providence and "celestial and terrestrial" reality. In the new intellectual setting, space tended to lose its Cartesian conceptualization and became neutral, parallel to the expansion of the new language of Newtonian physics. Chapter 2 ("Time Reinvented"), using the well-known cultural historical thesis and personal examples (such as the example of the Huygens family), aims to renegotiate how the expansion of material culture and technological improvements laid the groundwork for everyday materialism by profoundly altering the perception of biblical and religious time. As a consequence, the perception of time multiplied and secular punctuality became predominant, while "[t]he Christian meaning of time remained, but like predestination, millennial time seemed less and less relevant" (p.52). Following this logic, Chapter 3 ("Secular Lives") pays attention to the scope of ordinary people. It offers glimpses into the cacophony of small and unheard voices of the literate, represented by freethinkers, industrialists, travelling booksellers, scholars, religious and sexual heretics, and unnamed producers of erotic poetry, pornography, and other genres of forbidden literature. By using personal and

unpublished sources, in this chapter Jacob aims to provide a comprehensive account of the wider social foundations of secularity.

In the remaining five chapters, the Enlightenment is portrayed as a collective project which had its own entangled geographical and cultural characteristics. Concentrating on these geographical and cultural differences, each part discusses one of the most virulent European centers (Paris, Edinburgh, Berlin, Vienna, Naples, and Milan) between the 1700s and the caesura of the 1790s. As far as the themes are concerned, the scope of the chapters is very broad; they cover a wide variety of topics, including economic, moral, theological, political, and scientific quarrels. The leading principle behind these chapters is that the emergence of enlightened ideas was confused everywhere in Europe, though at the same time it was inseparable from secular(ized) sentiment. Although Jacob's goal is to retell the "well-known" topoi in a subversive way by adding pieces of information that go beyond the narrow thematical frame, the orientation towards the great names and the philosophical and theological debates remains a persistent feature of her analyses. The thematical blocks, however, appear to stand on their own and to resist comparison. Thus, the case studies, even though they represent the depth of the author's knowledge impressively, seem to lose sight of the latest findings in the scholarship on the Enlightenment.

Chapter 4 ("Paris and the Materialist Alternative: The Widow Stockdorff") places the Francophone Enlightenment in the contexts of anti-royalism, Anglophone political literature, and natural scientific discourses shaped by materialist ideas. According to Jacob, secularism in the French Enlightenment was preoccupied by a set of vibrant political and social visions which were debated extensively in unofficial literature. Therefore, the radical ideas could find expression "more commonly in cities rather than in the countryside" (p.89). Chapter 5 ("The Scottish Enlightenment in Edinburgh") depicts a more balanced and sophisticated image of the Scottish tendencies. As Jacob argues, the beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment in the 1690s was rather hesitant. In contrast to French radical sentiment, the lack of forbidden literature and the alliance between the moderate Presbyterian clergy and the university elite proved to be constitutive throughout the century. Here, the secular framework was equivalent to discussing a set of issues (such as literary works, agriculture, manufacturing, politeness, social progression, Newtonian science, and the participation of women in society) in front of a wider audience.

Chapter 7 ("Berlin and Vienna") with its almost fifty pages aims to extend the scope of the investigation to the German-speaking lands by outlining

the developments from the post-Westphalian intellectual climate to German idealism. Here, the two most substantial assets advancing secularization were the advanced university culture and the widespread anti-scholastic sentiment. Thus, as Jacob argues, in the early Enlightenment, more attention was paid to theology and religion than in France or Scotland (p.159). The search for "secular freedom" had a significant impact on the later philosophies represented by the prominent thinkers of the High Enlightenment, Lessing, Mendelssohn, Kant, and Herder (p.166).

Chapter 7 ("Naples and Milan") brings further arguments into negotiating the Italian experience, where secular tendencies appeared to have met the need for pragmatic reform. As the cases of eighteenth-century Naples and Milan exemplify, the enlightened vision could be channeled via the cultural transfers of experimental physics, political economy, and anti-tyrannical literature, into the Catholic scholastic mindset in various forms. As for the reform of agriculture and the penalty system, they were unquestionably connected to social and political needs.

As the title indicates, chapter 8 ("The 1790s") provides an outlook on how the French Revolution impacted the Enlightenment. By accepting the conventional explanation that the Enlightenment came to an end with the French Revolution, Jacob offers glimpses into the variety of reactions to the French tendencies, such as the Irish rebels, the distant supporters of the Revolution, the members of secret societies and masonic lodges, and the rejection of the Low Countries and German-speaking lands. Although the chapter begins with an evocation of the Romantic vision when, for the vast majority of people, it seemed like "everything could be questioned, rethought, reimagined, and even lived in new and unprecedented ways" (p. 237), it portrays an incomplete victory over enlightened secularism. This dramatization of the revolutionary sentiment has its purpose, as the earlier reviews have already pointed out, but many notable developments which would have merited more attention have been left out of the book.

While Jacob's scholarly experience, which draws on American, Scottish, English, Dutch-Belgian, German, French, and Italian narrative and archival sources, is impressive, the book focuses mainly on a conventionally Western-centered canon, and it fails to reflect on the experiences of the enlightened peripheries, such as Northern Europe (the Swedish and Danish Kingdoms), the Iberian peninsula, and East Central Europe (Austria, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, and Russia). The disproportion is the most visible in chapter 6, in which the

assessment of Habsburg absolutism is restricted to the culture of the masonic lodges and Mozart's *Zauberflöte* (p.172–78). Apart from these, Jacob's book takes the secular experience as evidently accessible in the context of the eighteenth century but pays no attention to the conceptual and contextual concerns that may make the notion of "secularity" less apt for historical analysis. Jacob's distinctly secular view implies that the progress of secularism as a Western-born phenomenon which became closely related to enlightened sentiment proceeded from the late sixteenth century onwards, contributing to the development of a set of seemingly "modern" questions, the effect of which on nineteenth-century modernization is hardly deniable.

All in all, *The Secular Enlightenment* is a thought-provoking collection of ideas, which provides an impressive account of the secular tendencies of the eighteenth century which were most substantial to the intellectual movement. Jacob guides her readers with considerable confidence and compassion over a set of topics which demand serious attention even from experts. Thanks to her elegant and fluent prose, the book reads easily. Merely with its choice of subject, the book merits scholarly attention, and Jacob approaches the topic in a way which will lead to constructive debates on the field.

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"Kedves Hazámfiai, mozdulni kell..." Georgikoni peregrinatio oeconomica a 19. század elején ["Dear fellow countrymen, we must move..." The technological journeys of Hungary's first college of farming in the early nineteenth century]. By György Kurucz. Budapest: Corvina–Ráday Gyűjtemény, 2020. 303 pp.

The practice of international travel went through exponential growth from the early to mid-sixteenth century, but it was perceived as dangerous and frivolous by many intellectual authorities. In order to provide a framework for a possible practice of *useful* travel, a specific genre emerged in the second half of the century: *ars apodemica*, normative texts aiming to shape the "art of being abroad." Young men were to be exposed to the dangers and temptations of foreign travel and to invest both time and extensive resources (their own, their family's or their sponsors') only if a clear benefit was in sight. A beneficial travel experience had a dual goal: service to the state and development of the self. Personal development itself was only an intermediary step towards service to the state: thanks to individual's experience abroad, the state would gain a trained and experienced specialist able to fill crucial roles. Within the development of traveling practices over the following centuries, a key novelty was the emergence of new entities which completed and modified this schema. Service to the supranational *Republic of Letters*, learned societies, and particular institutions could complement or, indeed, replace the idea of traveling in the service of the nation.

György Kurucz's monograph tackles one such case, drawing on a corpus of international significance. The Georgikon school of agricultural studies of Keszthely, founded and directed by members of the Festetics family, was an institution of European importance. In order to keep up with innovations abroad and to maintain essential interpersonal and scholarly networks, the school regularly sent students and also staff on European trips. The book tackles the most extensive of these expeditions, the 1820–1825 *peregrinatio oeconomica* of two teachers, physician Pál Gerics and horticulturist József Lehrmann, using the large amount of materials in diverse genres (instructions, journals, reports, correspondence) resulting from these trips. One of the strongest features of the book is the careful distinction between these various writings: Kurucz is careful to consider which text targeted which audience.

Finding a format that does justice to the practice discussed and acknowledges the work that remains to be done must have been a difficult task. The structure of the book is one possible solution. After an introductory chapter, Chapter

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2 sketches the immediate local and national intellectual context, followed by a chapter (which offers a welcome range of international parallels) on the genre and practice of instructions for travel. A central chapter describes the journey step by step, helpfully complemented by maps of the itinerary of the two scholars (who sometimes traveled together and sometimes parted ways) on the inner cover at the beginning and end of the book. The last two chapters shed light in particular on two types of interactions and experiences at various stages of the journey: Chapter 5 provides an excellent summary of all things related to innovation in agriculture and related fields; Chapter 6 tackles what relates to the human experience of such a journey. The book comes to an end with a quick conclusion which mostly highlights the extensive work yet to be completed.

While this structure is logical, I was left uncertain about some of the editorial decisions regarding the length of the various chapters. The central chapter, which presents the trip itself, stands out. It is a 96-page behemoth, without any subchapters, giving a quick summary of every stop the travelers made. The subsequent chapters provide a more detailed analysis of the main centers of interest at various stages of the trip (agrarian innovations and the human aspects of travel). Since these survey chapters are present, would it not have been possible to shorten (or even do away with) the central chapter and to extend the chapters which contain analyses? Particularly the last chapter on the human element (described here as "sentimental journey," a term I do not necessarily find appropriate) flits a little too quickly through multiple topics, including meetings and networks, infrastructure, and curiosity concerning politics and religion, etc. Breaking up chapters into subchapters would have increased the book's readability, as would have a more extensive index featuring key subjects at the end of the book. The volume is richly illustrated with relatively contemporary illustrations of the places visited and some key persons. These illustrations provide some sense of "getting closer," but ultimately, they remain only decorative; at times the link between the illustration and the text is tenuous.

While the surviving material is of exceptional depth, the trip taken by Gerics and Lehrmann has some parallels. Chapter 3 explores comparisons of a range of instructions for and practices of travel. To complement this, I would suggest two additional paths to be explored for further research. One of these paths revolves around schools, and especially schools of technical education, to which both teachers and advanced pupils regularly traveled: by the late eighteenth century, this had become regular practice in the cases of two major French schools of engineering, the École des Ponts et Chaussées and the École des Mines. Another

possible comparison would be the tradition of instructions for "patriotic" travel, or in other words journeys which were expected to serve the improvement of the nation (and, ultimately, humankind) through the scientific knowledge gained by the travelers. This corpus grew out of two traditions discussed in the book, that of travel instructions issued by learned societies and the Göttingen tradition of traveling methodology; however, it went even further in developing a meticulous methodology of observation, often using tables of observation. The best-known example is Moravian aristocrat Leopold Berchtold's influential *An Essay to Direct and Extend the Enquiries of Patriotic Travellers* (London, 1789), considered a "total" methodology of travel.

The work on the Georgikon traveling practices clearly merits further exploration. Some aspects of these practices would be of interest to historians of agriculture, while others would be of interest to historians of education, intellectual historians, and specialists on travel. Kurucz's monograph attempts to cater to all these audiences at once, and even to the general public, as shown by its use of illustrations. This ambition comes with some challenges. Nevertheless, the volume is a fitting tribute to the major endeavor it presents, and its findings should be shared with an international audience.

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## Universities in Imperial Austria 1848–1918: A Social History of a Multicultural Space. By Surman, Jan. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2019. 460 pp.

A revised and updated version of his doctoral dissertation *Habsburg Universities 1848–1918: Biography of a Space* (University of Vienna, 2012), Jan Surman's new book is an ambitious study of universities as spaces of knowledge, multilingualism in the Habsburg Empire, and changing landscapes and networks of academic mobility in Cisleithania in the long nineteenth century. The book follows a chronological structure while engaging with a multi-layered thematic framework which draws on historiographical traditions and debates in the history of science and knowledge, the spatial turn, and imperial history, making an important contribution to understandings of the history of the Habsburg Empire. Surman's work will surely be of interest to scholars in these fields, as well as to readers interested in the history of education, migration, and nationalism.

While the title indicates that the narrative will focus primarily on the period between 1848 and 1918, Surman takes a broader view, exploring the transformations of what he calls "imperial academic space" (p.3) from the late eighteenth century to the afterlife of the empire in the late 1930s. He starts with an introduction of the Habsburg academic landscape of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, when universities were seen as institutions which made civil servants rather than scholarship, and the production of "real" scientific knowledge in the empire took place in other spaces, such as museums, botanical and zoological gardens, clubs and associations, libraries and other (state) collections. 1848 is identified as a turning point for Habsburg universities in Chapter 2, when new agendas emerged and universities were reorganized under Minister of Education Leo Thun-Hohenstein. Surman argues that Thun saw science as a panacea for the various problems, national and social, of the Habsburg composite state: universities were part of an agenda of imperialism, and the new policies aimed to create universities which were positive towards the monarchy and furthered the idea of German linguistic and cultural superiority. At the same time, Surman calls for a more nuanced view of the 1850s and the changes it brought forth, pointing out that the matter of university autonomy remained a central point of debate. He also argues against the forced Germanisation discourse in earlier historiography. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 consider the transformation of the intellectual geography of Cisleithania from

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the 1860s as a consequence of the implementation of university autonomy, with a particular focus on changes to the language of instruction at universities across the empire. These chapters focus on changes to imperial, regional, and local academic landscapes, academic hierarchies, academic mobility and migration, and scholarly identities across three main language spaces: Czech, German, and Polish. Surman maps a network of tensions around issues of language, education, scholarship, and identity, pointing to parallels and differences in, for instance, Bohemia and Galicia, and he shows that there were definite similarities, for example, in Czech and Ruthenian language activism from the perspective of political stability. At the same time, these spaces developed very differently, as shown through examples of disciplinary diversification, patterns of academic mobility and exchange, and the stabilization of the institutional hierarchy, with Vienna at the top. The question of identity is explored further in Chapter 6, which considers the experience of being an "Other" at Habsburg universities, with a focus on the role of religious denomination in academic advancement in a context of increasing anti-Semitism, Catholic anti-modernism, and nationalism. Finally, the last chapter moves beyond 1918 and explores the pervasiveness of the Habsburg system in the successor states, not only through the survival of personal connections and scholarly entanglements, but as a consequence of the fact that prominent universities (Cracow, Prague, Vienna) had already been acting according to national geographies before the war.

Surman defines the Habsburg Empire as a "linguistically divided but still culturally entangled scientific space" (p.279). The engagement with the concept of entanglement (or multiple entanglements, in fact) is one of the most interesting aspects of the book. Surman focuses on the productive nature of multiculturalism, which, he argues, outweighed monoculturalism and nationally oriented intellectual retreat. In this sense, when he argues that language change and linguistic plurality did not lead to the dissolution of the empire, he is very much in conversation with recent revisionist histories of the Habsburg imperial space and imperial Austria in particular. The originality of Surman's book is in that it depicts the Habsburg Austrian university sphere as a moveable, dynamic environment, in which universities were part of an agenda of imperialism, even if, at the same time, they also pursued their own, autonomous agendas. This is illustrated, for instance, through the question of language equality: the book shows that these agendas could be very different in Bohemia and Galicia, two of the book's most important case studies, but as Surman argues, one cannot understand processes in one without looking at the other.

Space and its limits/limitations is one of the central themes that runs through the narrative as Surman maps the parallel transformations of the academic and imperial landscape. There are multiple, overlapping spaces under the lens here, both vertically and horizontally: Surman quotes Theodor Mommsen as saying that "Habsburg scholars are sentenced to Chernivtsi, pardoned to Graz, promoted to Vienna" (p.154), showing that the institutional and academic hierarchy in the Habsburg Empire was inseparable from imperial symbolic geography. The limitations of the academic space are also demonstrated through the analysis of academic appointments and scholars' careers outside universities, with Surman crafting a nuanced picture of career insecurity and the role of untenured and unpaid university instructors. *Privatdozenten* (unsalaried university lecturers) are identified as key victims and, at the same time, important pillars of the Habsburg imperial academic landscape. They constituted a precarious teaching force which, for the most part, worked for no pay and which, through the work the members of this teaching force did outside universities, made an important contribution to local and urban developments. Another instance where the significance of multidirectional spatiality is made clear is when in Chapter 6 Surman writes about the anti-Semitism of academic participation and appointments, delineating the "invisible ghetto walls" and glass ceilings that affected Jewish scholars horizontally and vertically.

Language is another key theme used by Surman to argue that Habsburg universities were both spatial and imperial projects. The book uses the question of language use in university education and research to address various tensions in the empire, not only in terms of how nationalism affected academia at a more universal level, but also down to the more particular questions of local sciences or disciplines, such as the development of regional historiographies. Surman identifies changes to the language of instruction as a particular turning point, and he shows that it affected not only demands for language equality, but also the intellectual geography of the empire, its regions, and cities. Chapter 5 examines these processes through comparative analysis of the appointment processes in Galicia and Bohemia, looking at linguistic and geopolitical aspects of how the universities in Cracow and L'viv sought Polish-speaking professors, while Prague looked to appoint Czechs from the 1860s in a different fashion. Ultimately, the book convincingly argues that while science was, and remained, an overall universal enterprise for Habsburg scholars, pursuing it in the national language was seen as essential for national development, as the use of the national language in the sciences was seen as serving and securing loyalty to the national cause.

A meticulously researched work based on extensive archival research in an impressive number of languages and countries, the book offers detailed and nuanced analysis of the source material. In addition to several tables offering statistical evidence about academic salaries, appointments, and other social patterns of university life (including the percentage of professors' offspring who entered the professoriat), the narrative is also interspersed with some well-placed anecdotes. As Surman states himself in the introduction, the book would have benefitted from more attention to women (or rather, the virtual absence of women) in the Habsburg academic system, and, as evident from the title, Hungary is largely missing from this history of a Habsburg multilingual university space. This criticism notwithstanding, the book shows remarkable range in its coverage and analysis, and it is a significant achievement for the history of science in Central Europe.

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Slovutný pán prezident. Listy Jozefovi Tisovi [Your Honor, Mr. President: Letters to Jozef Tiso]. By Madeline Vadkerty. Žilina: Absynt, 2020. 228 pp.

Since the struggles and debates over the memory of World War II and the Holocaust have not come to an end in most of the countries concerned, including Slovakia, the German position concerning its allegedly exclusive responsibility for the Holocaust has become an obstacle not only to independent scholars, but also to the society which needs to confront its own troubled history and its own responsibility. While the Holocaust was exclusively a German plan, as Jan Grabowski correctly claims, the Germans found many willing allies and enablers. Thus, the Slovaks too should take responsibility for the acts of the Slovak authorities, the Hlinka Guards, and collaborators who helped facilitate the deportation of tens of thousands of Slovak Jews to their deaths. The Holocaust in Slovakia happened smoothly in large part because the local representatives and populations participated. And among those who represented the whole regime responsible for the destruction of the Slovak Jewry was Jozef Tiso.

There are not many Slovak personalities who are more controversial than Jozef Tiso, the Catholic priest and president of the wartime Slovak Republic. While every serious academic research has proven his role and participation in the Holocaust in Slovakia, nationalistic sentiment tends either to rehabilitate him and point out his role in saving Slovaks (including some Jews) or bluntly admire him for his alliance with Nazi Germany and his participation in the persecution and massacre of Jews, Roma, and political opponents. American author Madeline Vadkerty decided not to write a major biography of Tiso or an academic analysis of existing debates on the role of Tiso in the Holocaust. In her book *Your Honor, Mr. President: Letters to Jozef Tiso*, she used archival sources to demask the Catholic compassion of this man, who was a politician and a clergyman, and shed light on the helplessness of the persecuted Slovak Jewry. In her book, Tiso stands in the background, yet his persona is omnipresent. The central figures of her book are people whose lives had been brutally affected by the anti-Semitic policies of the Slovak Republic, i.e. the Jews of Slovakia. The ongoing adoption of anti-Jewish measures gradually had a devastating effect on the lives of about 89,000 people. And when the economic destruction of Slovak Jewry was completed, the Slovak authorities led by President Tiso decided to "solve" the "Jewish question" by stripping the Slovak Jews of their citizenship and deporting them in collaboration with Nazi Germany to the "East."

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Vadkerty examines the prelude to the deportation, and she sheds light on the time of permanent persecution, which included the loss of jobs and thus livelihoods, the loss of property, and relationships broken up due to the racial laws regulating sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. Vadkerty's book brings the reader to the moment when thousands of people decided to write to the president of the republic of which they were citizens with the hope that they could trust in the compassion and moral commitment of the head of the state, who was also a Catholic priest. Thousands wrote to Tiso hoping that their letters would prompt him to recognize their fundamental human rights, for instance by helping them keep their jobs, shops, or property or by granting them the "famous" presidential exception, awarded to the "economically important" Jews. These exceptions protected approximately 1,000 people (the exceptions also included family members, and thus they involved an estimated 5,000 people) from deportation in 1942.

Through these letters, which can be read as testimonies to the destruction of the Slovak Jewry, readers can learn about the Holocaust through the fates of individuals. These 13 real stories, which Vadkerty had chosen, are presented in the form of short novels, based on actual historical events. Vadkerty recreates (fictionalizes) possible monologues, dialogues, and backstories while she writes about little-known chapters of the Holocaust in Slovakia. Using the format of a short novel, she introduces readers to real Jewish and non-Jewish women and men of all ages from numerous Slovak villages and towns as they reacted to the regime's anti-Jewish measures. Each of 13 stories is based on deportation records, archival documents, and interviews with family members, and they are all accompanied by pictures of the original letters. Vadkerty switches back and forth from fictional dialogues and recreated stories inspired by historical sources and historical narrative based on references to historical sources, so she keeps reminding the reader of historical facts and documents which are the base of these stories. The book shows how the anti-Jewish policy of the wartime Slovak republic destroyed the lives of ordinary people simply because these people were regarded as Jews. Vadkerty describes how these people not only asked for mercy, but also proclaimed their own integrity, diligence, love of country, and other civic virtues in their letters. However, the President's Office did not respond to many of the letters. In some cases, the President's Office simply declined the requests or called on other local authorities to investigate the situation. Often, replies arrived after the people who had written the letters had been deported.

Thanks to archival research and her focus on story-telling, in collaboration with Ján Púček, Vadkerty manages to shed light on the unhealed wounds of recent Slovak history. While the introduction of the book by Ivan Kamenec, one of the most important Holocaust scholars from Slovakia, gives an academic frame to a book which is intended for a general audience, it points out this problem in Slovak historiography. In Slovakia, the gap between best-selling memoirs of Slovak Jews who survived the Holocaust and the highly exclusive academic works on the Holocaust, which are almost inaccessible in their vocabulary and approach to a reader who is not a specialist in the field of history, calls attention to the need for more approachable historical narratives on the Holocaust in Slovakia. Yet more and more scholars in Slovakia, such as Hana Kubátová, Monika Vrzgulová, Marína Zavacká, Ján Hlavika, Anton Hruboň, and Jakub Drábik, have begun to recognize the potential roles for scholars of this area and the need not only for extensive research but also for comprehensive and accessible publications which meet high scholarly standards while also appealing to wider audiences.

Vadkerty's book follows a trend of semi-fictional writing in the international Holocaust literature. Yet, unlike many other similar books based on real stories, such as Heather Morris's best-selling novel *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, Vadkerty does not blur the authenticity of the history. Vadkerty's book uses primary historical sources, including photographs and testimonies, and thus it can be recommended not only to readers looking for interesting literature about tragic stories of Jewish fates in Slovakia during the Holocaust, but also for scholars who search for new formats to share their research findings. Nevertheless, *Your Honor, Mr. President: Letters to Jozef Tiso* does not fulfil the function of a standard work of historical scholarship. Hopefully, Vadkerty will add to her book an additional publication which will allow her to combine archival research with a more academic approach. Her research would thus be an important addition to Holocaust historiography, and her style of writing could hopefully be an inspiration for professional scholars and an example of how to write more accessible academic texts, which are still rare in the historiography of the Holocaust in Slovakia.

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Budapest–Bergen-Belsen–Svájc: A Kasztner-vonat fővárosi utasai [Budapest–Bergen-Belsen–Switzerland: The Budapest passengers of the Kasztner train]. Edited by Anikó Lukács. Budapest: Budapest City Archives, 2020.

The story of the so-called Kasztner train and Rezső Kasztner's activities were parts of one of the controversial episodes of the Hungarian Holocaust. Kasztner worked as the deputy chairman of the Vaada, the Zionist Aid and Rescue Committee. In 1944, as a result of his negotiations with the SS, he was able to organize the escape of several hundred Hungarian Jews to Switzerland. For each of the 1,684 passengers, thousand dollars had to be paid to the Nazis, and the train, which departed from Budapest on June 30, first took the refugees to the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen. Many of them managed to reach the safety of Switzerland only half a year later. Kasztner was criticized then and is still criticized today for having "sold his soul to the devil," (a phrase used by the judge in his trial) in part because some people assume that only rich, prominent Jews were able to get on the list of passengers. As a consequence, Kasztner became involved in a trial in 1953, where he was accused of collaborating with the Nazis, and the trial drew attention to him which may have caused his death: three members of Lehi, a Zionist paramilitary underground group assassinated him.

*Budapest–Bergen-Belsen–Switzerland: The Budapest passengers of the Kasztner train,* a book published by the Budapest City Archives, contains the material from the exhibition of the same name, which was opened in June 2019. The material for this exhibition was compiled in the course of an exciting international cooperative endeavor connected to the discovery of approximately 7,000 data sheets with information concerning the owners and tenants of Budapest apartments from 1944 (the digitalized documents are available at https://archives.hungaricana.hu/en/lear/Lakasiv/). In this volume, documents concerning the life of Kasztner train passengers are combined from two collections: the Budapest City Archives and the Verband Schweizerischer Jüdischer Fürsorgen (VSJF), the Swiss association which aided Jewish refugees.

The book applies a previously neglected approach: the story of the Kasztner train is introduced through the fates of ten rescued persons or families on the basis of a variety of archival sources, photographs, documents, letters collected from private individuals, recollections, and diaries. The book is attractive, with photographs and documents arranged in a "scrapbook style." Both the main

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text and captions have been translated into English, making it accessible and engaging to the English readership too.

In Holocaust research, the perspectives of victims and microhistory are becoming increasingly prominent; this book is an example of this trend, as the core consists of the stories of survivors. Editor Anikó Lukács also mentions this in her foreword, where she emphasizes that the main focus was not on Kasztner's activity and its political aspects but on the refugees themselves.

A short writing by Annie Szamosi, in which she gives an account of how she learned of her family's past, fits into this concept. Szamosi's story is typical: her parents were reluctant to tell her and her brother what had happened to them during World War II; however, during a trip she took to Budapest, a relative disclosed the entire story. Thus, her interest was raised in how Kasztner had saved her grandparents from certain death, and the story of Zebulon Jonatán Sternberg and Margit Dach became part of the volume.

The family stories are contextualized by a short historical introduction. The reader learns of the actions of Kasztner and the Zionists and the story of the train. The recollections of the refugees themselves and the suggestive postcards by graphic designer István Irsai, in which he depicts the characteristic objects and scenes of the camp behind barbed wire, provide an expressive picture of their experiences during the time spent in Bergen-Belsen. Nonetheless, the lack of information about the camp's history and structure may be bothering. Finally, photographs, documents, and a short account describe the circumstances of the refugees after their arrival in Switzerland.

Then come the stories of the ten families, among whom we may find a contractor, an industrialist, a lawyer, a goldsmith, a scientist, and a merchant. The family stories are based on a rich collection of sources, and the main text is complemented with quotes from ego-documents and letters. Since the fugitives are in focus, they could have been given more space to tell their stories in their own words; but alongside the historical text, an abundance of photographs, forms, letters, and other documents also speak for them, providing further details about the families' lives.

The volume offers the reader a picture of the passengers' prewar situation, how their careers and lives were broken by the Holocaust, what it meant for them to get a chance to escape, and how they lived in Switzerland and after the war. From the point of view of the latter, the families whose stories were chosen for inclusion in the volume may be representative. Most of them never

returned to Hungary. Instead, they settled in various countries throughout the world, from countries in South America to Israel.

Though according to the historical introduction "almost every class of Hungarian Jewry was represented" on the Kasztner train, most of the ten families whose narratives were chosen for inclusion here were prominent members of the Budapest community: for instance, György Bamberger and his wife, Rózsa Stern, who was the daughter of Samu Stern, leader of the Pest Israelite Congregation; Nison Kahan, one of the leaders of Zionism in Hungary and Gábor Munk, a member of the board of the Pest Israelite Congregation, whose daughter married Nison Kahan. Others were given places on the train due to their outstanding artistic or scientific achievements, such as the abovementioned graphic designer, István Irsai, contractor József Apor, and world-famous physician and psychiatrist Lipót Szondi. This asymmetry is probably a result of the disproportionately larger number of sources documenting the lives of well-known personalities or those who were in leading positions. Given this abundance of sources, it is easier to write about their lives. However, the material compiled for the book seems to underpin the assumption that only rich or famous people were given places on the train. This is contradicted only by the fact that the young Gádor–Donáth couple and Zebulon Jonatán Sternberg and his wife, Margit Dach, were also included on Kasztner's list, together with numerous other less wealthy persons whose stories are not well-documented and are not mentioned in the book.

The moral implications of the Kasztner train cannot be avoided, even if the lives of the refugees remain the focus and the process according to which passengers were selected is touched upon only indirectly. A final conclusion would be hard to draw, but one factor must be underlined, which can be demonstrated through the life of the Gádor–Donáth couple. László Gádor was 32 years old in 1944, and Blanka Donáth was 23. After they returned to Hungary in 1945, Gádor worked for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Donáth had a long and successful career as a doctor of educational psychology. Had they stayed in Hungary in 1944, probably they would not have survived until the end of the war. Kasztner's train made it possible for some 1,700 persons to survive the Holocaust. The life stories of the passengers effectively illuminate this simple but important truth.

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Hóman Bálint és népbírósági pere [Bálint Hóman and his trial at the People's Court]. Edited by Gábor Ujváry. Budapest: Ráció Kiadó; Székesfehérvár: Városi Levéltár és Kutatóintézet, 2019. 668 pp.

Bálint Hóman (1885–1951) a long-serving Minister of Culture of the Horthy regime, became a recent symbol of "historical revisionism." By revisionism, I am referring not only to the revisions of indictments made by the people's court after 1945 but also to the history of the period between 1945 and 1989 and thus, indirectly, to the attempt to revalue the whole period before 1945, which is a constitutive part of the memory politics of illiberal regimes. A thick volume entitled *Historical Revisionism* was also published in 2011. It was edited by Gábor Ujváry, a founding member of the controversial government-sponsored Veritas Historical Institute and Archive, in which the most outstanding contemporary Hungarian historians presented Hóman as a historian, a public collection specialist (as he was the director of the National Museum), and a politician while also examining his networks of valuable contacts (without which his upward career would have been unthinkable) and his connection to Székesfehérvár. However, this edited volume did not bring any closure on the subject. Rather, it was followed in 2015 by the ultimately failed plan to erect a statue of Hóman and, in 2016, the also failed lawsuit against the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia – MTA), which demanded the restoration of Hóman's MTA membership.

The volume under review, which offers the text of the documents in Bálint Hóman's people's court files and analyses of these documents surprisingly begins with a detailed, almost hundred-page, extremely thoroughly compiled chronology (pp.11–108). Although there are usually chronologies at the end of publications of historical sources, this chronology at the beginning of the volume provides a primary framework for interpreting the publication: the volume sticks to sources and facts and seeks to give the impression of a scholarly endeavor that is objective, clearly substantiated, and apolitical. The chronology and bibliography of Hóman's works are followed by Tibor Zinner's 40-page study on the history of the people's courts. The basic tenet of illiberal "revisionist historiography" is the emphasis on the need for a fresh start on the grounds that, until the work we have in our hands now was written, no one had dealt with the topic being analyzed. Zinner, who published his first work on the history of people's courts already in 1983, also uses this topos. Another reflection on the history of the people's court by Zsolt Horváth (which for some reason is at the end of the

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volume) mentions only the book by Tibor Lukács published in 1979 as the only summarizing work on the topic.

The volume contains two introductions concerning the people's courts and one about the 2015 retrial. This is followed by material from the people's court case in 1946. The real starting point of the volume is the thorough research work carried out by Gábor Ujváry as an expert for the case in 2015 (pp.537–610) and his analysis of the public debate (pp.162–99). This is followed by the documents of a court case in 1946 and then the 2015 trial.

The larger, more substantial part of the volume (about 300 pages) is the thoroughly annotated publication of the documents of the People's Court. The rules concerning the publication of these documents are explained in a preface to the collection (as is fitting). In this volume, the studies about the court case exceed in length the documents of the court case themselves, so the reader gets two loosely connected books. The largest theoretical problem of the volume is the authors' ambiguous attitude towards the empirical source of the volume, i.e. the minutes of the people's court proceedings.

Anyone who has ever worked with people's court documents knows this is a very challenging genre. The materials from a single case are sometimes held in different archives, and it can be extremely difficult to determine what documents the people's court used and often how it used them. The version of the Hóman court case published in the book was also created by merging two archival files (one from the Budapest City Archives, the other from the Historical Archives of the State Security Services). It is therefore strange that the documents' archival references are completely missing and, furthermore, that there is no reference to the missing materials that have been removed from the files in the meantime.

There are other methodological and theoretical problems which the authors fail to raise concerning the genre of people's court protocols as a source. The first problem concerns the transitional nature of the institution of the people's court itself. In an ever-changing legal environment, the authorities ran and used an institution which gained its legitimacy precisely from its ignorance of this constant change.

The second problem concerns the fact that, as is true in all court sources, since these kinds of written sources are available, they can be analyzed in two ways. The first approach is to consider these lawsuits as theatrical productions in which the actors performed the events of their past for the audience and the community according to the rules they thought were known. This, of course, had political consequences. In the case of the Hungarian people's courts, for

example, if the defendants were female, they referred to themselves as "weak women" and were usually given lighter sentences for crimes for which a male defendant would have been given a more seriously punishment.[1] Hóman tried to use this tactic. According to the interrogating investigators' summary report he behaved "womanly": "[He] describes his role as insignificant, denies his influence, and omits from his role the moments that show his unbroken German friendship, fascist attitude, and anti-Semitic attitude throughout." (p.210) He was not successful, given the court's politics and context. In other cases, defendants try to arouse emotions. Female defendants, for instance, may try crying. In the case of Hóman, however, the "old woman's complaint" (p.210), his strategy to portray himself as a victim, which is also mentioned in the report, did not help and may have hurt him. In this interpretive framework, the emphasis is on the fact that the trial, regardless of whether it happened incidentally in the transitional justice system of the extraordinary transitional period, never returns "the truth."

The other methodological approach typical of this volume is to consider what was happening in the court as "objective." The courts as institutions of post–World War II political justice did not function in this manner. The publication insists on factual accountability of the people's courts with great commitment and a huge footnote apparatus. This interpretation, even if consistent in its own methodological approach, would still be questionable. First of all, it is not clear that the lawyers, police officers, and investigators working in Budapest (a city largely in ruins) in 1945 and 1946 can be expected to have the same insights, knowledge, and source knowledge that today's researchers have. Second, this approach is inconsistent in the volume. For example, the investigative report of November 29, 1945 mentions 147 pieces of attached evidence in support of the allegations against Hóman, on which the volume does not reflect here. It is incumbent on the historian who is editing the text not simply to check and (quite legitimately) criticize the professionalism of the people's courts but also to explain why and how this kind of legal institution and procedure developed. Analyses of large, highly symbolic court cases like the Hóman hearing, however, are not suitable for this purpose.[2]

1 See more on this: Andrea Pető, The Women of the Arrow Cross Party. Invisible Hungarian Perpetrators in the Second World War (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2020).

2 See more Ildikó Barna, and Andrea Pető, Political Justice in Budapest after World War II (Budapest–New York: CEU Press, 2015).

In this review, I would not go into the controversial points of judging Hóman's professional life, which was extensively analyzed in the 2011 volume. The volume under review is interesting in part because it returns to the pre-2011 framework without meaningfully reflecting on the failure to erect a statue of Hóman and the failure to rehabilitate him as a historian and scholar. The book seems to have been intended as a monument of sorts, like a book to create a memory of the trial.

The volume concludes with a history of attempts to rehabilitate Hóman, analyzing the process that resulted in neither the erection of a statue of Hóman nor the restoration of his membership in Hungarian Academy of Sciences. István Varga (FIDESZ MP), who has been the political engine behind the rehabilitation of Hóman in recent decades, gained significant space in this part of the volume. In his writing, Varga puts himself at the center of these attempts, saying "without the two-thirds parliamentary majority, I would have found it much harder to take up the obstacles" (p.505). Thus, the legal process of rehabilitation became just as much a political process as the verdict against Hóman in 1946. When the volume mercilessly and meticulously footnotes the court case, it fights a battle that it had already lost when it was launched.

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 Hungarian Historical Review 9, no. 3 (2020): 587–590

## New Perspectives in Transnational History of Communism in East Central Europe. Edited by Krzysztof Brzechczyn. Dia-Logos 26. Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 2019. pp. 384.

*New Perspectives in Transnational History of Communism in East Central Europe*, edited by Krzysztof Brzechczyn, is the result of a renaissance in the research on the twentieth-century totalitarian systems in Central and Eastern Europe and an attempt to evaluate new theoretical proposals from various fields of study. It was published in 2019 as the twenty-sixth book in the Peter Lang series *Dia-Logos. Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences*.

First, I should say that the very title promises to introduce new perspectives on the historiography of European communism. That promise is not easy to keep, especially with respect to such a well-established sphere of research. Although the subject matter has been examined in depth, it is obvious to me that there are still too few studies that go beyond the national perspective. An examination of a phenomenon like communism should not, by definition, be restricted to one historiography. It should be global and comparative.

Brzechczyn outlines precisely this perspective in his introductory remarks. He draws a clear distinction between transnational and comparative studies, and he argues convincingly that they are based on different premises. From the comparative approach, the existing national historiographies are assumed to be ready-made, independent beings, and they are compared by means of a derivative determination of the criteria for their evaluation. Such a concept can be developed with the use of the available material, and in that sense, it does not constitute an entirely new perspective, but it does make it possible, as it were, to put the existing descriptions in order and contextualize them (p.15).

Brzechczyn suggests that the transnational perspective is methodologically more challenging, as it requires one to forget the existence of borders and national differences in order to allow the consideration of communism as a global movement, and only then is the implementation of the discovered model analyzed in the particular context. The national aspect is not the original context here. On the contrary, it is the global perspective that makes it possible to define and understand the local situation. This intriguing assumption could rightly be termed a "new perspective."

It is worth noting that that term was also used during the Third Annual Conference of the OSI–CEU *Comparative History Project. Comparative Studies of Communism: New Perspectives* (Budapest, May 27–29, 2010). It was also used in a

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2009 book edited by Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka entitled *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*. It seems clear that Brzechczyn would like to enter this discussion.

Although making paths for new perspectives is theoretically fascinating, it is also practically complicated. It is not easy to "set aside" the context in which the researchers have been raised and educated and in which they have been working all their lives. Can they free themselves from their particularistic histories? When we look through the biographical notes about the authors, we see that many of them lived and worked in more than one national context. That is an interesting Central and Eastern European phenomenon, which explains the possibility of a sensible implementation of the project. We are just entering a time in which the generation which was not shaped or, at least, was not solely shaped by the experience of communism is undertaking the theoretical reinterpretation of this experience.

In the introduction, Brzechczyn rightly notes that in the nineteenth-century scientific European historiography, the nation state was a widely accepted foundation for research. The paradigm of the "national historiography" survived, in a more or less covert form, the whole twentieth century, and it turned out to be one of the most durable assumptions of narratives about the past. Brzechczyn considers this to be both a natural consequence of the emergence of nation states and a construct of the cultural politics of those states. There is no doubt that the book ties in with the trend in transnational studies, discernible since the beginning of the twenty-first century. On the other hand, Brzechczyn correctly points out that the greater popularity of such research has yet not led to a clear theoretical position on the phenomena under study.

Consequently, Brzechczyn draws the logical conclusion that the very definition of transnational history has become a research problem. In his view, some doubts can be dispelled by separating transnational history from comparative history (p.16). This perspective is then rationally explained in a convincing manner. Brzechczyn explains why transnational historiography has recently become so popular and why it was not possible before. He focuses, on the one hand, on the new generations of researchers and, on the other, on the technical possibilities created by the Internet. Brzechczyn points out three areas of transnational research: (1) totalitarization and de-totalitarization; (2) modernist theories; and (3) the history of everyday life. In his opinion, modernist concepts were the first metanarratives of the process of transnational interpretation of communism in Eastern Europe, and the differences between the natures of communism in Eastern and Western Europe were first noted in those narratives.

The research on totalitarianism and the history of everyday life is also a traditional element of the scholarship on communism in Eastern Europe. Brzechczyn openly agrees with Peter Apor's and Constantin Iordachi's views on the topic. However, these authors do not see the need to draw a clear distinction between the comparative and transnational approaches, and they appear to wish to enrich the former with the latter. Indeed, for many scholars, it seems as if transnational studies are to expand and continue the main assumptions of comparative history, despite some tension between the two approaches.

Brzechczyn points to the fundamental differences between the methodological assumptions of the transnational and comparative approaches. The latter has enjoyed an established position since Marc Bloch, but it is especially popular in contemporary research on communism. One reason for this boost in popularity is the inclusion of new strategies of transnational research to that methodology. At the same time, Brzechczyn argues for the actual existence of two separate approaches here (p.17). On the other hand, Brzechczyn's examples do not contradict directly the assumptions of comparative history.

The articles in the book are based on the papers from the 2014 conference (Poznań, October 16–17). They are essentially 16 independent texts written by various authors from different countries. This diversity makes it possible to preserve the interdisciplinary and transnational perspective, however, this comes at the cost of consistency, despite the editor's evident efforts to maintain it. One advantage is doubtless the very broad representation of most national historiographies of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Also, various topics are covered, and many postulated "new perspectives" are shown.

Brzechczyn indicates three ways in which the transnationality of the authors' approaches finds expression: (1) in the analysis of the usefulness of the theories and models characteristic of transnational studies; (2) in the research on the use of these methods; and (3) in the research carried out with the use of universal categories which may be effectively applied to many societies. It is easy to notice that point three belongs to the comparative perspective. This very perspective appears to dictate the tone of many fragments of the book, and it indicates how difficult it is to maintain the postulated sharp distinction between comparative and transnational research in practice.

The book consists of five parts. In the first three parts, the general subject matter (communism) is divided into three aspects: political (i), ideological (ii), and economic/social (iii), while the two last parts are called, respectively, the states and societies of Central and Eastern Europe (iv) and the memory and narratives about

the communism in Central and Eastern Europe (v). The texts are consistently impressive, but it seems that not all the authors share the editor's vision of the transnational perspective. Most of them focus on traditional descriptions which emphasize the historical specificity of the given country and nation, with references to comparative methods. In the remaining texts, the comparative method is assumed from the start and effectively applied. The transnationality of the methods and subject matter of research remains in the background, but we see that it is still more of an interesting idea with perspectives for the future than a specific, independent research program. Especially interesting are articles from Chapter Three offering new spheres for study from the transnational perspective: consumerism and emotion studies; and from Chapter Five that shows problems of transnationalism when challenged by official memory politics in Belarus and Ukraine.

To sum up, in most texts in the book, including Brzechczyn's article, transnational studies are not clearly separated from comparative studies. The book does not exhaust the topic of this mutual relation, but that is not the objective of researchers who propose new points of view. It shows, in theory and practice, that there is still much work to be done before we could consider the transnational perspective to be fully conceptualized and standardized. It is difficult to separate the comparative and transnational histories, which gives rise to the question as to whether the endeavor is even justified.

In this respect, the third chapter, which is devoted to consumerism, instills optimism, as it proves that such research is not only possible but, in some areas, necessary. In the fifth chapter, ambitious plans are made for further work on the transnational perspective in historiography, and the last two texts indicate the urgency of that work, which, after all, does not take place in a political vacuum. The historiography of Central and Eastern Europe remains as complicated as its history. This is another reason why we should appreciate this publication, which presents a very broad spectrum of the theoretical and practical problems awaiting new generations of researchers. There is still no unequivocal answer to the question about the relationship between transnational and comparative perspectives in that research. The discussion continues, and Brzechczyn and his coauthors have made an important contribution to that conversation. Altogether, they have provided a good introductory book for everyone interested in transnational perspective, especially from the methodological standpoint, and for the wide range of researchers who focus on the comparative history of European communism.

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 Hungarian Historical Review 9, no. 3 (2020): 591–593

Magyar-zsidó identitásminták [Hungarian-Jewish identity patterns]. Edited by Iván Zoltán Dénes. Budapest: Ráció, 2019. 267 pp.

An interesting volume entitled *Hungarian-Jewish Identity Patterns* was published by the Budapest-based Ráció Kiadó in Hungary. The volume aims to trace the spiritual path of Hungarian (Neolog) Jewry through the fates of two Hungarian Jewish scholars, Henrik Marczali (1856–1940) and Bernát Alexander (1850–1927). The editor, Iván Zoltán Dénes, is the leader of the Henrik Marczali Research Group at the Jewish Theological Seminary at the University of Jewish Studies. Dénes analyzes how a 2018 conference which was held at the Institute of Philosophy of the Center for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences led to this volume. The spiritual foundation of the book is also provided by Károly Kecskeméti in his introduction, which focuses on the activities and identities of Neolog scholars or, as he writes in connection with the two scholars, "Jewish scholar[s] who at the same time identif[y] with the Hungarian nation" (p.9). Dénes also doubts the apologetics of assimilation, orthodoxy, and Zionism, as well as their idealization as an eternal explanation for every event, thus giving the ars poetica of the book, at least to be assumed.

We can read Mihály Huszár's thorough study on Henrik Marczali's father, Mihály Marczali, in the "Chapter of Identity Samples," who was the first rabbi of the village of Marcali. Huszár writes about the role Mihály Marczali he played in the formation of the identity of the family. Dénes analyzes the Hungarian-Jewish identity of Henrik Marczali, and then Szilvia Peremiczky describes the appearance of three Hungarian Jewish authors (Bertalan Ormódi, József Kiss, and Emil Makai) in Hungarian literary life.

The next chapter is entitled "Situation Assessments, Strategies, Pathways I." Here, Miklós Konrád deals with the problems of depictions of the Dualist era as the Hungarian Jewish golden age. András Zima writes about modern Jewish integration strategies at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Gábor Schweitzer examines the search for the Neolog rabbi identity in Hungary by analyzing the events between the rabbinical meeting in Győr and the foundation of the National Rabbinical Association.

In the next section, entitled "Location Assessments, Strategies, Findings 2," Péter Zóka analyzes the role of Alexander Bernát at the Hungarian National Congress of Free Teaching. Péter Turbucz describes the views of Bernát Alexander and Henrik Marczali in a long study on World War I, and Péter András

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Varga writes about Alexander Bernát and his circle of students as a "problem of philosophical history writing."

The volume strives to situate a defining part of Hungarian Jewry within the framework marked by the oeuvre of the two great Neolog scholars. In this respect, this book can be said to have been successful, because not many professionals have tried to trace the process of the historical formation of the Neolog Jewish identity. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that we are not talking about all of the Hungarian Jews at that time, but only about a community within this larger group, which means that we are only talking about a kind of intellectual history.

However, if we assume that historian Henrik Marczali and philosopher Bernát Alexander were role models for Hungarian Neolog Jewry, their unbroken enthusiasm for Hungarian national goals, for instance, which made them apologists for the "Great War" (as Péter Turbucz makes clear in his study), seems a bit odd today. Of course, it would be anachronistic to question the degree of enthusiasm at the time, yet at the same time, this unconditional loyalty and enthusiasm proved to be an illusion from a historical perspective.

I would like to highlight a few studies from the book which I feel are essential to an understanding of the message this collection of essays seems to endeavor to convey to the general readership. The essay by Miklós Konrád, which analyzes the attitude of the Hungarian Neolog public and intellectuals about dualism, is extremely interesting. Konrád convincingly demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, the Neolog Jewry was dissatisfied with the conditions and was increasingly frustrated, and in the end, many of them took a left-wing turn, which in this case meant supporting the revolution of 1918.

The book offers insightful articles about Alexander Bernát and Henrik Marczali, which examine certain stages of their lives and their relationships to decisive historical events. Péter Zóka analyzes Alexander's speech in Pécs (October 1907), which was delivered at the Hungarian National Congress of Free Teaching, where many people were present, from Oszkár Jászi to Ottokár Prohászka. Alexander, in whose view nurturing the desire for knowledge and raising the level of general education were the fundamental goals, condemned all uses of education for partisan political purposes and denied the accusation brought against him that he sought to relativize the truth.

At the end of the volume, Péter András Varga analyzes the circle of students of Alexander Bernát. Bernát's disciples were extremely important people in the history of Hungarian fiction. Béla Zalai, who died in a Russian prisoner

of war camp, Jenő Varga, head of the Moscow Institute of World Economy, Vilmos Szilasi, who had a "European career," and Béla Fogarasi, an important personality of Hungarian Marxist-Leninist philosophy, were all talents whose early interests were significantly influenced by Alexander. Varga sees in the phenomenological philosophical connection the point where these personalities were also connected to one another.

My main criticism of the book would be that it is a somewhat haphazard compilation of very high-quality studies. It sheds light on the careers of the two prominent Hungarian Jewish scholars in many respects, and it offers clear explanations of the relevance of their activities to the Hungarian Jewish intelligentsia in general. We are talking about people who were Jews but who considered themselves Jewish on the basis of religion only and who were otherwise essentially assimilated. They identified themselves as Hungarian, and in this respect, they also stressed the importance of being more than a member of a given nation. However, their unflinching Hungarian nationalism proved to be a failure in all respects, and this caused them great frustration and, paradoxically, prompted them to identify more passionately with the idea of the integral Hungarian state. This was paradoxical given the events of the subsequent decades, when the notion of the Hungarian state as defined by the borders of the medieval Hungarian kingdom proved a mirage, as did the notion that Hungarian society accepted Jews as Hungarians.

This volume is a significant contribution to the secondary literature in part because it brings identity disputes off the emotional plane and places them between the cornerstones of the historical facts and science.

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The

# Hungarian Historical Review

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The Hungarian Historical Review is a peer-reviewed international journal of the social sciences and humanities with a focus on Hungarian history. The journal's geographical scope—Hungary and East-Central Europe—makes it unique: the Hungarian Historical Review explores historical events in Hungary, but also raises broader questions in a transnational context. The articles and book reviews cover topics regarding Hungarian and East-Central European History. The journal aims to stimulate dialogue on Hungarian and East-Central European History in a transnational context. The journal fills lacuna, as it provides a forum for articles and reviews in English on Hungarian and East-Central European history, making Hungarian historiography accessible to the international reading public and part of the larger international scholarly discourse.

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# Hungarian Historical Review

## *Holocaust Victimhood in Hungary: New Histories*

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