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A hurban pusztulást jelent. A kifejezést hagyományosan a jeruzsálemi Szentély pusztulására használták. A szó a spanyol kiűzetést is jelölte. Az orthodox zsidóság a vészidőkre is alkalmazta a kifejezést. A pusztulás viszont önmagában történelmi és szociokulturális síkon nehezen értelmezhető, csupán erkölcsi következtetések vonhatók le belőle. Az induló folyóirat célja differenciáltan – korszakonként tagoltan, azok kontextusának figyelembevételével – szemlélni azokat a jelenségeket, amelyek a közép-európai, és a vele érintkező térségek zsidóságainak életében a Soá idején az összeomláshoz vezetett. A periodika nagy hangsúlyt kíván fektetni az együttélés kérdésére, melyet a társadalmi struktúrával, mint kontextussal együtt változóknak tekint. A holokauszt története nem zárható le a közösségek pusztulásával. A visszatérők újraindítási stratégiái ugyanúgy kiemelt figyelmet érdemelnek. A zsidó közösségek a mártíriumot évszázadokon keresztül tudatosan mutatták fel, mint az Örökkévaló nevének megszentelését (kidus Hasém), ezáltal a pusztulás közösségi értékmegerősítő és kohéziós erőt keltő jelentésszerűt is kapott. A múlt eseményei az általános emberi együttélés mintázataiban számunkra is útbaigazító és összetartó erővel bírhatnak. Ezért a folyóirat helyet kíván adni a memorbuch-elemzéseknek, a visszaemlékezés és a narrativitás kérdésének, valamint a holokausztról, s általában a genocídiumokról szóló alkotások művészetszociológiai vizsgálatának is.

A magyarországi zsidóság a Soá előtt egy közép-európai zsidó világ részét képezte, ugyanakkor az ország határterület is volt. Egyfelől otthont adott a német-cseh-morva gyökerű askenáz rítusú zsidóságnak, másfelől – az országban megjelenő Habsburg galíciai zsidóság révén – a kelet-európai zsidósággal is érintkezett. Balkáni határain túl pedig már az Oszmán Birodalom szefárd zsidósága volt található. A folyóirat kitekintést nyújt a közép-európaiság mellett ezekre a déli és keleti területekre is.

Hurban: együttélés – összeomlás – újraindítás c. folyóirat célja hazai és külföldi tudományos eredmények közzétevése és bemutatása, helyi közösségtörténelmi kutatások segítése és a holokausztmegemlékezésekhez kötődő hírek szemlézése. Első számunk egyúttal a HDKE munkatársainak bemutatkozó lapszáma is. Szerzőink a saját kutatási területükön elért új eredményeiket jelenítik meg. Tudatosan tükrözi a stáb sokszínűségét a fogalmi keretek és a megközelítések sokfélesége, amelyből a periodika interdiszciplináris megközelítése is adódik.

Haunting Female Holocaust Narratives from the 1960s in Hungary¹

Testimonies, memoirs and fictional accounts of the Holocaust written by female survivors, whether artistic or not, were little or not at all studied in Holocaust studies until the 1980s, as feminist scholars have pointed out. Feminist scholarship on women's Holocaust studies became significant when feminist scholars began to examine gendered memoirs, testimonies and fictions. Additionally, historical, empirical explorations on gender and the Holocaust tend to reveal the changing role of women in ghettos, in concentration camps, in the survival strategies, or in resistance, and to illuminate the perpetration of sexual and reproductive violence against women under the Nazi rule by a complex, intersectional analytical way.² Comparing these approaches to Hungarian developments, the gender focused research started around the turn of the millennium in Hungary. Despite expanding of the exploration on gender and genocide for the last decades, which endeavour has particularly been concerned with forgotten or unpublished journals, interviews of survivors, only a few studies of Hungarian memorial sites are addressing issues of gender in response to the importance of the remembrance of collective trauma for contemporary and formerly understandings of the past and for the formation of collective identity and memory. From the new perspectives on "Women and the Holocaust" in the context of East-Central Europe Andrea Pető, Louise O. Vasvári, Katalin Pécsi, Ilana Rosen (among others) open new avenues of inquiry, when they engaged to the analysis of interviews and archival materials for Holocaust memory.³

My fieldwork in Hungarian women's memory is pertained to memorial narratives of persecution, mainly those memorializing practices that concern female testimonies published before 1989. This paper relies on a tiny part of a greater research focused on the female public representations of trauma and mass violence during the 1960s in Hungary, in which women's stories of genocide were recounted through memoirs, non-fictional accounts, and novels. All of women's holocaust testimonies I will present in this paper appeared as public representations during the 1960's: Gáborné (Katalin) Vidor's memoir: *The Grave is Running High* (1960), Boris Palotai's novels: *The Man* (1962), *The Birds Silenced* (1964), Erzszi Szenes's diary: *The Soul Resists* (1966), however the Hungarian collective memory seem to have forgotten them completely.⁴

This project though was only intended to study forgotten Hungarian female testimonies on the Jewish genocide identifying a kind of *counter memory*, but it inevitably links with other novel research in reliance on Hungarian Holocaust representations and memorialization practices under the Communist era.⁵ The view about general setting of "deep silence" on Jewish genocide in Hungary before 1970s and 1980s ordinarily rests on the argument of academic historiography. According to Gábor Gyáni, or Regina Fritz, the official memory of the Holocaust was not

achieved until the 1980's. They state that "renewed public interest in the Holocaust reappeared as late as the 1970s and especially the 1980s after the deep amnesia imposed on it, a pause beginning at the late 1940's."⁶ Gábor Gyáni refers a "real tide of the partly fictional, partly documentary biographic memory literature in Hungary" in the 1970s, he also adds that

"Starting in the 1970s quite a large number of texts on Holocaust memory started to appear in book form, making available the authentic experiences of the Jewish victims of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators to a reading audience".⁷

It is acknowledged that the scholarships of the historical policy in terms of the Holocaust started to work mainly after the collapse of the Communist rule, but along with the new perspectives and researches together are forcing us to rethink and to pose question on how the development of collective memory can be reinterpreted concerning multifarious dimensions of remembrance and forgetting during different period before 1989 raising issues of political context, aesthetics, cultural and media attention on Jewish genocide. In so doing, I shall confront the principal claims on the "deep silence" before 1970s by arguing on a public discourse of the Jewish genocide has been constituted around the issue of "coming the terms with the past" during the 1960s, in which women have already participated adding their voice.

Instead of interpreting the opportunity of the remembrance, or staging questions on the progressions of political discourse that shaped the public discourse of the Holocaust, which have also been greatly influenced by foreign policy events (the Eichmann-trial of 1961, and Arab-Israeli Six-day war of 1967), I would like to concentrate on female narratives, which have become a part of the public memory of mass trauma in their contemporary age, although most of them fell into oblivion a few decades later. My questions in this paper mostly arose from feminist perspective focusing on representational, memorial practices of female experiences and behaviours under extreme conditions: how they spoke of the unspeakable, in which way they recounted her traumatic experiences in their public representations in the 60's.

GENDER AND HOLOCAUST MEMORY

The international discourse on gender issue within the Holocaust studies loaded theoretical debates staging the question: have the testimonies been claimed to be universal examples of suffering, or can they be examined from the gender perspective? Feminist Holocaust studies have sparked important issues on gender differences of the experiences and the testimonies of the ghettos, of deportation, of the concentration camps. The research on women and the Holocaust following first conference on this issue in 1983 thanks to Joan Ringelheim and Esther Katz in USA; subsequently scholars began to gather to different kind of sources, historical documents, interviews, and personal memories. Several scholarships set out to corroborate

¹ This paper is an extended version of the English-language presentation of the international conference held at HDKE (Holocaust Memory: Recent Challenges in Research and Representation Conference, November 10-11, 2020.). A part of my research on Hungarian women's narratives was published in Hungarian - Hivatalos amnézia és az emlékezés kényszere. A holokauszt női elbeszélései az 1960-as években [=Official Amnesia and the Compulsion of Remembrance: Hungarian Female Holocaust Narratives during the 1960s] – in *Múltunk*, (64.) 2. 2019. 77–110.

² Ofer – Weitzman (eds.) 1998; Weitzman – Ofer 2015.

³ See among others Pető – Hecht – Krasuska (eds.) 2015; Pető 2020; Vasvári 2014; Vasvári 2016; Pécsi 2007; Pécsi 2013.

⁴ The broader version of my paper was published in Hungarian in 2019. See Jablonczay 2019.

⁵ See *Zombory* – Lénárt – Szász 2013; Ebenshade 2019.; Kékesi - Zombory 2022.

⁶ Gyáni 2016: 215; Fritz 2012.

⁷ Gyáni 2016: 224–225.

women's particular experience with a finding and recovery gesture. By stressing the gender differences in experiences and their memories, as Myrna Goldenberg, Joan Ringelheim, Esther Katz, Dalia Ofer, Lenore J. Weitzman, Zoë Waxman, Marlene Heinemann, and others remind us that the gender differences also shape the experiences of those inflicted by physical and psychological pain. These feminist scholars pointed out that women also wrote down their testimonies, but these testimonies were not interesting to be researched by historical or cultural memory scholarships until the 1980s, men's narratives dominated the Holocaust discourse, which have not shaped the experience of women, and we must mention that female experiences did not easily enter public discourse. These studies on the field of Holocaust and feminist studies addressed the particular experience of women under "double jeopardy" subjugating them to sexual and emotional violence as women as well as mothers, and the researches also stressed the significance of bonds of womanhood (*maternal consciousness and sisterly solidarity*) providing singular strategies for surviving.⁸ The decisive role of feminine identity (*biological roles*) in relation to the rate of their survival (*nurturing, supportive bonds*) displays that their bodies could be fatal, since pregnant women were sent directly to the gas chambers, thus gender differences shape the experience of the genocide. At the same time, they submit when "woman" functions as a metaphor for marginalization, interpreting the female gender as a sign of suffering, absence, and vulnerability is also problematic.⁹

Dalia Ofer, Lenore Weitzman (1998), Carol Rittner (1993), Joan Ringelheim (1998) among others, claim that the study of women in the Holocaust is necessary to retrieve the absence of women's voice and testimonies in Holocaust history and memory. In contrast to this point of view, Ruth Bondy (1998) or Lawrence Langer (1998) disagree over whether women and men should be considered as two diverse groups. After the millennium, the common-sense notions, such as representation or "different voices" were challenged from many directions. The scholars with new feminist perspectives on the Holocaust underlined those early scholarships with their "recovery mission" emphasized the lost voices, different experiences of women by suggesting the field's shortfall to endow to women's voices, the sex difference as given was treated instead of examining its position as social construction affording sex stereotypes. Most recently, for historical and empirical research, Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman have provided a new theoretical framework defining structural sources for gender differences in the Holocaust and proposing the more powerful model concerning sequential development of women's coping strategies during the Holocaust. This model departs from traditional gender concepts, they portray how women's various behaviour during the atrocities, continuing or disrupting of pre-war roles, their diverse responses to them in accordance with their different ages, backgrounds or social class can be analysed.¹⁰

The scholars working in the field of memory studies – particularly around national memory, counter memory, memorialization, testimony, post memory – have also started to engage with feminist analyses of gender, sexuality, race, nation and class for decades. Within the field of study of women's history and memory, the form of counter memory has proven useful as a conceptual tool, addressing gender differences in the act of remembering, and disclosing the political structures due to the forgetting strategies of official nationalized memory.¹¹ The female research on Holocaust memory also posed in terms of gender differences in narratives of female testimonies staging: how does the role of female witness diverge from that of male victim, how does gender shape the acts of remembering in narrated memory?¹² Sara R. Horowitz addressed the issue on different reflexions, recollections, interpretations of Nazi atrocities subjected women to violence, arguing that "women's testimonies reveal distinctly different

patterns of experience and reflection from those of men", "women may remember differently from men – or they may remember different things". She has also added that

*"Treating women as a more or less unified group with similar behavioural characteristics ignores important differences in cultural background, social class, age, economic standing, level of education, religious observance, political orientation- differences that, like gender, contribute to the way victims responded to their circumstances."*¹³

Horowitz argued that discussing women in Shoah literature, three areas (women are figured by men; women's own memoirs, gender perspectives in research) reveal the differences between male and female narratives on women's representations. According to her, women are portrayed as marginal, helpless, fragile, morally deficient, and eroticised in their victimization by men's narratives.

The debates on the crisis of representation also claimed about the difference of testimonies articulated by men and women, whether "real" differences between men and women should be validated or women's victimhood should be understood to produce gender as an identity? Recognizing the role of cultural interposition in the memorial practices and in the public imaginary, and the meaning of the constructed role of gender, we can acknowledge that memories carry the stories of sexual abuse, violence, abortion, the murder of children, heroic and painful stories of female supporting, these experiences could not have been integrated into their own Holocaust memoirs by female survivors. In these narratives often, as Lawrence L. Langer stressed, the texts and the sub-contexts collide with each other, the reader must uncover – through the effort of confrontation with the witness – the covered stories of the sufferer from below the text as sub-contexts,¹⁴ furthermore, the memory of the body is central, in which the female body is portrayed as fragmented, dismembered, or absent (intersected that of body with categories of class and race).

The new horizon interrogates the notion of representation as "standing for an absent object, event, or experience", which could not be a vehicle for self-expression, or construction of "fact" as a basis of truth assertions about the past or present. Furthermore, the question is posed on the paradox of the testimony. According to Lisa Disch,

*„the most compelling connection between the fields of Holocaust and feminist studies: the fraught connection of authority to experience that is played out in the event of testimony. Testimony cuts to the heart of debates about representation insofar as first-hand accounts are taken not simply to represent the past but also to remember it, to construct it through available narrative frames. This is the paradox of testimony: that speaking neither discloses the self nor reports the past but lays bare (...) the uncertainty of authorship, experience, and identity".*¹⁵

8 Disch – Morris 2003.

9 Remmler 1994: 170.

10 Weitzman – Ofer 2015.

11 Lourie – Stanton – Vicinus 1987.

12 Hirsch – Smith 2002.

13 Horowitz 1998: 370.

14 Langer 1998.

15 See Disch – Morris 2003: 13.

HAUNTING FEMALE NARRATIVES IN THE 1960S

There is a shift within the field of (female) memory and Holocaust studies from recognizing “different voices” to demonstrate how the past is turned out by testimony, memory or art, including the increasing interest towards the dynamics of remembrance evolving the circulation of the meanings in a broader environment.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the forgotten and erased female memories and authors should be recovered by analysing the ways of cultural remembering and forgetting. What a culture recalls and what it forgets are involved in the dynamics of gender and power, in that case, the process of recalling/forgetting and the foreign policy have become inextricably intertwined. As we know from the scholarship of memory studies, the narrated forms of traumatic experiences, the representability of traumatic events are always transmitted into compelled conversion. The witness did not only tell his/her own memory, the individual stories and memories are shaped by social narratives, indeed, the remembrance is always forged in conjuncture with the public and private.¹⁷ The acts of remembrance are linked with the mediation of cultural practices that forms of memory can receive frame, meaning, and encoding of genres,¹⁸ which themselves evolve with changes in media technologies over time.¹⁹

I sought to examine the female representations of traumatic events, which were both respond to and produce cultural memory, but these forgotten female texts can be interpreted as alternative or counter-narratives of the past within a public discourse on a Holocaust during the 1960s. The explored testimonies established narrated traumatic memories that can be described in a genre of “life writing”²⁰ in which the biographical and autobiographical, the fictional and non-fictional, the individual and collective acts of remembering, the haunting presence of the past in the present, the representational difficulties of the narrative regarding the painful traumatic stories are embedded in a politically and socially regulated representational and discursive formations of larger structures of violence, oppression or terror.

Gáborné Vidor’s testimony, *The Grave is Running High* (*Háborog a sír*) was published in Hungary once in 1960, in Germany under the name of Katalin Vidor (*Unterm Zeichen des Sterns*) in 1963 (translated by Bruno Heilig), and was reprinted in 2014 under the title *Alltag in Der Hölle*.²¹ The little information we have about her life is from the official biographical lexicon, from her book and from journal reviews. According to these sources, Katalin Vidor was born as Catherine Sommer in Zalaegerszeg on September 22nd, 1903, died in West Berlin on June 7th, 1976. Her book appeared under her official Hungarian name, Gáborné Vidor (as an official name of a wife after marriage). She was deported to the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 from her hometown, Zalaegerszeg.²² After four months in Birkenau, she was selected for labour, and was transferred to Sackisch, then to Merzdorf, both subcamps of the Groß Rosen concentration camp. She survived, but her son, Tibor, her family and her husband’s family were killed. Her husband, Gábor Vidor (1895–1958) was forced into Labor Service in a cement factory then he was obliged to move to Italy as a medic in an ambulance. After 1945 he lived as a dentist

in Feldafing (Upper Bavaria). Katalin Vidor, after her liberation from the concentration camp, apparently lived again in Zalaegerszeg and Budapest, later moved into Berlin. She worked as a translator (on especially psychological theme), she wrote articles in journals (*Zala Newspaper*, *New Life*, *Life and Literature*), finally she began to publish on her experiences in the camp only fourteen years later after her release (1960). Unfortunately, Katalin Vidor’s personality and her testimony were forgotten in Hungary. Nevertheless, the question arises, whether the oblivion has at all periods prevailed, whether the testimony has been always neglected?

From the viewpoint of my research based on reconsidering the (female) representations of Holocaust under the communist era, it is a remarkable fact that her testimony still had reviews during the 1960s in literary journals, and that the printed copies were soon snapped up demonstrates she had an impact on that era. In 1961, one of her reviewers elaborating on his assessment as this testimony is a memento of the female lager and the horror of Auschwitz, stressing the survival witness how could remain a human being under the destruction and dehumanization.²³ In her narrative the female survivor, the witness, wanted to emphasize the experience of exclusion, stigma, violence and destruction, publishing her statements built on her own experience and memory in own right as a part of the public discourse. We cannot claim that this female memoir of Auschwitz has been completely laid unremarked in its time, entirely neglected, or tabooed. On the contrary, this book was awarded with the so-called “plane prize” of 1961 by the institutional side of the remembrance by the Publishing Directorate General of the Ministry of Culture. After that, the book was translated into German (GDR).²⁴ The translator, Bruno Heilig also translated two other memoirs during these years (Oszkár Betlen: *Élet a halál földjén. Auschwitzi visszaemlékezések*, 1959 [*Leben auf dem Acker des Todes*, 1962], György Sós: *Vég-tisztesség*, 1962 [*Die letzte Ehre*, 1965]).²⁵ It can be assumed that the German translation of Katalin Vidor’s memoir would not have taken place without this state award. Unfortunately, with the changes in the political circumstances, particularly it became negligible from the 1970s, when the criticism had acknowledged that Katalin Vidor’s memoir is a shocking document after all suggesting that the written form of this memory was inappropriate in the literary sense.²⁶ Thus, this testimony, like many others, went into oblivion for almost 50 years in the Hungarian cultural memory and Holocaust remembrance.

Inasmuch as Katalin Vidor published her memoir under the communist era, in the early of 1960’s, it is presumed that the manner and the perspective of the records were influenced by the political and social environment surrounding her. The survivor, who recollected and interpreted her experiences, met Soviet liberators, and the context may have been charged politically, but a communist hue or reference to soviet resistance would not appear in the rest of the narrative. The writer of the memoir was starting to recall the moment of the Soviet liberation by remembering the traumatic events in the process of writing. She tries to tell a retrospective narrative of the past, the story of the traumatic events can be told. As it is well-known, in the narrated memory, the remembering includes a reinterpretation of the past in the present, which process is not a passive, the narrator actively gives meaning to the past.²⁷ Several records of personal experiences recalled from a second level of the narrative, a present and the past has been taken together, providing insight into the way in which remembered, narrated records, in accordance with the memorial writings of the 1960s, differed from that of previous ways of speaking. Since the remembering process is embedded in the narrative, the survivor contacted the past by remembering past events 14 years later. A sentence stated by survivor in her narrated memory, “*the grave is running high*”²⁸, gives title of the recollection

16 Disch – Morris 2003: 13; Rigney 2008.

17 Hirsch – Smith 2002.

18 Rigney 2008.

19 See Nünning 2008; Erll 2008.

20 See Vasvári 2016.

21 Vidor 1960; Vidor 2014.

22 A small Jewish community lived in Zalaegerszeg from centuries; there were 1076 inhabitants in April 1944. The ghetto was established in May 16, 1944 to which the Jews of the city, Zalaegerszeg, Lenti and Nova (375 families, 1,221 people) were forced to move. The inhabitants of the rural ghettos were concentrated in transit and assembly camps of Zalaegerszeg, squeezing in around 3,450 people. The Jews were deported from the III. and IV. Gendarmerie districts between July 4th and 6th with four railroad trains. 2,900 people onboard the train left Zalaegerszeg on July 5th and arrived in Auschwitz on July 7th. In April 1945 around 100 people returned to the city. By 1962 the number of the Jewish community had decreased to 30 in Zalaegerszeg. Balázs (ed.) 2008; Vidor 2014: 196–198.

23 Nyerges 1961.

24 Molnár 1962.

25 Kárpáti 1993: 106.

26 Földes 1977.

27 Smith – Watson 2010: 16.

28 Vidor 1960: 166.

and is a deeper indicator or a symbol to designate the phenomenon of the haunting past in the present. For the author telling the truth is imperative, for the sake of millions, whose monstrous death claims remembrance to educate and warn. Moving between past and present in narrating the displacement and dehumanization confronts us with the unspeakable brutality, cruelty, murders, and fear, the everyday life in hell, recounting how they would make great effort to survive during the ordeal (often from an intellectual observer position). Additionally, she focuses on the experience of mutual support and solidarity, the strategies of survival. She is describing their hopeless, paralysed situation living in the shadow of death, every concept is annihilated, the coordinate system of reality is lost:

*“death comes in milliseconds” (...) in one of the camps, the “untaugliches” no longer sit on the ground, and the chimneys shed more smoke ... Tomorrow perhaps we will do - the paralyzed fantasy strains, then stumbles into a realistic thought: at night we will have more space in the block, and at the moment this is the ‘point’, the tomorrow is not yet interesting.”*²⁹

The first-person narrator tries to select the events, and as in every autobiographical narrative, the act of remembering is connected to rhetorical acts.³⁰ However, here this selection is rather supposed to be linked with the unspeakability of traumatic events. When the survivor-narrator recounts her story, the present tense is much more frequent in the way of narration than the past tense, the events are recorded simultaneously by a narrator as a “penetrating eye”, but she also has an interpretative perspective through which she appears in the foreground. The narrator of the recollection is forced to omit the circumstances of the deportation, the painful memory of arrival and separation from her family. Recounting her story being in the camp, but only two days after her arrival since those two days are entirely forgotten, she cannot remember, because of the fear she felt about asking herself: where her family was, and what happened to them?³¹

12 The first part of the memoir is about the ordeal of Auschwitz, when in November they were being transferred to a textile factory in Mezdorf and is dedicated to a testimony on children and mothers of Auschwitz. Like many other female testimonies, the survival-narrator cannot tell the stories of violence against children, or the drama of death directly, the dying is counterpointed by stories of heroism, self-sacrifice, and solidarity. The text recounts on women’s bounding, how important it was for women to create the sense of sibling belonging, how they were able to help each other, similarly to Holocaust sources and scholars who have stressed as well, “the fact that survival, first and foremost, was random, virtually all memoirs by women implicitly or explicitly credit survival to some manner of women’s friendships and collaboration.”³² It can also be pointed out that, on the one hand, socialisation gave women a learned role in relationships and interdependence, and on the other hand, they were more inclined to write so-called collective biographies rather than autobiographies, in which stories of friendships and solidarity were more prominent than in men’s narratives.³³

It will also be striking how she presents herself as an actor when she would reach a numbed, *Muselman* state, that can be described as “*distortion in/of Auschwitz*”, “*when the soul is stricken down death*”,³⁴ receiving outside help from someone as she tries to help others. Recounting a story of human affection, beyond all suffering and torture, recounting some stories in which women help each other in order to avoid being perished and succumbed, how can they save their lives and children’s lives, or obtain the necessary food. She emphasized that the role of

nurturing could have helped to survive: their responsibility as mothers, or women forced them to overcome their own depression and to conceive strategies for their survival. She attempts to express the extreme joyful feeling when two children find their mother in a wonderful way, and the crisis of language comes to light from a new perspective, the real joy cannot be represented:

*“My science stops here again. Shall I say joy, laughter, crying? ... Words, words, and words. They embrace, they almost absorb each other. The questions and answers are immersed in the flood of questions and answers, the language is just a crutch, a support for the heart, because nothing but nothing is interesting, just to hug again, to intertwine, and to live together - or die!”*³⁵

In recounting the uncomprehending gladness of liberation, she also refers to a Czech little boy born in Mezdorf:

*“a mother pushes a little boy, Tomika born in Mezdorf, in a car home on the country road. Women surround the car and go. No, the wheels of the car are not spinning in the dust of the road: the Czech women put their hearts in front of the car, by means of rolling into Prague.”*³⁶

A careful reading of *The Grave is Running High* may reveal that narrative memory tries to veil the unspeakable trauma: what happened to her family, with whom she was deported together to Auschwitz, what happened to millions? The stories of saving children are highlighted in her narrated memory, but the death of her own son has remained unspeakable. According to Lawrence Langer, particularly, in a female testimonial narrative “the subtext of her life and her testimony is not a quest for release but an admission of irreplaceable loss.”³⁷ But as Sara R. Horowitz states,

“examining the ways the atrocity of the Shoah affected women or men, in specific terms – in their roles as mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, daughters, sons, lovers, friends, workers, homemakers – reveals to us something of the trauma they continue to bear.”³⁸

13 According to the German edition, this is not just a book about Nazi terror, about death, suffering of victims, but it is a report about life, about the humanity that still exists during the extreme ordeal. The focus is on women’s recruitment in their autonomous human existence, even though they have been mentally and physically damaged. Even in Auschwitz, many of them apparently saw themselves not only as objects of the Nazis, but still at the same time, they could remain subjects of their own lives.³⁹

Boris Palotai (1904, Nagyvárad – 1983, Budapest) was born into a Hungarian Jewish family in Oradea (Nagyvárad), lived in Kosice between 1919 and 1940, and in 1940 moved to Budapest. During the war she and her family survived the persecution by hiding with forged papers in Budapest.⁴⁰ In terms of her career, it can be noted that she already belonged to the Hungarian literary circle in Kosice, her lyrical verse and her novels were started to be published in inter-war period, but she became known and renowned in Hungarian publicity particularly after the war during the Communist era without so much as receiving a real recognition of her in the high literary field. The literary evaluation of her writings has remained incomplete, namely her works – out of which many films were made - were inserted into a popular category, but they were neglected. Most likely, this aesthetic aspect was one of many reasons due to which the Hungarian literary history could not draw attention to those novels that are steadily connected with the memory of the Holocaust.

29 Vidor 1960: 7. [The English translation of the Hungarian original (and all other Hungarian originals) was made by Tímea Jablonczay.]

30 Smith – Watson 2010: 16.

31 Vidor 1960: 12.

32 Goldenberg 1996: 86.

33 Bos 2003: 36.

34 Vidor 1960: 35.

35 Vidor 1960: 35.

36 Vidor 1960: 287.

37 Langer 1998: 361.

38 Horowitz 1998: 366.

39 Vidor 2014: 196–198.

40 Palotai 1975: 126.

Boris Palotai's two fictional novels, *The Man (A férfi)* (1962), and *The Birds Silenced (A madarak elhallgattak)* (1964) are engaged in the direct antecedent and aftermath of the Holocaust depicting the process of traumatic memory elaborated in narrative structure of novels from female perspective, but here the effect of the trauma is not emerged from the experience of the survivor. The struggle of remembering is at the heart of the two novels, the events are focused on two perspectives shifting the emphasis. These novels particularly recount the compulsion to remember and confront the hidden past, they make prosecutions and call for empathy for the victims, moreover, these novels can attract and hold the attention by means of their own narrativizing processes, literary skills based on narrative coherence and fidelity. *The Birds Silenced* narrates two stories: during the 1960's the male protagonist (a writer) recalls to 1944. In the narration of the two stories of the novel, two times are layered on top of each other: from the present time of the early 1960s past events were being emerged: a love story of a hiding Jewish girl in the summer of 1944, which story was repressed in the consciousness of the male protagonist. The protagonist was a celebrated writer during and after the Nazi era, nevertheless, who is not described as a collaborator of the Nazis, but who does not recognize the circumstances and consequences of inhumanity and terror, who does simply look away, and with that he will be an accomplice of the murderous system. We would say today that this man characteristically inhabited what Michael Rothberg refers to as the implicated subject, who is neither perpetrator nor victim, but beneficiary and accomplice of a system of power that makes some people victims and others perpetrators. To quote literally Rothberg,

14 *"Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less "actively" involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mould of the "passive" bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators. In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct forms of violence turn out to rely on indirection. Modes of implication—entanglement in historical and present-day injustices—are complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, but are nonetheless essential to confront in the pursuit of justice."*⁴¹

In fact, it is a position occupied by a large part of society, by the community itself, a position that is widely reflected in the works of memory published in the 1960s. Compared to the unconsciously acting protagonist, the other characters represented in the novel wear masks and play a role: in the age of disaster, in the destructive world of totalitarianism, they are forced to wear masks under the pressure of the destructive machinery, it is underlined that the roles of privacy cannot function as they cannot trust each other. The characters appearing next to the protagonist represent different statuses and habits, who will be an accomplice to the system, or who will be resistant. In the narratives the layers of the present and the past (and narrative levels) overlap, the past becomes apparent, namely, the retrospective mode of the narration with act of remembering to begin to work, from a level of reflection along with the excavation into the past, the traces of trauma are starting to haunt. The male protagonist wants to deny his responsibility for the traumatic events, but the traces emerge after 17 years, it gradually turns out that he was unaware responsible for someone's (her lover) deportation, and her death. The memory of the male fictional protagonist oscillates between amnesia, forgotten details and overly clear memory images. The

fictional representation of the individual act of recalling and forgetting with the past symbolically refers to the forgetting strategy of Hungarian collective memory passing the responsibility of the community by reason of the mass murder. The book was published many times and was translated into several other languages. Even a movie was also made from the novel by Zoltan Fábri (*Nappali sötétség, Daytime darkness*) and it did not only become popular in a narrow intellectual circle.

The plot of another novel, titled, *The Man*, was drawn about the effect of certain experiences upon those who survived them. The female protagonist had just returned home from the concentration camp and tried to remake her life after the liberation, getting help from her female friend, who had no exact experiences about the atrocities. The female protagonist of this novel struggles to recover a collapsed connection with life, she survived an unspeakable ordeal, but she cannot overcome her suffering, her memory; because of the loss of her family, she lost hope to remake her life. The present – in which she was forced to live – always collapsed to the past, repetitive images appeared around her children who were thrown up onto a van, disappearing right before her eyes, shipped in gas chambers. This past is incomprehensible, her life is split into absent past and present, but this past cannot be inserted into her present, the past is haunting. As Lawrence Langer argues, *"women who outlived the atrocity also inhabit two worlds, the world of then and the world of now."*⁴²

*"The maternity continues to haunt: one biological feature of their gender, the capacity to bear children, has had a singular impact on their efforts to confront their ordeal. The woman could not escape the taint of her memory, "her absent past is permanently present inside".*⁴³

In Boris Palotai's novel the memory of the body and the portrayal of the body are playing a central role in the process of act of remembering: the body as it was scared, it was under total humiliation, but it can operate a site which tries to stand against the loss of identity, precisely because of her deep bodily memory a resumption of her life proves impossible. Not only the representation of the process of the unbearable memory is crucial, the remembering processes and images intersect with the meaning of the collective memory regarding the past, and the present provides recognition for the female protagonist and for the reader about Hungarian complicity. It is symbolically emphasised that the resumption in Hungary is impossible, the investigation of survivor-witness about the past, when she discovers the hidden past of a Hungarian man, all society is uncovered, pointing out the accomplice of Hungarians. 15

The fiction supposedly can be interpreted as a pseudo-factual novel,⁴⁴ which intends to provide a fictional realm by means of additional claim to extratextual verification. In doing so, the novel reifies its memorial status: even though it is not the author's own testimony, but it is held to be a remembrance of her friend, another survivor-female writer, Tereza Rudnóy (1909–1947) which contains a fictionalized set of biographical elements referring to Rudnóy's tragical story before and after the liberation. Her children were executed in Auschwitz after arriving at the camp, her husband is assumed to have died in labour service; she and her sister were only members of their family to survive the ordeal. Rudnóy tried to begin to rebuild her life, however she died in an accident in 1947.⁴⁵ As a survivor she aimed to speak of the unspeakable with her fictionalized testimony (a kind of documentary novel), titled *Liberated Women Survivors [Szabaduló asszonyok]* – published in 1947 [2011], a month before her death – she wanted to tell the truths struggling against amnesia after the horror and liberation. This testimony had not merely personal therapeutic function for own writer

42 Langer 1998: 353.

43 Langer 1998: 361.

44 Foley 1986.

45 When she wanted to ferry over the Danube, from Léva (Slovakia, from her sister) to Esztergom, the ferry storm-bound, all passengers drowned.

– she formulated it immediately after the release in Boris Palotai’s home supporting her –, but it has a collective value as well. Unfortunately, her life, her previous works, and her extraordinary testimony totally went into oblivion after her death.⁴⁶

Erzsi Szenes (Elisheva Senesh) (1902–1981) was a Czechoslovakian–Hungarian–Jewish woman writer, a Holocaust survivor, later Israeli writer and journalist. She wrote down her autobiographical accounts in her half-literary ghetto-diary entitled *The Soul Resists [A lélek ellenáll]*, (1939–1941) published in 1966, and in her memorial texts published in Israel *I have a homeland (Van hazám)* in 1956. Accordance with her records, she participated in the Jewish resistance (she was not a partisan or fighter, but she attempted to have a talk with diplomats/politicians on behalf of saving Slovakian Jewish community) during the Nazi era, moreover she was one of the witnesses in the Eichmann–trial. She was known for her poetry in Hungarian and Czechoslovakian literary circles in the interwar period. Must be noted here, that after the war her reputation has only remained in the Czechoslovakian–Hungarian literary history. In Hungary she was only able to reappear in the publicity for a short time, in 1960’s, before and after she was totally forgotten. The memory of her and the history of her oblivion are also peculiar.

On the day, 19th of March 1944, the German command reached Budapest, the occupation was enforced meeting no resistance from the Hungarian Army. She was arrested on the 21st of March 1944. During her imprisonment she was repeatedly interrogated, tortured and relocated to a camp in Kistarcsa, Hungary, then deported to Auschwitz. Her parents were deported from Mihalovce to Auschwitz and murdered in the autumn of 1944. During this time, her brother was killed by the SS nearby Banska Bistrica. From Auschwitz she had to endure in Fallersleben, then she was transmitted to Salzwedel into a military factory, where she was until she and her fellow prisoners were liberated by the American forces. After spending three years in Bratislava, her experiences related to the Holocaust were published in a Slovak-language journal (she was a columnist of *Knihy a Osudy*). Already shattered by the realization of her disrupted life, she decided to leave for Bratislava at the beginning of the first immigration wave of Holocaust survivors from Europe to reach Israel in 1949. Until her death (1981) she lived in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, worked as a writer, published her memoirs, short novels, articles in an Israeli–Hungarian journal, *Új Kelet (New East)* organized around a Hungarian literary circle.

The manuscript of her diary, *The Soul Resist*⁴⁷ that remained unpublished until 1966, was written inside the Mihalovce ghetto between 1939 to 1941. Her autobiographical accounts begin from the time of her confinement in the ghetto until the time of her rescue. Besides emphasizing the original version of the text – that was written during the time of terror in a hiding place risking the author’s life – we might also consider textual aspects – titles, paratextual elements and the functional structuring of the narrative devices – all of which constitutes the narrative activity of the diarist at some level. In her diary she considers events happening around her, internal observations, and reflections, external and internal events seem to carry the testimonial authority to which she devoted considerable effort. Since the text of the diary comprises more narratives and descriptions, observations, and comments with highly reflective accounts, it tells us about the mechanism of memory and the writing act. Through the writing act, she reflects on the process of life, in which the retrospective view on the past assigns meaning to her life. Among other things, self-discovery and self-presentation are threaded throughout her interrelated experiences; such varied functions belong to autobiographical writing. What is significant in this context is not the function of the diary as a momentary interpretation of life,

which also operates in her text, but the autobiographical effort linked to testimony. Namely at such a moment of crisis, the author, like Szenes, recognizes the significant role of the crisis and attempts to struggle over meaning and order in her life, she may discern the pattern of repeated experiences through telling the story of which narrative identity is constructed. However, within testimonial discourse in relation to the genre of the Holocaust diary the personal experience and self-introspection is linked with the “fate of a whole people”, in which “the narrative “I” represents a community or collective”, the personal transformation is linked to a group marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle.⁴⁸

Szenes’s book, *The Soul Resists* was published in Budapest and aimed to claim the interest of the Hungarian public, it is explicitly addressed to the Hungarian audience, therefore her Hungarian cultural identity is stressed pointing out her exclusion and the shaping of her identity as a traumatized Jew. Critics underlined that she belongs to Hungary, for instance, András Mezei highlights that “in the shadow of death-camps” “she is thinking of Hungarians all the time: *my country*,”⁴⁹ concurrently reviewers also admit that her accounts consist of fragmented lyrical and prosaic elements, but they continue to say that these accounts are described by the writer as a guildsman. At the same time as the publication of her book, Erzsi Szenes also reappeared personally on the Hungarian literary and cultural scene: at the invitation of the poet Ferenc Juhász she visited Budapest in 1966 and was guest of honour on that year’s Day of the Book, as a part of the diplomacy, David Giladi, ambassador of Israel also attended to the event visiting her. She was interviewed by several newspapers and the radio. In interviews at the time Szenes spoke of being a witness in the Eichmann-trial⁵⁰ and at the trial of Hunsche and Krumej in Frankfurt in 1964, for she was on the transport that was called back from the border by Horthy, but which, as she put it, on Eichmann’s orders, was slid over the border for a second time by the SS. The personal appearance of Szenes in Budapest with the publication of her diary was a particularly quaint moment: she became one of the representatives, indeed a diplomat, of the process of „the coming to term with the past” that articulated in the 1960s and of the short-lived period of Israeli–Hungarian cooperation that was blocked with the collapse of the Soviet-Israeli relationship very soon, in 1967. The authority of the survivor who wrote her testimony and who appeared in the publicity is constructed becoming a witness, as she explicitly attended at the Eichmann-trial. According to Annette Wieviorka this trial opens a new era, through which the memory of the Holocaust is being admitted to the public sphere, from this the survivors turning into witness “became an embodiment of memory” attesting to the past and to the continuing presence of the past⁵¹.

Concluding, female witnesses entered the public discourse on the Jewish genocide during the 1960’s in Hungary. Many memories and fictions, including female testimonies, memoirs or fictions on the traumatic past were published, they were closely aligned with a new discourse begin to constitute around the constraint of the “coming to terms with the past” in this era. Although female narratives also participated in the principal concerns of the remembrance, these memories could be easily relegated to the margins of the literature, and they went into oblivion erasing from the cultural memory. In these memorial texts, the working of the remembering process is conspicuous, so to speak, a more complex reflexive narrative form of memory constituted: the memory techniques convey both the inner experience of trauma and the haunting past in the present. This retrospective mode is articulated from a level of reflection, the narrator or the protagonist recall the past after 15–20 years, and in the remembrance

46 Teresa Rudnóy recounted her experiences about devastation, hopelessness, tormented memories, in posing questions about law and revenge after the liberation. The docu-novel narrates the story of the last 24-hour, the antecedents and consequences of liberation: it confronts us with crucial issues: whether liberation can bring true freedom, whether the unforgivable can be forgiven? Rudnóy’s novel examines female body experiences through extraordinarily strong visual narrative devices, connected to visual effects that are at the focus. The text portrays strong female bodily experiences; within this representation the fragmented female body could be revealed as a sign of suffering, absence and vulnerability.

47 Szenes 1966.

48 John 1989; Hutton 2005: 62.

49 Mezei 1966.

50 Her testimony at the Eichmann-trial (25 May 1962) is available on line on the homepage of Jewishgen (Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York) <https://kehillalinks.jewishgen.org/Michalovce/documents/Testimony-of-Erzsi-Elisheva-Szenes.pdf> [last accessed on 22 August 2018.]

51 Wieviorka 2006.

of the traumatic past – about humiliation, stigma, vulnerability – the process of “coming the term with the past” is emphasized. The female survivors of their own memoirs or the protagonists of the fictional renditions recall the unbearable traumatic stories on the horror displaying double texts, along with the memories of the unsayable pain of loss confront us amidst the compulsion of infinite remembrance.

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HOLOCAUST RESEARCH IN GERMANY: CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

CURRENT STATUS

Several years ago, I wrote in the introduction to a collection of essays I co-edited on *Mass Violence in Nazi-Occupied Europe*:

“In light of how sophisticated and differentiated Holocaust research has become, it may come as a surprise that, in contrast to Poland, the Netherlands, or the United States, a professorship for the study of the Holocaust has only very recently been set up for the first time at a German university. The country’s first ever professorship for Holocaust studies was inaugurated at Frankfurt’s Goethe University in May 2017. While the country has multiple academic programs and researchers focusing on the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people, the new chair is the first long-term professorship with a specific focus on the repercussions that have followed the Holocaust through to the present day.”¹

Shortly after my co-editor and I penned those words, a second German professorship devoted to studying the Holocaust was established, namely the Chair of ‘Modern German Literature with a focus on Holocaust and Camp Literature and its Didactics’ at the Justus Liebig University in Giessen. Like Frankfurt, Giessen is located in the German state of Hesse. Unlike the Frankfurt professorship, the Giessen professorship is for the time being merely a *short-term* post, with funding secured only for the first five years (though since extended). Furthermore, though undoubtedly an expert on Holocaust literature, the professor in question – Sascha Feuchert – is not a historian; he is a literary scholar.²

This is not to say that Frankfurt and Giessen are the only German universities where the Holocaust is currently taught. Many institutions of higher education, such as the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, the Free University in Berlin or my own University of Potsdam, offer numerous courses on the Holocaust, but the range of courses offered clearly depends heavily on the involvement of affiliated or integrated institutions – such as the Fritz Bauer Institute at Frankfurt’s Goethe University or the Research Unit for Holocaust Literature at Giessen’s Justus Liebig University – and/or the commitment of individual lecturers.³ Furthermore, only one university in Germany offers a Master of Arts programme on the Holocaust; the institution in question, however, is not even a German university: it is an American private university in Berlin – Touro College. At a national and institutional level, very little has changed at Germany’s universities since the establishment of the country’s first professorship for Holocaust studies in May 2017. The same applies to the study of Nazi Germany as a whole. Only a single chair has an explicit working focus on National Socialism and bears this emphasis in its name, namely the chair of ‘German History in the 20th Century with a Focus on the Period of National Socialism’, which has existed at the Humboldt University in Berlin since 2009.⁴

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1 Kay – Stahel (eds.) 2018: 3.

2 Weitere Holocaust-Professur in Hessen 2017.

3 For instance, I taught three university courses specifically on the Holocaust and a further course on Nazi Germany in the space of less than three and a half years between October 2017 and February 2021.

4 Nägel – Kahle 2018: 30–31.

In this context, the content of university teaching on the Holocaust is also worth noting. According to a study produced by Berlin’s Free University in 2018 entitled ‘University Teaching about the Holocaust in Germany’, only a third of the total number of courses on the Holocaust taught at German universities over four semesters between 2014 and 2016 focussed on the actual historical events. In the words of the authors of the study, the small proportion of classes dealing with the events themselves ‘indicates a clear deficiency’. Of the remaining two thirds of courses, more than a quarter dealt with literary or media representation of the Holocaust. This finding demonstrates that there is no guarantee of regular and basic courses of study on the history of the Holocaust at all institutions of higher education in Germany. Even the aforementioned Master of Arts degree offered by Touro College is in Holocaust Communication and Tolerance.⁵

One result of the current state of affairs of teaching on the Holocaust at German universities is that now, as before, leading German historians who have published ground-breaking studies on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany work abroad: Christian Gerlach in Switzerland, Dieter Pohl in Austria, Wolf Gruner, Jürgen Matthäus and Thomas Kühne in the United States, Nikolaus Wachsmann, Christian Goeschel and Daniel Siemens in the United Kingdom. The list is extensive. Does the high number of German scholars abroad mean that opportunities have been created for universities to appoint non-German scholars to senior positions in the field of Holocaust studies? In a word, ‘no’. The appointment of non-Germans to senior positions at German universities is virtually unheard of. The few senior positions in the field of Holocaust studies and National Socialism are firmly in the hands of scholars born in the ‘land of the perpetrators’. The salient point here is that this state of affairs tends to reinforce orthodoxy and discourage debate in the field.

In an interview given in 2016, Frank Bajohr – who is director of the Centre for Holocaust Studies at the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, which was established in 2013 (more on which below) – stated: ‘[...] the Holocaust is, like no other topic, an international field of research.’⁶ This is undoubtedly true. But where, then, are the international scholars at German universities and research institutions? The fact that the Holocaust is an international field of research is certainly not reflected in appointments of international scholars to senior positions in the world of German academia. In this respect, at least, German universities remain parochial and inward-looking. In many university departments, ‘diversity’ is understood to mean that not all members of staff are white German men; there are also a handful of white German women. There seems to be comparatively little interest in introducing students in Germany to the perspectives of historians from countries occupied by Nazi Germany or those who fought against the German war machine, at least when it comes to teaching.

To be fair, if we compare the situation now with the situation ten or twelve years ago, there has been a marked improvement. At the time, the Fritz Bauer Institute for the History and Impact of the Holocaust, which had been founded in Frankfurt in 1995, was the only one of

5 Nägel – Kahle 2018: 23–24 (quote: 23).

6 Nägel – Kahle 2018: 75.

its kind in Germany. Even after its establishment, however, Germany still lacked an institution comparable to the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC or the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The last ten years have witnessed the establishment of the Centre for Holocaust Studies in Munich, the Chair for Research on the History and Impact of the Holocaust at Frankfurt's Goethe University (a post held by the director of the Fritz Bauer Institute) and the Chair of Modern German Literature with a focus on Holocaust and Camp Literature and its Didactics at the Justus Liebig University in Giessen, all mentioned earlier.

The establishment of the Centre for Holocaust Studies at, of all places, the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History (*Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, or IfZ) in Munich, however, leaves a bitter aftertaste in view of recent accusations that, over a period of decades, employees of the institute systematically ostracised Jewish historians such as Raul Hilberg (1964 und 1980), Joseph Wulf (1963), H. G. Adler (1965) and Gerald Reitlinger (1954) in connection with research into the Holocaust, and hindered the investigation and disclosure of Nazi crimes, as in their refusal to publish a complete and annotated edition of the so-called Incident Reports of the Einsatzgruppen.⁷ This is all the more remarkable if we bear in mind that the IfZ was set up in 1949 under the unambiguous name 'German Institute for the History of the National Socialist Period' (*Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Zeit*).⁸ The historians in Munich were clearly guided here, among other things, by motives of self-interest. They argued, for instance, that the publication of a German translation of Reitlinger's book *The Final Solution* would 'disrupt' the institute's own plans for a comprehensive documentation of Nazi Germany's anti-Jewish policies. These plans initially failed to materialise, however. Indeed, 37 years would elapse before the appearance of the institute's own 'comprehensive documentation'.⁹

A further motivation in obstructing the publication of Reitlinger, Hilberg, Adler and co. was, it seems, that the historians in Munich believed that they could more objectively understand the National Socialist era and were better equipped to apply the necessary critical methodology when examining the historical sources. In 1987, the then director of the institute, Martin Broszat, even claimed that Jewish historians were not capable of writing a rational historical account of Nazi Germany because they were biased. Of course, Broszat's membership in the Hitler Youth and the Nazi Party did not stop *him* from writing on the subject. The lack of good judgement displayed by the historians from the Institute for Contemporary History in rejecting the works of Jewish historians testifies not only to their conceit, as well as an absence of intellectual sovereignty and openness, but also to a greater regard for their own self-interest than for the advancement of academic research and historical learning.¹⁰

Of course, times have changed, and the Institute for Contemporary History – once vilified by some as the Institute for the Promotion of National Socialism (*Institut für die Förderung des Nationalsozialismus*), as an employee of West Germany's domestic intelligence agency noted in 1951 – is today no longer the same organisation that it was in the 1950s and 1960s or even the 1980s. Having said that, the institute has still not investigated its own past role in shunning Jewish historians and hindering the investigation and disclosure of Nazi crimes. In response to the most recent accusations, current director Andreas Wirsching has stated that 'transparency in dealing with one's own past, too, is a decisive leitmotif' for the institute he heads.¹¹ On the face of it, this is good news. At a time when German federal ministries and institutions such as the Federal Intelligence Service are finally having their history examined by independent experts,

it would be prudent for the Institute for Contemporary History to also have its own history subjected to a careful *external* examination. Regrettably, though, we are still awaiting this examination. There is, then, considerable room for improvement when it comes to teaching and research on the Holocaust in Germany.

German universities and research institutes might learn from watching the work being done in a different but related field of Holocaust education, namely the preservation of historical locations of Nazi persecution and terror, and the establishment there of memorial sites. Memorial sites at original locations of Nazi crimes, especially former concentration camps, are now institutionalised as an integral part of political culture in Germany. In what was West Germany, however, this was the result of tenacious efforts on the part of civil society. Only after German reunification in 1990 did state-sponsored and institutionalised memorial policies lead to former concentration camps becoming central places of political education and public heritage in Germany. Even so, a lengthy process of recognition was required before universities began to take an interest in integrating memorial site visits into their teaching. This phenomenon is thus relatively new. An empirical examination of university courses on the Holocaust reveals that more than one fifth of such courses offered now include an excursion to a memorial site located at a former concentration camp.¹² The integration of such excursions into university teaching benefits from the sheer abundance of memorial sites throughout Germany – owing, of course, to the profusion of sites of Nazi persecution and terror between 1933 and 1945. Wherever you are in Germany, in both towns and rural areas, you are never very far from remnants of the Holocaust: former concentration camps, labour camps, Gestapo prisons, psychiatric clinics, POW camps, and so on.

Today, then, the memorials for victims of the Nazi regime are not only state-institutionalised places of remembrance and historical-political education but also places of research on the Holocaust. Accordingly, a more extensive interaction with universities has been reported. Concentration camp memorials are increasingly perceived, furthermore, as potential occupational fields for graduates of master's degree programmes such as Contemporary History, Public History or Holocaust Communication and Tolerance.¹³

FUTURE CHALLENGES

In summarising the current status of Holocaust research at universities, academic institutions and memorial sites in Germany, I have hopefully already pointed to some areas in which there is potential for improvement and where, structurally-speaking, some of the future challenges might lie. Further challenges exist, of course, where the content, core focal points and approaches to historical research itself are concerned.

In terms of the ways in which the Holocaust is taught and researched, one of the future challenges facing Holocaust research in Germany will be to integrate it into the wider fields of genocide studies, for one thing, and research on mass violence, for another. The authors of the study produced by Berlin's Free University in 2018, mentioned earlier, conclude that, in Germany, 'comparative genocide research has so far been neither widespread nor very visible'.¹⁴ Some Holocaust scholars, such as Yehuda Bauer and Saul Friedländer, repudiate the very notion that the Holocaust can be placed 'within the framework of explanatory categories of a generalising kind'. According to Friedländer:

7 Aly 2017: esp. 1–3, 6–7, 10–12, 16–17, 20 (fn. 25) and 21–22; Schlott 2017. On the case of Wulf, see also Berg 2003: 337–345. On the case of Reitlinger, see also Berg 2002: 105–110.

8 Winkler 2018.

9 For both quotes, see Berg 2002: 107. The publication in question is Benz 1991.

10 On the motivations of the IfZ historians, see Aly 2017: 18–21. On Broszat's 1987 statement, see "The Holocaust Won't Disappear" 2007. On Broszat's membership in the Hitler Youth and the NSDAP, see Berg 2003: 615.

11 On the nickname of the IfZ in the 1950s, see Winkler 2018. For the Wirsching quote, see Wirsching 2017.

12 Nägel – Kahle 2018: 80–81.

13 Nägel – Kahle 2018: 81.

14 Nägel – Kahle 2018: 82.

*“The absolute character of the anti-Jewish drive of the Nazis makes it impossible to integrate the extermination of the Jews, not only within the general framework of Nazi persecutions, but even within the wider aspects of contemporary ideological-political behaviour such as fascism, totalitarianism, economic exploitation and so on.”*¹⁵

I disagree. We can simultaneously accept the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust on the one hand and still place it in a broader comparative context on the other. Comparing two things is not the same as equating them. If applied correctly, comparison remains one of the historian’s most valuable tools, and – when applied to the subject in question – it can indeed reveal *differences* as well as similarities in the Nazi persecution of Jews and other victim groups.

For all the differences in the nature of the victims and, frequently, the ways in which they were murdered, however, they had something fundamental in common. It is no coincidence that all the major Nazi killing programmes took place during the war years.¹⁶ The commonality shared by the different victim groups is closely related to the wider military conflict. While each of the killing programmes possessed a racial (and racist) component, the logic of war was central to the rationale for killing each and every one of the victim groups, for they were regarded by the Nazi regime in one way or another as a potential threat to Germany’s ability to fight and, ultimately, win a war for hegemony in Europe. From the perspective of the Nazis, then, winning the war required their ruthless destruction. This view was informed and justified by Nazi racial thinking, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate German wartime strategy from Nazi genocidal racial policies. Indeed, one might go so far as to argue that in the case of the German Reich genocide itself, and mass killing policies in general, constituted a form of warfare.

The mentally and physically disabled in Germany were seen as undermining the health and vitality of the German nation in wartime, while the disabled in the occupied territories were viewed as rivals for food and accommodation; the Polish ruling classes and elites were murdered as pillars of Polish national identity and potential focal points for resistance to the German occupation; as alleged leaders and revolutionaries pulling the strings behind the scenes, Jews everywhere were believed to pose a threat to the very existence of the German people; Soviet prisoners of war and urban dwellers were regarded as direct competitors of German troops and the German home front for precious food supplies; rural populations in Eastern and Southeast Europe were suspected of aiding and abetting partisans; Roma – whether itinerant or sedentary – were considered to be potential spies and a general factor of destabilisation behind German lines. Indeed, it was the context of war that provided the necessary final ingredient that turned these programmes of persecution into programmes of mass killing.

In view alone of this intertwinement of war and extermination, it makes a great deal of sense to consider the different strands of Nazi mass killing together rather than in isolation from one another. This of course means going against the grain of most scholarship on the subject and examining the genocide of the European Jews alongside other Nazi mass murder campaigns.¹⁷ Taking an integrative approach to Nazi mass killing in no way contradicts the view – advocated here, too – that the Holocaust was an unprecedented phenomenon, not least in its comprehensive and systematic nature. Instead, it is possible to argue that the Holocaust was unprecedented yet simultaneously regard it as one part of a wider process of demographic reconstruction and racial purification pursued by the Nazi regime, first in Germany itself and then, as the war progressed and the Nazi empire grew, in each and every one of the territories occupied by German forces.

By the same token, the Holocaust – and Nazi Germany in general – needs to be placed in the broader context of German history. Again, this does not mean denying the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust or the special place it deserves to have in German public consciousness. However, the Holocaust and Nazi Germany are still often viewed in isolation from prior and subsequent events, so that the historical circumstances in which the Holocaust took place are neglected and continuities in German history are overlooked. This allows leading scholars, such as Guenter Lewy in a recent book on Holocaust perpetrators, to claim that ‘[p]rior to 1933, the Germans arguably were among the least anti-Semitic people in Europe’.¹⁸ The unprecedented ‘Jew census’ (*Juden-zählung*) that was carried out in the German army in 1916, as well as the concealment of its results until the end of war, contradict this claim. The publication of falsified statistics in 1919 was exploited by radical right-wing parties and organisations to reinforce a massive wave of anti-Semitic propaganda. The correct results of the census – which revealed that the same proportion of German Jews as non-Jews had been drafted into the military and that 77 per cent had fought in combat operations – were not published until 1922, by which time the damage had already been done.¹⁹

The key to understanding and explaining the vision that Nazi ideology had of society and the violence it spawned – including the Holocaust – is to be found in the First World War, its outcome and, above all, societal perceptions of this experience.²⁰ According to Sebastian Haffner, one of the most perceptive contemporary commentators on National Socialism, the war years later became ‘the positive underlying vision of Nazism’.²¹ Immediately after the war ended, scapegoats were sought for Germany’s defeat, resulting in the stab-in-the-back myth of a betrayal by Jews, communists and pacifists on the home front. The defeat – and right-wing rationalisations for it – bred a traumatic fear of internal instability in times of war and crisis.²² Lessons were drawn from the constantly invoked crisis of 1918: a repetition was to be avoided at all costs. This called for radical preventive measures. Whatever was deemed necessary was also regarded as legitimate. Thus, in wartime, all real and prospective enemies (ideological opponents, racial undesirables, those considered unproductive, worthless or a burden, and other potential dissidents) were to be removed and eliminated with the goal, on the one hand, of preventing a reoccurrence of the defeat and turmoil of 1918 and 1919, and, on the other, of purifying and strengthening German society and, later, a German-dominated Europe in the name of the National Socialist utopia.

But I digress. The point of these remarks is that one of the key future challenges for Holocaust research in Germany – and indeed beyond its borders – will be how to ensure a greater historical contextualisation of the event that marked a ‘shattering of civilisation’, as Dan Diner has termed it, while still recognising its unprecedented nature.²³

15 Friedländer 1981: 2. See also the excellent discussion in Levene 2005: 38–39.

16 On this and the following, see Kay 2021: 1–3.

17 As I do in my book Kay 2021, the first comparative, comprehensive history of Nazi mass killing.

18 Lewy 2017: 124.

19 Rosenthal 2007.

20 See Keller 2014.

21 Haffner 2002: 23.

22 See Gerwarth 2020; Gerwarth 2016.

23 Diner 1988.

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RECENT TRENDS IN HOLOCAUST RESEARCH

Unless one is blessed with the gift of prophecy it is hard to say exactly where research about the Holocaust is headed. It is possible, however, to look at what has been happening in the field during the last few years and point out some current trends, some (or more) of which will most likely continue in the immediate future. It is also possible to examine salient issues in public discourse about the Holocaust and suggest how they may influence scholarship in the immediate future.

Even in this time of pandemic, when we are largely housebound, there are available resources for exploring recent publications and the subjects of those publications. For this article, I have relied primarily on the *Yehuda Schwarzbaum Online Library Catalogue* at Yad Vashem, the online index of articles on Jewish subjects at the Jewish National Library – RAMBI, and the listing of publications in the most recent issue of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, to get a feel for what has been published recently. In addition, the Israel Academy of Science published a report in 2020 entitled, *The State of Holocaust Studies in Research Universities and Colleges in Israel*, that also provides important insights regarding the field, chiefly in Israel, but also in other places.¹ Owing to the fact that that research about the Holocaust appears in a great many languages, and not all of the publications appear in the sources with which I worked, this is not an exhaustive study of the trends, but rather impressions garnered from the sources cited above.

Roughly speaking: there is continuity in a number of areas that have been at the heart of Holocaust studies for a long time; there are somewhat newer subject areas that continue to be explored; there are newer trends from the broader field of history that have made their way into the field of Holocaust research and the same can be said of some newer methodologies; postwar issues like commemoration and representation have become and continue to be a very central part of Holocaust research; and several important related fields of research and discussion continue to intersect with Holocaust studies.

Toward the end of the last decade several noteworthy general histories of the Holocaust appeared. The common thread in them was an attempt to provide more up-to-date presentations and analysis across the broad history of the Holocaust based on new scholarship. The first to appear in 2016 was the late David Cesarani's last book on the subject, *The Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949*. Cesarani wove into his narrative many newer ideas among them the dysfunctionality of the Nazi regime and how that affected their anti-Jewish measures, the deep intertwining of the events of the war with those measures, and the centrality of Jewish voices to depicting and analyzing this history. His book was followed by a series of other one volume histories by Peter Hayes (2017), Laurence Rees (2017), Guenther Lowy (2017), Mary Fulbrook (2018) and David Crowe (2019), which not all aspired necessarily to be as comprehensive as Cesarani, but each of which covered much of the subject.² Projects to provide more up-to-date compendiums of the history of the Holocaust, are an ongoing phenomenon. At the time of this writing, for example, several of the major institutions dealing with the Holocaust, like the USHMM and Yad Vashem, have been working to update their online information, and

Cambridge University Press is preparing a four-volume history of the Holocaust by organized by broad subjects that reflects newer findings and understandings.

Holocaust research continues to grapple with some of the most fundamental issues regarding this watershed event, and this is clearly evident in publications from the last year or two. Certainly, one of the first issues that came to be explored is that of the German perpetrators, investigating what they did and why. There are many influential publications on this topic, beginning with the works of Leon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate*, and Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution in the early 1950s*; continuing with Raul Hilberg's seminal study *The Destruction of the European Jews* and soon after, the problematic but also stimulating book by Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in the early 1960s; the focused study about the Commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka Franz Stangl, *Into That Darkness* by Gitta Sereny appeared the following decade; then the opposing ideas put forth in the 1990s by Christopher Browning in *Ordinary Men* and somewhat later by Daniel Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*; these were followed by the sophisticated analysis offered in the early 2000s by Yaacov Lozowick in *Hitler's Bureaucrats*, and David Cesarani in *Eichmann*.³ Through these books, we have come to understand that the German perpetration of the Holocaust did not simply spring from a special trait in German society, like the vaunted Prussian military upbringing, but was a product of more complex social factors, the public discourse of the time, shifting values and the motivations of individuals, and of course within this, the centrality of Nazi racial antisemitic ideology and more traditional forms of antisemitism.

Two new research works stand out that continue to explore these ideas, often focusing on individuals, not a single individual, but on each member of a defined group. This kind of eye-level research has been a staple of educational work since the dawn of the millennium and also has found its way into research. Ian Rich, in *Holocaust Perpetrators of the German Police Battalions: The Mass Murder of Jewish Civilians, 1940-1942*, expands on the work of Browning in *Ordinary Men* by examining policemen, and seeks to analyze the motivations and the influence of lower ranking policemen on their subordinates who murdered Jews in Poland and the Ukraine.⁴ According to the publisher's information about the book it,

*"transcends anonymous group portraits and provides a micro-historical portrait of individual killers that offers broader insights into the overall actions of the SS and police under Heinrich Himmler. Rich's comprehensive analysis of SS and police personnel records and post-war trial investigations reveals the method by which police battalions were transformed into instruments of mass murder in the occupied east during the Second World War."*⁵

The prolific University College of London researcher Mary Fulbrook also addresses the self-understanding of perpetrators. In a very thought-provoking online exhibit that is meant to be used for educational purposes, entitled *Compromised Identities?* she and her team delve into

* Senior Historian. International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem.

1 Bartal 2020. The translations from this document are my own RR.

2 Cesarani 2016; Hayes 2017; Rees 2017; Lewy 2017; Fulbrook 2018; Crowe 2019.

3 Poliakov, 1954; Reitlinger 1953; Hilberg 1961; Arendt 1963; Sereny 1977; Browning 1992; Goldhagen 1996; Lozowick 2002; Cesarani 2004.

4 Rich 2018.

5 <https://www.amazon.com/Holocaust-Perpetrators-German-Police-Battalions/dp/1350038024>; accessed 21.10.20.

"how perpetration and complicity are represented and understood both at the time and later [and]... consider ways in which individuals and others tell their stories about being involved in state-sponsored violence, and how the stories change over time... [And how] individuals and societies understand themselves and create identities through the narratives they tell."⁶

Since the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, regional studies about the events of the Holocaust have been produced and continue to be produced. For example, Avihu Ronen's PhD thesis on Zagłębia (1989), Yehuda Bauer's study of the shtetl in the Kresy (2009), David Silberklang's study of the Lublin district (2013), and László Csósz's study about Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county in Hungary (2014).⁷ In this vein appeared the English language version of Wolf Gruner's study, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*, which assesses the role of the Germans, the role of the local Czechs and the responses of the Jews.⁸ Two studies also appeared that examine borderland areas and discuss the special dynamics of borderland areas during the Holocaust, echoing works by other earlier researchers like Bauer and the late Alexander Prusin.⁹ Mihai I. Polic published, *The Holocaust in the Romanian Borderlands* and Gaëlle Fisher and Caroline Mezger edited a volume entitled *The Holocaust in the Borderlands; Interethnic relations and the Dynamics of Violence in Occupied Eastern Europe*.¹⁰ The latter resulted from a workshop conducted through EHRI, European Holocaust Research Infrastructure, which seeks to provide a platform to make documentation about the Holocaust more readily accessible from archives throughout Europe and enhance research about the subject. The call for papers for this workshop constitutes a lucid explanation about the subject of borderlands, and evinces newer approaches to the study of the Holocaust by placing it within some significant intersecting contexts.

"As recent research has shown, the Second World War, Nazi Germany's occupational policies, and existing and shifting dynamics of local interethnic relations were crucial to the distinct unfolding of the Holocaust in different borderlands. This workshop sets out to explore this topic further and more systematically. It aims to bring together novel and critical insights on the borderlands of Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe and the growing body of research on the dynamics of violence in the wider region. By placing the Shoah into larger contexts of different military occupations and interethnic conflicts during World War II, this workshop seeks to problematize the relationship between state structures and popular mobilization — perspectives "from above" and "from below" — in the unfolding of Holocaust violence..."¹¹

A variant of a regional study that came out in 2019, is that of Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel and Valeria Galimi, which compares and contrasts several cities, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Florence, Thessaloniki, Vienna and Warsaw.¹²

Deeply interconnected with both the subject of perpetration of the Holocaust and regional studies is the growing body of work that examines the role of local people outside of Germany in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors. This, too, is not a new subject, and it particularly came to the fore at the start of this century with the appearance of the book *Neighbors* by Jan Tomasz Gross in 2000.¹³ It has been followed by a number of important studies since then by Jan Grabowski, Barbara Engelking, Christoph Diekmann and others that highlight the role of local in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors.¹⁴ In 2018 Grabowski and Engelking edited two

thick volumes in Polish followed by the English version *Night Without End*, about the fate of Jews who tried to survive the murders in Poland, and which highlights the role played by their Polish neighbors in their suffering and usually, death.¹⁵ Grabowski followed this volume in 2020 with his book in Polish about the Polish Blue Police, who collaborated with the occupation regime in their murderous anti-Jewish measures.¹⁶ Other new studies have also explored the role of the locals in additional venues. Based on their personal records, Yuri Radchenko wrote an article about members of the OUN-M, Ukrainian nationalists and their role in the persecution of Jews; Efraim Zuroff and Rūta Vanagaitė searched out sites of murder in Lithuania and highlighted the involvement of Lithuanians in the murder of the Jews there; Laurent Joly analyzed the role of French bureaucrats in anti-Jewish persecution; and Simon Levis Sullam published a monograph that should help put an end to the entrenched myth that the Italians were exceptionally benevolent toward their Jewish neighbors.¹⁷

Especially in the wake of the writings of Hilberg and Arendt in the early 1960s that cast Jewish leaders during the Holocaust in a negative light, and because of the common public perception that Jews had passively gone to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter, a body of research emerged that regarded Jews as subjects and not just objects, and investigated the wide range and multilayered dynamics of Jewish responses and behavior during the Holocaust. The concept of *Amidah* (standing up), which entailed many forms of resistance, began to gain traction by the late 1960s, and as time went on a more refined discussion of Jewish behavior began to appear.¹⁸ The new book *Resisting Persecution, Jews and their Petitions during the Holocaust*, edited Thomas Peglow Kaplan and Wolf Gruner explores a kind of *Amidah* that up to now has received little exposure, attempts by Jews to use the system to give them protection.¹⁹ Reviewing the volume Marion Kaplan wrote:

"In exploring how persecuted Jews petitioned Nazi officials – and, in some cases, Jewish leaders – for justice, rights, and mercy, editors Wolf Gruner and Thomas Pegelow Kaplan have initiated a thought-provoking and entirely new approach to Holocaust Studies. Challenging those who claim Jews were 'passive' victims or that only political or armed defiance can 'count' as resistance, this volume distinctly reveals that despite having far less power than the authorities, Jews demonstrated agency, protested -- even defied -- persecution, and, in some instances, succeeded. These eye-opening essays highlight a spectrum of responses over geographical regions and over time, becoming ever more urgent. Here we see active Jewish individuals and groups grasping at the kind of actions available to them, contesting oppression as it increased exponentially."²⁰ (<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/KaplanResisting>, accessed 21.10.20)

Other recent and current research also focuses on Jewish behavior and responses from various perspectives. Gruner has continued publishing in this vein and his newest book *Resisters, How Ordinary Jews Fought Persecution in Hitler's Germany*, focuses on acts of defiance and eye-level resistance. For his forthcoming PhD dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Yaron Nir Freisinger is researching Josef Zerkowicz and the Circle of Intellectuals with which he was associated in the Lodz Ghetto; whereas Hans Schippers returned to the story of the West-erweel Group which was involved in rescuing mostly young Jews in the Netherlands, and he focused on the dynamics in a group that was composed of Jews and Christians.²¹

6 <https://compromised-identities.org/>; accessed 12.10.20.

7 Ronen 1989; Bauer 2009; Silberklang 2013; Csósz 2014.

8 Gruner 2019.

9 Prusin 2010.

10 Polic 2019; Fisher – Mezger 2019.

11 <https://www.ehri-project.eu/holocaust-borderlands-interethnic-relations-and-dynamics-violence-occupied-eastern-europe>; accessed 20.10.20.

12 Von Frijtag – Künzel – Galimi 2019.

13 Gross 2001. The original Polish version *Sasiedzi* published in 2000.

14 Grabowski 2013; Engelking-Boni 2016; Dieckmann 2011.

15 Grabowski – Engelking 2018, English edition 2022

16 Grabowski 2020.

17 Radchenko 2019; Vanagaitė – Zuroff 2020; Joly 2019; Levis Sullam 2018.

18 For more about the concept of *Amidah* see Rozett R. 2004.

19 Pegelow Kaplan – Gruner 2020.

20 <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/KaplanResisting>; accessed 21.10.20.

21 Gruner, 2023. Freisinger (in progress); Schippers 2019.

Undoubtedly there is some behavior that is very difficult to categorize or even fathom. The issue of Jewish Kappos is such a topic. In her monograph from 2019, *Bitter Reckoning: Israel Tries Holocaust Survivors as Nazi Collaborators*, Dina Porat evokes the atmosphere around Kappo trials in Israel in the immediate postwar years. She shows how the trials actually shifted public opinion from seeing the Kappos as brutal traitors to seeing them as victims.²² In an article from the volume based on a Yad Vashem conference on Jewish Solidarity, Vera Buser sees the Kappos in a more complex way. She demonstrates that in Blechhammer, Karl Demeter displayed brutality, but at least at times he did so for a positive reason. Apparently, in some cases he hoped his brutality would prevent the German guards from being even more violent toward a given prisoner, and in other cases his brutality was a ruse to convince the guards that he was with them and not against them. This was so that he could continue to serve as a functionary with the goal of blocking the worst of the violence against the prisoners in his charge.²³

Probing the Holocaust through trials and legal issues is one of the oldest approaches in the field of Holocaust research that also continues today. Although it was not always the main focus, the Holocaust was clearly present in the first volumes that appeared regarding the Nuremberg Trials and the subsequent legal proceedings.²⁴ Two significant books that discuss law and justice that appeared in 2019 are Christian Rabi, *Mauthausen Vor Gericht*,²⁵ and Rajika L. Shah et. al. *Searching for Justice after the Holocaust, Fulfilling the Terezin Declaration and Immovable Property Restitution*. Although it is not inconceivable that there will be new trials of perpetrators, it is clear that the time for such trials is rapidly nearing an end. Nonetheless, the trials that were held and the material that was gathered for them remain important sources for historical inquiry. Moreover, issues like restitution of property remain very current. For example, the Reuters news service reported last spring, that in the recent Polish elections, the return of property to the Jewish heirs of the victims was very contentious. Polish television, Reuters reported, accused the opposition candidate of putting foreign interests above Polish interests when back in 2015 the spoke of the need to address the issue forthrightly.²⁶

Clearly, Holocaust research does not take place in a vacuum, and therefore, it is also influenced by wider trends and newer methods in historical research, and most likely it is reasonable to assume that these trends will continue in the foreseeable future. On the one hand, time has always been an element of historical inquiry in general and of the Holocaust in particular. Yet on the other hand, it has only been delineated more recently as a distinct aperture for exploration.²⁷ The same can be said for a number of other subjects that have been specified in a volume published in 2018 and edited by Marek Tamm and Peter Burke, *Debating New Approaches to History*. The essays in this volume discuss some of the newer ways that history is being investigated or how certain topics have been rearticulated. Among other topics, the volume includes articles on perspectives of gender, post-colonial history, the history of emotions and the history of memory, which have also found expression in recent years in Holocaust research.²⁸

In December 2018, Yad Vashem held a conference entitled “The Time Dimension During and Regarding the Holocaust: In Real-Time and in Retrospect.” The call for papers conveyed the various aspects of time in relation to the Holocaust that the conference addressed:

22 Porat 2019.

23 Buser 2022.

24 Gilbert. 1947; Jackson 1949; T Taylor. 1952.

25 Rabi 2019; Shah – Bazylar – Boyd – Nelson 2019.

26 Reuters June 15, 2020.

27 Tamm – Olivier 2019.

28 Tamm – Burke 2018.

“a) The experience of waiting and ‘non-moving time’ in ghettos, in hiding, and in camps; b) Controlling time as a tool for perpetrators; c) The historiographical question of defining the time-frames of the Holocaust and defining the Holocaust as a ‘period;’ d) The cycle of life and the calendar cycle in Jewish life as a tool for preserving identity; e) Ways of measuring time in extreme situations; f) Linear line and circular time in the self-consciousness of the Jews; and g) The acceleration and slowing-down of time in the Jewish experience and consciousness.”²⁹

Geography is another old/new prism applied to researching the Holocaust. Regarding using it as a vehicle for exploration, nearly a quarter of a century ago Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt analyzed the Auschwitz Birkenau Extermination Camp through the lenses of geography and urban planning in their groundbreaking book *Auschwitz, 1270 to the Present*.³⁰ This was followed several years later, by Tim Cole’s geographical study of Budapest during the Holocaust, *Holocaust City, The Making of a Jewish Ghetto*.³¹ Cole essentially mapped the creation of the Jewish starred houses and the Budapest Ghetto, and from that derived important insights about the nature of the Nazi and Hungarian regimes in 1944 and into 1945.

In 2018, Zoltán Kékesi, also returned to Budapest’s geography, but with a twist, in his article, “By the Footsteps: Spatial Imagination, Cultural Production, and Anti-Jewish Politics in Budapest.” He added an aspect of imagination. According to the article abstract:

“By focusing on Budapest as an imagined space, this article attempts to contribute to the application of spatial theories to Holocaust research. The article places the outlines of the Budapest ghettos on the ‘historical maps’ of local anti-Jewish urban imaginations. By doing so, it argues that anti-Jewish spatial policies in 1944 relied, in part, on a symbolic topography created by a long tradition of cultural representations. At the same time, it presents examples that confirm Michel de Certeau’s statement that city spaces, imagined or real, are produced on ‘ground level’—namely, by footsteps. Antisemites, too, were walkers in the city and created racialized images of the city ‘from the bottom up’.”³²

An article by Annette Finley-Croswhite and Gayle K. Brunelle in 2019 suggests that an early and seminal event in Paris during the Holocaust actually created a landscape. According to their article abstract, the bombing of six synagogues by the French right-wing Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire in October 1941,

“created a ‘Holocaust Landscape’ in Paris, with serious implications for Jews in Occupied and Unoccupied France. [And] several threads of the narrative thus interject the story of the bombings into the larger history of the Shoah.”³³

Within the framework of a larger ongoing digital undertaking about history and geography at Stanford University, that is innovative in both approach and methodology, there is an ongoing project, “The Holocaust Geography Collaborative”. The official explanation for the project elucidates these newer approaches. According to its website, the project

“argues for how the key geographic concepts of location, scale, resolution, territoriality and the space/place dichotomy are fundamental to an expanded understanding of the genocide. Central to all of these terms and to the original case studies of our collaborative were also the question of time and place. When something happened was just as crucial as where something occurred. The very nature of the geographic focus of our projects require either an emphasis on dynamic mapping that shows change over time or a focus on the relationship of the individual’s experience of

29 The time dimension during and regarding the Holocaust: in real-time and in retrospect. <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/events-of-the-international-institute/conferences/time-dimension.html>; accessed 25.10.20.

30 Dwork – Van Pelt 1996.

31 Cole 2003.

32 Kékesi 2018: 91.

33 Finley – Croswhite – Brunelle 2019.

movement through a particular space. The temporal scales involved in dynamic mapping or the movement of peoples (as we believe it to have occurred) can be described but not captured easily in a print format. The dynamic digital environment and the use of GI Science allow for visualizations of these spatial concerns in more robust and innovative ways."³⁴

Their first findings were already published in *Geographies of the Holocaust* in 2014.³⁵ They also have produced GIS (Graphic Information System) databases about deportees from Italy and Jewish survivors in Budapest. Most recently Simone Gigliotti and Alberto Giordano, both who have been involved in the Collaborative, are embarking on a GIS project about Jews who sailed to Shanghai during the Holocaust period.³⁶

As with time and geography, emotions have often been integral to historical discourse, and like them, they have only really been articulated as an angle of inquiry during the last decade or two. Writing in *The Journal of Contemporary European History* in 2016, Christian Bail reviewed a number of books on this topic that have appeared since the start of the twenty-first century. He notes that it is a complicated subject that is still in the process of coalescing:

*"What exactly is the history of emotions? This question, often still encountered by historians working in the field, suggests that the history of emotions is difficult to understand yet hard to ignore. Historians active in other areas may have noticed the recent founding (and funding) of emotions research centers by Queen Mary, University of London, the Max Planck Society and the Australian Research Council. Yet the emergence of a critical mass of emotions researchers has not altogether dispelled concerns that emotions are not really accessible to the historian or worthy of sustained and serious consideration. Even a pioneer of the once dubious field of cultural history such as Peter Burke has wondered about the history of emotions' viability while recognizing its promise. As he sees it, if historians regard emotions as stable across time (and thus pre-cultural, it seems) then all they can do is chart changing attitudes to these constant emotions. This leaves historians writing intellectual history but not the history of emotions. If historians, by contrast, treat emotions as historically variable then they may deliver more innovative work, but they may also end up struggling to find evidence for their conclusions."*³⁷

About ten years ago in a print discussion with a number of scholars, Alon Confino proposed the possibilities for the history of emotions in research about the Nazi period. Confino wrote:

*"A history of sensibilities goes beyond the logic of ideological thinking into those emotions and memories that make human motivations and actions, into those images of the self, collectivity and the past that cannot be reduced to ideology. This adds new perspectives to the history of twentieth-century Germany, creating new links (as well as ruptures) among the various ideological regimes. It makes us able to capture that which it was possible to experience, feel and perceive in a given society and regime, and that which it was not, drawing out more clearly, for example, the emotional configuration in the Third Reich compared to what came before and after."*³⁸

Since then, it seems that only a few works have been published in this vein about the Holocaust period. Among them, Simone Gigliotti, now of Royal Holloway, wrote an article entitled "Emotional History and Dramatic Disruption" in 2016. At the conference of the American Historical Association (AHA) in New York City early in 2020, the Harvard scholar Jan Burzlaff gave a paper entitled "Totalitarianism from Below: Toward a History of Emotions of German Jews." According to the article synopsis, he addressed how German Jews reacted to the unfolding persecution:

*"This paper offers the first insights into what aims to be a history of the emotions of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, a field merely in its infancy. Based upon a dozen personal memoirs submitted by German Jewish émigrés to the so-called Harvard contest in 1941, the paper argues that the social exclusion of German Jews after 1933 is a powerfully emotional process."*³⁹

In 2020 Marion Kaplan published a monograph about the hope and anxiety Jewish refugees felt in Portugal during the war years, two emotions that are obviously fundamental any discussion of emotions.⁴⁰ In addition, during summer 2020 Yad Vashem held an online conference on the subject of Ego Documents. Such documents are firsthand accounts that include elements of introspection, which is certainly part of the history of emotions. As an example of what was discussed, one of the sessions combined the subject of ego documents with the subject of Jewish functionaries – Kappos and others. Among the presentations was that of Daniela Ozacky-Stern, "It is Our Duty to Save the Strong and the Young": Revisiting a Controversial Ego-Document about the *Aktion* in the Oszmiana Ghetto". In this *Aktion*, Jewish policemen from Vilna were sent to choose among the weaker ghetto residents to be handed over the Germans in an attempt to keep as many others as possible alive. The subject of Sarah Cushman's paper, also presented in the session, was "Privileged Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Their Ego-documents." This was a micro study about the dynamics between several women with more protected positions in the camp, and how they saw themselves.

The study of the Holocaust through the lens of different groups in society is ongoing, and developing more and more. Subjects like women, family, and children have been and continue to be investigated from new vantage points. In spring 2020, the entire issue of the journal *Nashim (Women)* was addressed to women health care providers during the Holocaust era.⁴¹ In 2019, Sharon Kangisser Cohen and Dalia Ofer edited a volume about the rehabilitation of child survivors in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.⁴² Dalia Ofer also published an article about children and solidarity within Jewish families in Warsaw during the Holocaust.⁴³ In 2020 Yad Vashem issued a call for articles for Yad Vashem Studies about another important group in society, the elderly. Of course, the definition of elderly is not necessarily what we would use in our more normative world. In the fire storm of the Holocaust years any survivor over 50 was considered elderly. It is also worth mentioning that other victims of the Nazis, like the disabled continue to be researched and discussed in conjunction with the murder of the Jews. In 2019 IHRA published a volume based on a conference it sponsored on this topic.⁴⁴

Newer methods of research often are tied to newer resources that have become available. The advent of EHRI, as was mentioned above, provides an unmatched portal to archives with material about the Holocaust, and as it continues to develop, will increasingly allow scholars to discover new material. Similarly, International Tracing Service material which was digitized a number of years ago and is now open to the public at large contains tens of thousands of records about individuals. This compendium facilitates engaging in micro history, and allows researchers to uncover common threads or variations between a great many individuals. Although it has not yet been digitized, the opening of the Vatican archives also promises to yield important information about the important subject of the Vatican's and Catholic Church's actions and attitudes during the Holocaust era.

34 Spatial History 2020.

35 Knowles – Cole – Giordano 2014.

36 The Holocaust at Sea 2020.

37 Bailly 2016: online extract.

38 Confino 2011: 76.

39 Burzlaff 2020.

40 Kaplan 2020.

41 Nashim 2020.

42 Kangisser Cohen – Ofer 2019.

43 Ofer 2022.

44 Bailer – Wetzel 2019.

The digitation of resources allows for new ways to explore material and present information, and has engendered a new field, digital history. According to one of the centers that works in this new realm, the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University:

*"Digital history is an approach to examining and representing the past that takes advantage of new communication technologies such as computers and the Web. It draws on essential features of the digital realm, such as databases, hypertextualization, and networks, to create and share historical knowledge."*⁴⁵

At Yad Vashem there are ongoing digital database history projects. The Transports to Extinction or Deportations of Jews project,

*"examines the transports as an historic event that is significant in its own right, not just as a technical stage during which Jews were transported from one place to another. Indeed, the transports played an important role in translating the grim theory of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Problem' into reality and enabling it to spread its tentacles to the very edges of the territories controlled by the Third Reich...The aim of the resulting database is to reconstruct all the transports that took place during the Holocaust from territories of the Third Reich, countries under German occupation, Axis states, and satellite states. The database has been constructed on the basis of information from a wide variety of documents, research, legal material, survivors' testimonies, and memoirs."*⁴⁶ ()

And the Online Guide to of Murder Sites of Jews in the Former USSR, alongside the Yad Vashem project The Untold Stories,

*"combine the results of historical research with documents reflecting personal experience, to provide concise information on the location of murder sites, the identity of the perpetrators, the number of victims and how the Jews were murdered."*⁴⁷

In my own research I have found that the metadata from digital archives, libraries and other databases is a very useful tool for exploring history. The idea of bibliometrics, using statistical methods to analyze publications, is not new, but the digital environment makes it easier and presents more possibilities to map what, and how much, has been published about a given subject. I first tried this regarding survivor memoirs back at the start of this millennia, using the digital Yad Vashem Library catalog.⁴⁸ In other later research projects I have also mined digital databases. For my monograph *Conscripted Slaves, Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers on the Eastern Front during the Second World War*, I used the digitized card index of the Hungarian military for those laborers who either were killed or were missing in action. This allowed me to trace the path companies followed on the Eastern Front, to map out how many men were killed or missing in action at a given time or place, explore the age distribution of the forced laborers and analyze other factors.⁴⁹ More recently in an article I wrote about the moment of liberation for Hungarian Jewish survivors, using Yad Vashem's databases and the Degob website, I was able to identify sites of liberation, indications of relative proportions of survivors in those places, and then specific testimonies of survivors to add descriptive details.⁵⁰

In December 2019 the Israeli Academy of Sciences published a report *The State of Holocaust Studies in Research Universities and Colleges in Israel*. Among the many important elements that surfaced in the report is that more than half of the courses taught in Israel at the university and college levels are about commemoration and representation, which is indicative of the trend not only in Holocaust teaching but in research, too. Out of all the research papers that were written in academic institutions in recent years in by Israeli scholars, the report cited that about a third deal with the events and other aspects of the Holocaust itself, about a third deal with historical and ideological contexts of the Holocaust, and about a third with Holocaust representation and commemoration.⁵¹ This direction in research is also clearly evident in the RAMBI articles database for 2018–2019, where the most prominent topics under the keyword Holocaust are representation, commemoration and other post-war issues.

Among other issues touched upon in the report is that academic and public discourse about the Holocaust is most likely influencing research, but it is hard to gauge just how much. The relationship between Holocaust and Genocide is one such significant discussion in both academia and the public spheres. In Israel, according to the report,

*"it appeared that there is a fundamental disagreement among the community of Israeli researchers – between those who think that the Holocaust should be studied as a subject of knowledge that stands on its own, and those who are sure that Holocaust research should be merged with Genocide Studies. These positions are contiguous to the narrowly focused debate among researchers of the subject regarding the question whether the Holocaust is unique and unprecedented, or an event that is part of the series of genocides."*⁵²

Other subjects such as the relationship between the Holocaust and colonialization, and the Holocaust and racism, have found expression in publications in recent years. The monograph, *Decolonizing Auschwitz? Komparativ-postkolonial Ansaetze in der Holocaustforschung*, by Steffen Klaebers from 2019, and the volume *Holocaust Memory and Racism in the Modern World*, by Shirli Gilbert et.al. are salient examples of these topics in academic discourse.⁵³

Competing narratives about the Holocaust, some of which are clearly a distortion of the historical record, is also a heated issue of late. So far most of the publishing on this subject has been in journals, such as the special volume of "" entitled *Disputed Holocaust Memory in Poland*, and the articles I wrote for the *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 2019 "Distorting the Holocaust and Whitewashing History: Toward a Typology, and 2022, "Competitive Victimhood and Holocaust Distortion."⁵⁴ It is hard to tell where these controversies may lead in terms of research and scholarship, but it does not seem at the moment that they will be resolved anytime soon.

Lastly, it is important to pay attention to a major point in the Israeli report about the need to provide better and more focused academic training to ensure that the level of scholarship about the Holocaust will remain high. The report emphasized the importance of context for the scholarship about the Holocaust. According to the report,

45 <https://cperrier.edublogs.org/2018/04/15/12-digital-history-projects-that-will-make-you-say-wow/>; accessed 12.10.20.

46 <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/research-projects.html>.

47 <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/research-projects.html>.

48 Rozett 2001.

49 (Rozett 2013).

50 Rozett 2018.

51 Bartal 2020: 29.

52 Bartal 2020: 9.

53 Klaebers 2019; Gilbert et.al 2019.

54 *Holocaust Studies* 2019; Rozett 2019: 23–36 and 2022: 65–82.

"seven historical and ideological contexts have been defined for which familiarity and understanding are essential for Holocaust research: Nazism, racism, antisemitism, twentieth century Europe, the Second World War, genocide, and relevant phenomena before the Holocaust and after it ended." It went on to note that in addition, researchers need knowledge and familiarity about a number of other subjects for the places and topics they are investigating, including: modern European history in general and that of the specific place, general and local Jewish history, sociology and culture, relations between Jews and non-Jews, Jewish integration into and contribution to the prevailing non-Jewish cultural life, wider national movements, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations, and political trends.⁵⁵

In other words, how we teach and what we teach certainly will have a significant effect on future research.

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Transit camps during the first wave of deportation from Slovakia in 1942

THE ANTI-JEWISH POLICIES OF THE SLOVAK STATE DURING 1938-1941

At the end of September 1938, the Munich Agreement was signed, which had a negative impact on democratic Czechoslovakia. Overnight, the first Czechoslovak Republic became a thing of the past, and its Slovak portion went on to create an undemocratic regime. The strongest political party in Slovakia was the Hlinka Slovak People's Party (HSĽS), which had long been promoting its autonomy programme, and was known for its negative attitudes toward Jews. Several days after Munich it finally succeeded in achieving autonomy, and immediately took a clear stand against Jews. The HSĽS espoused autonomy in the "Manifest of the Slovak Nation", in which it declared:

*"In the spirit of the right to self-determination, we ask for executive and government power in Slovakia to be seized immediately by Slovaks. For the Slovak nation, victory of the right to self-determination means a victorious end to our long years of struggle... We shall persevere by the side of nations fighting against the Marxist-Jewish ideology of disruption and violence."*¹

46 The period of autonomy, which lasted several months, featured similar declarations and specific acts, for example, the deportation of approximately 7500 Jews to southern Slovakia, which had been awarded to Hungary following the Vienna Arbitration. The Slovak autonomous government, led by Jozef Tiso, passed this measure as a reaction to the arbitration, and primarily affected Jews without property or citizenship.²

After the creation of the Slovak State (14 March 1939) preparations began for the "solution to the Jewish question". A few weeks later, on 18 April 1939, a government decree was issued introducing the term Jew based on religion, and prohibited the presence of Jews in certain occupations such as lawyers, notaries public, and journalists.³ Additional measures were gradually implemented, which increasingly discriminated against Jews in Slovakia, affecting public services⁴ (lay judges, civil servants, appraisers, experts), Jewish doctors⁵ and pharmacists⁶, or prohibiting young Jews from serving in the army and introducing mandatory labour.⁷ Aside from these measures and many others, the Slovak State also conducted anti-Jewish propaganda to paint an image of Jews as enemies of the Slovak nation. It was used in the press, various propaganda posters, or publications.

1 *Slovák* 7 October 1938 (20.) 228. 1.

2 Fatranová 2007, 19–21; Nižňanský 2016, 34.

3 Government Decree No 63.

4 Government Decree No 74.

5 Government Decree No 184.

6 Government Decree No 145.

7 Government Decree No 150.

Following negotiations between representatives of the Slovak State and Nazi Germany in Salzburg, the evolution of anti-Jewish policies escalated to a more radical phase. This manifested itself in the arrival of Dieter Wisliceny in Slovakia (as an adviser for the solution to the Jewish question) and increasingly stringent measures. The process of Aryanization of Jewish property also accelerated, and Jews were gradually forced from the streets of Slovak towns and then from towns as such. The anti-Jewish measures culminated with the adoption of Government Decree No 198/1941 on the legal status of Jews, which contained 270 sections. It was known as the Jewish Codex, and the period press called it the strictest racial legislation in Europe⁸, or spoke of the racial purification of Slovakia.⁹ The Jewish Codex took its inspiration from Germany, as was written in 11 September 1941:

*"Overall, it is a summary of all statutory measures, containing 270 sections based on Germany's Nuremberg Laws."*¹⁰

The racial nature of this decree was defined right in the first section, which said:

"Pursuant to this decree, regardless of sex, a Jew is considered to be:

a) someone who has at least three racially Jewish grandparents;

b) a mixed-race Jew who has two racially Jewish grandparents."¹¹

Similarly, as in the case of the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, the term "mixed-race Jew" was also introduced in Slovakia.

In the fall of 1941, negotiations were already taking place between representatives of Nazi Germany and the Slovak State concerning the deportation of the Jewish population. A key meeting took place during October 23–24 in Hitler's main tent, attended by leading representatives of the Slovak State: Jozef Tiso, Vojtech Tuka, Alexander Mach, and Ferdinand Čatloš. According to historian Ivan Kamenec, an important discussion that took place on 24 October 1941 included only Vojtech Tuka, Alexander Mach, and Heinrich Himmler and his entourage. During this time Himmler was working on plans for the extermination of European Jews, and told representatives of the Slovak State of plans to deport them to occupied Poland. They didn't have to press the Slovak delegation in any way, as both Tuka and Mach were in favour of this idea, and presented the deportation as departure of Jews for purposes of work. A final decision on deportation of Jews from Slovakia was reached during negotiations between Vojtech Tuka and Germany's ambassador to Slovakia, Hans Ludin. Tuka also agreed with the deportation of persons of Jewish origin with Slovak citizenship from Germany, occupied Austria, and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.¹² Prior to this meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacted the Slovak government, other ministries, and other institutions with a request regarding

8 *Ludové noviny* 21 September 1941 (2.) 25. 1.

9 *Gardista* 11 September 1941 (3.) 207. 3.

10 *Gardista* 11 September 1941 (3.) 207. 3.

11 Decree No 198/1941.

12 Kamenec 1991, 155–156.

the deportation of these Slovak nationals. Specifically, it was interested in the government's position on whether it wished to have them deported to Slovakia or to the East.¹³ The agreement included a deportation fee, as noted by Ivan Kamenec:

*"During negotiations V. Tuka also concluded an agreement on a so-called colonization fee. It stated that the Slovak government had to pay Germany 500 reichsmarks for every deported individual to pay for 'resettlement costs'. The agreement, which also applied to Jews that would eventually be deported from the Slovak State, was one of the most embarrassing acts of the HSL'S government during its entire existence. All of the aforementioned meetings were strictly confidential. Here, a small circle of people, headed by V. Tuka, was playing its own 'political game'."*¹⁴

At a conference in a Berlin suburb by Wannsee Lake on 20 January 1942, attended by representatives of Nazi Germany's ministries, institutions, and security forces, the logistical and organizational implementation of the "final solution to the Jewish question in Europe" was planned. The minutes of the meeting that survived the war mentioned Slovakia, and stated that Slovakia would not pose any great difficulties during the preparation of the "final solution".¹⁵

PREPARATIONS FOR TRANSPORTS OF THE JEWISH POPULATION

Organizational preparations for the transports had already commenced during the first months of 1942. On 12 February 1942 the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior ordered all district authorities and other subsidiary institutions to draw up a list of Jews. Jews were to be entered on special "A", "B", and "C" lists. The "A" list contained all Jews "regardless of capacity to work, sex, nationality, or current employment (economic classification) under any legal title, if they are not or will not be placed on the 'B' and 'C' list."¹⁶ The "B" list applied to able-bodied men from 16 to 60 years of age, and the "C" list contained Jewish men over the age of 60 and Jewish women aged 16 and up.¹⁷

At the end of February 1942, a decree of the Ministry of the Interior came into force prohibiting Jews from moving from their current place of residence.¹⁸ Less than a week later, a compulsory marking for Jews was instituted, according to which

*"Jews [§ 1(1) of Decree No 198/1941] must wear a yellow star 10 cm in diameter, sewn on the left side of the breast of their top garment. When worn, the star must be entirely visible and the garment to which it sewn must not be of the same colour."*¹⁹

Aside from the marking of Jews themselves, their homes also had to be marked in the same way,²⁰ as another decree of 12 March 1942 prohibited Jews from leaving their homes between 6 p.m. and 8 a.m., or from changing their place of residence without prior written permission.²¹

Based on these measures, the Slovak State was able to organize deportations in a better and more efficient manner, as it had at its disposal the necessary information on Jews: which

households were Jewish, where they were located, and when Jewish families were present in them. The Ministry of the Interior asked the Ministry of Labour and Public Work to take care of the logistics of the upcoming transports; specifically, they contacted the Department of Railways, which was to arrange the transport of Jews. A letter dated March 5 discussed transport in freight wagons, with each wagon being holding 40 persons, for a total of 1000 persons per transport, which comprised 25 wagons numbered 1–25. The doors of each wagon also had to be secured to make sure they could only be opened to a width of 10 cm. The start of transports was stipulated as 25 March 1942.²²

Starting in March 1942, five transit camps were created: Bratislava-Patrónka (commander Imrich Vašina), Nováky (commander Jozef Polhora), Sereď (commander Jozef Vozár), Žilina (commander Rudolf Marček), and Poprad (commander Jozef Petřík), which were to serve as locations through which the transports were to take place. Each camp was assigned a German non-commissioned officer to help with implementing the transports.²³ The transit camps had differing capacities, with the largest being at the camp in Nováky (for 4000 Jews), then the camp in Sereď (for 3000 Jews), Žilina (for 2500 Jews), Poprad (for 1500 Jews), and Bratislava-Patrónka (for 1000 Jews).²⁴ The Ministry of Transport and Public Work answered the letter of the Ministry of the Interior of 5 March 1942, agreeing to provide wagons for the transport of Jews. They also agreed to the dates the Ministry of the Interior had requested for the transports, and drew up the first tentative timetables, in which they already included the transit camps that were to be gradually established. Specifically, they wrote:

"In order to grant your wish that the transports cross Slovak territory at night, we have proposed the following timetable to German Railways:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Lamač departure (Note: Bratislava-Patrónka) 6:55 p.m. | Čadca arrival 4:28 a.m. |
| 2. Sereď departure 9:11 p.m. | Čadca arrival 4:28 a.m. |
| 3. Nováky departure 7:13 p.m. | Čadca arrival 4:28 a.m. |
| 4. Poprad departure 8:10 p.m. | Čadca arrival 4:28 a.m. |
| 5. Žilina departure 3:20 a.m. | Čadca arrival 4:28 a.m. |

The timetable has been created so that handover in Čadca to German territory always takes place at the same time. We are doing so to make things easier for German railways and border officials."²⁵

The correspondence shows how they planned the deportations, as well as that the transit camps that were under construction played a key role in this process, as they intended to organize most of the transports through them.

On 12 March 1942 the General Command of the Hlinka Guard issued orders for its members, assigning them the task of implementing the transports. The concentration of Jews was to gradually take place, based on § 22 of Decree No 198/1942, in Nováky, Sereď, Bratislava, Žilina, and Poprad. They were concentrated based on lists submitted by the Ministry of the Interior to individual District Authorities, according to which Jews were to be concentrated at the afore-

13 Document No 42. Nižňanský – Kamenec (ed.) 2003, 136–137.

14 Kamenec 1991, 155–156.

15 Wannsee Protocol [online].

16 Document No 8. Decree of the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior of 12 February 1942 to all district offices and other subordinate institutions on the census of Jews. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 104.

17 Document No 8. Decree of the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior of 12 February 1942 to all district offices and other subordinate institutions on the census of Jews. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 105–106.

18 Decree No 92.

19 Decree No 103.

20 Decree No 118.

21 Decree No 125.

22 Document No 16. Letter from the Ministry of the Interior of 5 March 1942 to the Ministry of Transport and Public Works, the Railways Department, concerning the transport of deported Jews. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 115.

23 Deportations in 1942. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 42–43.

24 Document No 37. Instructions of the Ministry of the Interior of 12 March 1942 to the commanders of transit camps in Bratislava-Patrónka, Sereď, Nováky, Poprad and Žilina for the preparation and implementation of the deportation of Jews. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 139.

25 Document No 157, 5 March 1942 – 14 January 1943, Bratislava. Correspondence between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Public Works in connection with the transport of Jews from Slovakia to concentration camps. In Hubernák 1994, 36–37.

mentioned camps. District authorities continued with the preparation of summoning notices for Jews that were delivered by subsidiary authorities (notary and district).²⁶ The instructions emphasized:

“A Jew that has received such a summons must without exception report on the specified date and time to the location given him in the summons. These will be district transit locations that will be designated by the district commander (there may be several if needed). Jews will then be escorted from these district transit locations under the supervision of gendarmes and Guardists to the main transit camps for Jews. Obviously, Jews will try to avoid this obligation in all sorts of ways, and will either try to escape, commit suicide, or do something similar, just so they don't have to go to work. We therefore order you to notify local Hlinka Guard commanders of this measure, who can set up inconspicuous patrols in their municipalities to monitor the movement of Jews, their behaviour, travel, interaction with Aryans, and everything that would hinder the problem-free concentration of Jews.”²⁷

The intensive preparations for the planned transports and inhuman conditions are documented by a report from Jozef Petrik, the commander of the transit camp in Poprad. In it, he wrote:

“I am informing you that today I was in the local barracks under Gerlach, and accompanied by Lt. Col. Noščak, the commander of the garrison and barracks, I inspected the accommodations for Jews in Poprad (women), regarding which I note the following: Jews (women) at the transit camp in Poprad will be housed in the barracks under Gerlach in one building, in which these at most 1500 persons can be located, and will sleep on a floor covered in straw (not on beds).”²⁸

Several days later, only two days prior to the departure of the first transport, the Ministry of Transport had already specified the plan for transport from Slovakia. They stipulated that according to mutual agreement with the German Reich Railway the transports would cross the border at Skalité – Zwardon. Transports were handed over at Zwardon station, with Slovak Railways accompanying the train comprising 25 freight wagons²⁹, four additional wagons for baggage, and one special wagon for guards.³⁰ At the same time, in the document they noted:

“that the destination station (Auschwitz or Lublin) must be adhered to precisely according to the given timetable for reasons of smooth transport on German railways. We can change the order of boarding station in Slovakia as needed if you notify us of the change in time – prior to the return of the train to Čadca.”³¹

The Ministry of Transport drew up a plan for the first twenty transports, with departure from Slovakia planned starting March 25, and wanted to organize them all via five transit camps. They also noted that all transports would be dispatched in the late afternoon and that transports in Žilina would be loaded at night.³²

26 Document No 32. Instructions of the Hlinka Guard Main Command of 12 March 1942 on arranging deportation by the Hlinka Guard. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 132.

27 Document No 32. Instructions of the Hlinka Guard Main Command of 12 March 1942 on arranging deportation by the Hlinka Guard. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 132–133.

28 Document No 46. Report by J. Petrik of 16 March 1942 to the Ministry of the Interior, Dept. 14, on the preparedness of the Jewish transit camp in Poprad for deportation. In Nižňanský (ed.) 2005, 149.

29 For the transport of Jews, they used freight wagons used to transport cattle. They gave the transported Jews only two pails, one for water and the other for bodily functions.

30 The escort consisted of two members of the Hlinka Guard, gendarmes, or members of the *Freiwilligeschutzstaffel* (voluntary defensive units).

31 Document No 157, 5 March 1942 – 14 January 1943, Bratislava. Correspondence between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Public Works in connection with the transport of Jews from Slovakia to concentration camps. In Hubernák 1994, 37.

32 Document No 157, 5 March 1942 – 14 January 1943, Bratislava. Correspondence between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Public Works in connection with the transport of Jews from Slovakia to concentration camps. In Hubernák 1994, 38.

The deportations officially began on 25 March 1942 with the departure of the first transport, containing young women and teenage girls, from the transit camp in Poprad. At the same time Jews were being assembled, for example in Sered', where the first Jews arrived at the transit camp on 26 March 1942. The first transport left Sered' on 29 March 1942 at 9:11 p.m., precisely according to plan. This specific transport was headed for the Lublin District in the east of Poland, and contained 1000 young Jewish men.³³ By the end of March 1942 the first five transports had departed from all five transit camps. As Gardista informed on the day the first transport left Sered':

“To this we can also add that since March 25 a thousand Jews are leaving for labour camps every day. To this day, 4000 Jews have thus departed. These transports are departing with the greatest order and without difficulties.”³⁴

After a meeting with the representatives of the 14th Department of the Ministry of the Interior and Wisliceny, the consultant for the solution to the Jewish question, it was decided to suspend transports between 6 and 11 April 1942. They also agreed that after this date transports will contain not only able-bodied Jews, but also their family members.³⁵

CONDITIONS IN THE CAMPS

The propaganda of the Slovak State attempted to describe conditions in these camps in a positive light. When the first transports left Slovakia in March 1942, the Gardista daily wrote:

“To this we can also add that since March 25 a thousand Jews are leaving for labour camps every day. To this day, 4000 Jews have thus departed. These transports are departing with the greatest order and without difficulties. The transports and the camps are being watched by Guardists, who are taking care of them in exemplary fashion. Very good care is being taken care of health, supply, and other such matters, so it is impossible to speak of Jews being treated in some harsh or God forbid inhuman manner.”³⁶

Up to that date the first four transports departed from the transit camps in Poprad, Bratislava-Patrónka, Žilina, and Sered'. The first to arrive at one of the transit camps were young women and teenage girls from eastern Slovakia, who were being moved to Poprad. Among them was Laura Špániková, who described completely different conditions:

“The order said all girls, all single ones, were to report, and that was that. We went like baby chicks, they loaded us on a bus, our parents wrung their hands and cried, but nothing helped. And we young people thought we were going to work, well so what, we'll work. We left on 25 March 1942 on a bus to Kysak, in Kysak we transferred to a train to Poprad. In Poprad they unloaded us into a building where there was straw, and we lay down on that straw. And I'll never forget when a Guardist came and too everything we had on us: earrings, bracelets, watches, and rings. And he told us: 'You won't be needing that anymore!' We still thought that it was all fun and games.”³⁷

Helena Weinwurmová (neé Weisová), who was deported from the Bratislava-Patrónka transit camp, had similar memories. She recalled the following:

33 Hlavinka – Nižňanský 2009, 35–36.

34 *Gardista* 29 March 1942 (4.) 73. 3.

35 Document No 157, 5 March 1942 - 14 January 1943, Bratislava. Correspondence between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Transport and Public Works in connection with the transport of Jews from Slovakia to concentration camps. In Hubernák 1994, 40.

36 *Gardista* 29 March 1942 (4.) 73. 3.

37 Špániková [DVD].

“Guardists came and told us that they were taking me and my older sister to go to work. We spent two days and two nights at Patrónka. We just lay there in the straw and had just enough food to subsist on. That was on 24 March, and on 26 March 1942 they loaded us into cattle wagons and locked them. One pail of water as a toilet and one pail of drinking water. And we then travelled two days and two nights, not knowing at all where.”³⁸

Their memories of the start of the transports are proof of the different reality of the transports that propaganda claimed were occurring in complete order and that Jews were being well taken care of in the transit camps. More such articles were published during the transports. Right at the start of the deportations, they claimed the following:

“The transports and the camps are being watched by Guardists, who are taking care of them in exemplary fashion. Very good care is being taken care of health, supply, and other such matters, so it is impossible to speak of Jews being treated in some harsh or God forbid inhuman manner.”³⁹

At the end of May 1942, the Gardista paper published an article informing the public about Jews being “moved” out of Slovakia. It described the transports, which included young, old, rich, and poor Jews, who were leaving Slovakia in freight wagons. Later they described life in one unnamed transit camp.⁴⁰

“Journalistic curiosity led us to one of these transit camps. It lies outside a certain district Slovak town, far from the urban hustle and bustle, inconspicuously hidden. Only the two-armed Guardists who patrol the camp day and night give away that something unusual is going on here. Many people pass this way every day, and many of them don’t even notice it. The camp is surrounded by an ordinary wooden fence, which in some places is not even topped by barbed wire, and the appearance of the buildings and accommodations reveals that it wasn’t built for this purpose.”⁴¹

But the reality of conditions in these camps was different. At the start of the transports, President Tiso received an anonymous letter about the conditions in the Žilina transit camp. The anonymous author wrote the following about the camp:

“Allegedly 1600–1800 Jews are concentrated in Žilina, housed in army barracks. These barracks, which date back to the former world war, have no windows, the roof is defective in places, and floor is rotten. Quick alterations are being performed only now, and these people are exposed to all the whims of nature. For example, one night these people stood outside under the open sky, whether as punishment or because the rooms weren’t ready, that’s irrelevant. It changes nothing on the fact that people had no place to lay their head! Is this not worse than in the Middle Ages? Where is humanity and moral responsibility?”⁴²

The anonymous author continues and says that the concentrated Jews are being stripped of all valuables, money, and clothing by the Guardists. They also speak of the violent, ruthless, and brutal nature of the Guardists, who treat the Jews in a very callous manner. Jews in the transit camp have no papers, which were confiscated, and were assigned numbers. He also noted that conditions in Žilina are identical with those at the Bratislava-Patrónka transit camp.⁴³ Another complaint regarding the way in which Jews were being concentrated and deported was also addressed to the office of the President of the Republic. In the letter to President Tiso from May 1942, its author asks for corrective action with regard to the poor conditions at the Žilina transit camp. He gives examples of people who were already deported, among them a

pregnant widow with nine children, a 95-year-old postman, an 84-year-old butcher, or a woman who had just given birth. He asks what benefit the departure of these people could have, who are not capable of working. Similarly, as in the anonymous letter from the end of March, he describes how the Guardists confiscated all the Jews’ possessions and physically assaulted them. The letter arrived at the presidential office sometime in June 1942, and was eventually archived; pursuant to the applicable provisions of Constitutional Act No 68/1942⁴⁴, the request did not need to be processed.⁴⁵

TRANSPORT LOCATIONS

During the entire process (before, during, and after the deportations), propaganda played a very important role. It was used intensively to communicate the implementation of the transports, which were presented to the public as departure for work or moving away. From March 1942 most communication regarding the transports was handled by Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach. Six days before the departure of the first transport, he spoke of the fact that he had issued guidelines for the last phase of the solution to the Jewish question. At the same time, he asked Guardists to not let themselves be misled and fooled by some information being spread by Jews. He emphasized that Jews were going abroad only to work.⁴⁶ Following the departure of the first transport, he declared the following in Issue 70 of Gardista dated March 26:

“Apparently Jews are faced with the most horrible fate. Apparently, they are to be taken somewhere to mysterious marshes, where they are to be murdered, shot. Nothing like that lies in store for them, only one thing lies in store for Jews: they will have to work. That is all!”⁴⁷

Two days later, the Slovák daily published an article entitled “Move Jews Out of Slovakia”, in which Minister Mach spoke of the Jewish question in Slovakia. In it, he reacted to the current situation, and discussed the moving out of Jews, which in his words was not yet complete, because his goal was to move out all Jews. He called the deportations “emigration activity”, and once again presented the departure of Jews as departure for work, which according to him they were to perform in production centres.⁴⁸ Two months prior to the end of the transports, the president of the Slovak State, Jozef Tiso, declared:

“Do not forget that in recent years, the following slogan sounded: Jews to Birobidzhan! No, we’re not sending them to Birobidzhan, as that would be a little too far. Prior to the world war, what all did the English promise Jews just to get their money. They promised them an independent state, and then didn’t give it to them. And see, Hitler didn’t ask the Jews for anything and didn’t get anything from them, and now he’s giving, he’s giving them a state!”⁴⁹

After the transports ended, an article was even published entitled “How Jews Are Living in

38 Weinwurmová [DVD].

39 Gardista 29 March 1942 (4.) 73. 3.

40 Gardista 31 May 1942 (4.) 122. 5.

41 Gardista 31 May 1942 (4.) 122. 5.

42 27 March 1942, Bratislava. An anonymous letter to Dr. Jozef Tiso on conditions in the transit camp for Jews in Žilina. In Hubernák 1994, 72.

43 27 March 1942, Bratislava. An anonymous letter to Dr. Jozef Tiso on conditions in the transit camp for Jews in Žilina. In Hubernák 1994, 72–73.

44 Constitutional Act No 68/1942 was passed by the legislative assembly of the Slovak State, thereby sealing the fate of Jews that had been deported or were still waiting for deportation out of Slovakia. Based on this act, these Jews were stripped of their citizenship and their property was forfeited to the state. This measure applied both to Jews that had already been deported and those that they were planning to deport.

45 Ministry of the Interior of the SR, Slovak National Archive, Ministry of Interior Collection, Box No 243, 9268/42

46 Gardista 19 March 1942 (4.) 64. 4.

47 Gardista 26 March 1942 (4.) 70. 3.

48 Slovák 28 March 1942 (24.) 72. 3.

49 Slovák 11 August 1942 (24.) 186. 4.

the East”⁵⁰, the purpose of which was to eliminate doubts regarding the true fate of the Jewish transports. According to the *Gardista* daily, it was a reportage that

*“will also perfectly subvert all those horrible rumours, spread by unfriendly, mainly whispered propaganda about the alleged atrocious treatment of deported Jews. The reportage will convince everyone that deported Jews are living an orderly life in their new homeland, to the extent that they want to work, that’s true, because manual labour is not part of Jewish nature.”*⁵¹

In reality, the transports from the transit camps were headed to the Auschwitz camp or to the Lublin District. Those deported in the first wave included Alfréd Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba (originally named Walter Rosenberg), who in the spring of 1944 managed to escape from the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex. Alfréd Wetzler was deported on 12 April 1942 from the Transit and Labour Camp for Jews in Sered’. After the war, he described the departure in his book as follows:

*“...you’re leaving for work, – continues the deputy commander of the Sered’ camp, an ungainly man with purple veins under watery eyes, – everything has been readied there for you. There’s no need to panic. After all, we’re treating you as people deserve, and there it will be the same. Don’t worry! Each of you will do what they do: the cobbler will cobble, the doctor will treat, so everyone will be able to work at their trade. In exchange for work you will be given a place to live, food, and pay so you can buy what you need. And you’ll all be nicely together there. Do your work and after a half-year, a year at most, you will return.”*⁵²

Filip Müller, who was born on 3 January 1922 in Sered, departed on the same transport. As soon as he arrived at Auschwitz, he was placed with the Sonderkommando, who operated the gas chambers. First, he worked in the main Auschwitz I camp, where they built the first gas chamber. Later he was moved to Auschwitz II – Birkenau, where the Nazis built high-capacity gas chambers and crematoria. In his book *Sonderbehandlung*, he described what the gas chambers looked like. He described them as a rectangular space measuring about 250 metres, with a low ceiling. They contained columns supporting the ceiling, as well as hollow columns into which Zyklon B crystals were thrown. Fake showers were used to deceive the people entering the chamber. According to him, about 1000 people fit into these chambers. There were also various signs that on one hand served to direct people to the chamber and on the other to give the impression that it involved only a shower and disinfection.⁵³ Müller’s description contained many important details:

“Slogans such as ‘Freedom through cleanliness’ or ‘Lice – your death’ served to deceive, as did clothes hooks installed at a height of 1.5 metres on both walls, with numbers. There were wooden benches by the walls. They gave the impression that they were there to let people undress in comfort. Other signs on the walls asked those arriving in several languages to tie their shoes together and hang them with their clothes on the hooks and to remember their number so that they could find them more easily after their shower. The way from the dressing room to the gas chamber was also described as the way to the ‘bath and disinfection room’. The entire furnishings of the underground space, based on sophisticated camouflage and bold deceit, could give the impression of some sort of international information centre. With horror I realized that everything I’d experienced up to now was child’s play compared to what lay in store for me. Every detail served

50 Fritz Fiala’s reportage with this headline was published on 7 November 1942, less than a month after the departure of the last transport. In his reportage, he wanted to eliminate any traces of doubt in connection with the deportation of Jews from Slovakia, and above all about the places to which Jews were being deported. In the article, he for example spoke of the fact that Jews had in the East the Jews had self-governance, that they lived in freedom, and that they were happy. All this information was part of the propaganda apparatus used by the Slovak State to support the deportations. See: *Gardista* 7 November 1942 (4.) 256. 5.

51 *Gardista* 6 November 1942 (4.) 255. 3.

52 Lánik 1989, 7–8.

53 Müller 2018, 48.

*to satisfy and fool mistrustful and suspicious victims as soon as they entered the gas chamber, so they entered it quickly and didn’t cause problems.”*⁵⁴

Rudolf Vrba was first deported to the Lublin District, to the Majdanek camp. He was registered in this camp at the end of June 1942.

*“Even though I was mentally prepared, my first encounter with the camp shocked me. I wasn’t afraid, at least not for myself – I was determined to live, to escape. But I was sick to my stomach from the horrible atmosphere of that place and the disgusting feeling remained with me as the stink of rotten blood in my nose. As we passed through individual sections [Majdanek was split into several sealed-off sections], emaciated skeletons whispered: ‘Some food? Something in your pockets?’ When they spoke, they didn’t look at us. They continued with their work: digging, sweeping, pushing wheelbarrows, so heavy that they almost ripped their skinny forearms from their joints. We threw them what we had, secretly and inconspicuously, with a flick of the wrist. And then I saw how life in a concentration camp can debase a human being. I discovered another side of life in the camp, something that was completely foreign to my world, something completely disgusting. First the skeletons threw themselves like jackals on the scraps of food, fighting and growling. Then the guards attacked them and beat them willy-nilly with clubs. The inmates didn’t notice the blows, continued to scabble in the mud, and then one separated from the bunch and started running, and while the guards ran after him and beat him, he was stuffing a dirty piece of cheese in his mouth.”*⁵⁵

Another deportee who passed through a transit camp in Slovakia was Dionýz Lénard. When they started deporting Jews from Slovakia, as an able-bodied Jew he was sent to the transit camp in Nováky, where he was included in a transport. At the camp he had an opportunity to see the cruel manner in which the Guardists treated arriving Jews. Like Vrba, he was sent to Lublin, to the Majdanek concentration camp. In the camp there was hunger, rampant diseases, and inmates were subjected to constant beatings and murder. Lénard was an eyewitness to several murders committed by the SS. Like Wetzler and Vrba, he escaped from the camp, with the difference, however, that he succeeded in doing so two years earlier. He managed to escape at the start of June 1942, and returned to Slovakia roughly in July. Dionýz Lénard escaped from that camp before they built a gas chamber there,⁵⁶ but his testimony was very important, because it gave proof of the conditions being completely different from those claimed by the propaganda of the Slovak State.

SUMMARY

The transit camps were built for organizational purposes during the first wave of transports from Slovakia in 1942. They operated from March to October 1942, and most Jews deported from Slovakia passed through these camps. After the transports, some of the transit camps were closed (Poprad, Bratislava-Patrónka, and Žilina) while the rest continued on as labour camps (Nováky and Sered’). The head of the 14th Department of the Ministry of the Interior, Anton Vašek, declared:

*“It is generally known that the measures of the Slovak Republic have resulted in 4/5 of Slovak Jewry having been moved out.”*⁵⁷

Only six days prior to the departure of the last transport from Slovakia, the Propaganda Office contacted the Ministry of the Interior with a request for statistics for a yearbook. Aside from oth-

54 Müller 2018, 73–72.

55 Vrba 2007, 72–73.

56 Hlavinka 2016, 76–77.

57 *Gardista* 10 November 1942 (4.) 258. 7.

er data, the Propaganda Office also requested the number of Jews deported, more precisely, the decline in Jews by individual district (note: Slovakia had six districts) since 1940. The total decline in Jews was around 73 %.⁵⁸ A total of 57,752 Jews were deported from Slovakia, only a few hundred survived, and most died in the Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

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Ghettos in the Baltic States under German Occupation, 1941-1944

For many years the historiography of the Holocaust in the Baltic States focused on the six main ghettos in Lithuania and Latvia. However, it neglected the role played by ghettoization in the countryside prior to the mass shootings in 1941. More recent studies, by Christoph Dieckmann and Menakhem Barkagan, among others, have now shown that more than 100 improvised ghettos were established in Lithuania and around 29 in Latvia.¹ These numbers contrast sharply with a figure of only about 20 for each region given in a study by Ilya Altmann published just a short time before.² Many ghettos were short-lived and served to concentrate the Jews for just a few weeks before the killings. Nonetheless, the Jews were housed separately from the non-Jewish population, and they were subjected to forced labor and other systematic forms of discrimination.

This essay will analyze the patterns of ghettoization in the Baltic States and demonstrate how the many smaller and short-lived ghettos were used to concentrate the Jewish population and facilitate the process of destruction. The role of local collaborators will also be examined and their cooperation with the German killing squads. Finally, the history of the larger ghettos, forced labor camps for Jews (*Zwangsarbeitslager für Juden* or ZALfj), and concentration camps in this region will be reviewed, as a policy of “destruction through work” was applied in the Baltic States through the end of the occupation.

How many ghettos did the authorities establish in German-occupied Lithuania? Even today some secondary sources focus only on the three main ghettos in Lithuania. These were the ghettos in Kaunas, Vilnius, and Siauliai, which (together with that in Svencionys) were the only ones that remained after the massacre of the Jews in the smaller towns and villages in the period from July through December 1941, when some 100,000 Jews were killed in the Lithuanian provinces. Yet the careful research of Christoph Dieckmann demonstrates that comprehensive orders were issued by the German and Lithuanian regional authorities in summer 1941 to establish ghettos throughout the country.³

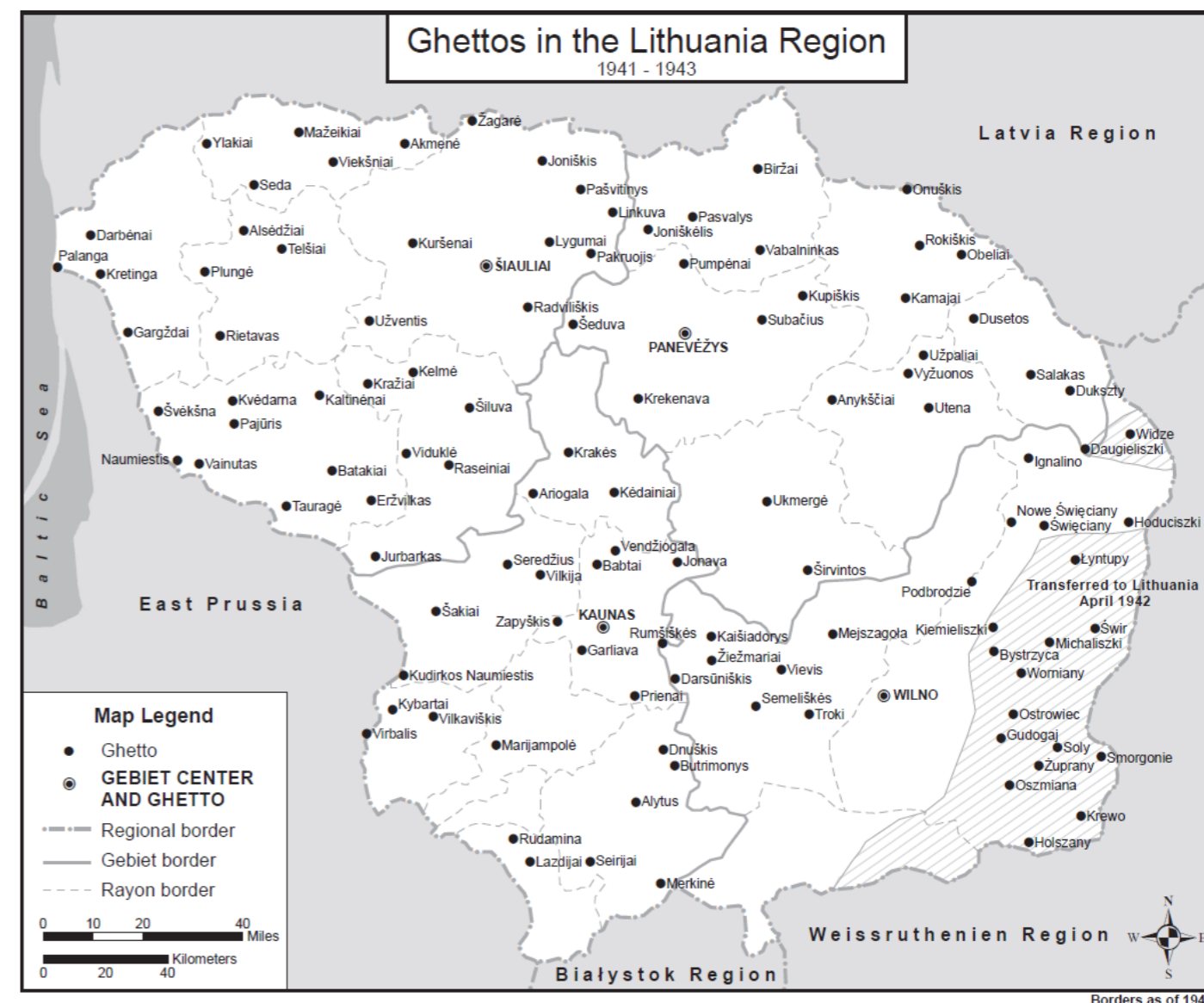
For example, in the Siauliai region, at that time under the German military administration, an order was issued for ghettos to be established at the end of July. However, this was not implemented in all towns immediately. So once the German civil administration took over in August, the District Commissar (*Gebietskommissar*), Hans Gewecke issued another order on August 13, 1941, for the Jews in the region to be ghettoized. These orders were then implemented largely by the local Lithuanian authorities, as the Germans had very few personnel on the ground.⁴

1 Dieckmann 2011; Barkagan 2008.

2 Al'tmann 118–119.

3 Dieckmann 2011, II, 803–809.

4 Dieckmann 2011, II, 803–809.



Map of Ghettos in German-Occupied Lithuania⁵

The broad scope of ghettoization across all of occupied Lithuania can be seen from this map. The map shows the location of 115 ghettos and holding camps that were identified and described in the *USHMM Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos*. Many of these ghettos held not only the Jews of the town concerned but also Jews brought in from neighboring villages and other small towns. The pattern of ghettoization was influenced also by the orders issued at the level of the region (*Gebiet*) and even the county (*Kreis*) below this, which influenced the precise chronology of ghetto establishment and their liquidation. The operations of the German killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) and Lithuanian auxiliary units (such as the *Ypatynga Buras* squad) had to be coordinated closely with the local Lithuanian authorities.

Similar ghettoization orders were issued by the District Commissar for Wilna-Land, Horst Wulff, in August 1941. This led to the establishment of more than 10 short-lived ghettos in his region in late August 1941. On September 19, a further order was issued to place all Jews there behind barbed wire. However, these orders served only as a cover for the murder of the remaining Jews by the end of September 1941. For several locations, such as Velucionys, where Jews were briefly concentrated for 2-3 days and then shot, the existence of the site was too short for it to match the criteria used to define a “ghetto” – so these sites have not been included on the map.⁶

5 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1037.

6 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1034–1035.

Such decisions, of course, raise the question of how to define a ghetto. While I appreciate the linguistic analysis of the emergence of the term “ghetto,” carefully described by Dan Michman,⁷ which stresses that it meant different things to different people at different times, for the purposes of compiling an encyclopedia it was necessary to develop a workable definition, in order to decide what to include and what to exclude. As the German authorities never strictly defined what a ghetto was, the definition was honed over time by analyzing individual cases and all the evidence that we encountered. Here are the four main principles used in deciding this question case by case:

1. Resettlement into an area only for Jews.
2. Restrictions on entering and leaving the area.
3. In existence for at least two weeks.
4. Defined as a “Jewish residential area” or “ghetto” in sources.

The requirement for a ghetto to have existed for two weeks is of course arbitrary and may exclude some short-lived ghettos, but there is clearly a difference between a place where Jews were held for just a few days, as in Velucionys, away from any town, and the situation, for example, in nearby Mejszagala, where Jews were contained in two separate places for more than a month, being escorted out for work each day for much of that period.⁸

There was also considerable overlap between the concept of a ghetto and that of a labor camp. Indeed, many Russian-language sources apply the term ghetto indiscriminately to sites that were clearly forced labor camps for Jews. Listed here are some of the most important differences between the two types of facility:

1. Ghettos included entire family units
2. Labor camps held mostly Jews of working age, selected for work, and often segregated by sex
3. Ghettos were located usually in or near existing places of Jewish residence
4. Labor camps were usually at or close to the place of work – in factories, quarries, peat-digging sites, forests, or other work locations

In the Baltic States, there were also dozens of forced labor camps for Jews and concentration camp subcamps, in which Jews were confined, so it is important to distinguish clearly between these different types of sites. An additional hybrid site is the so-called Remnant or “Rest-Ghetto.” These were camps for a few remaining Jews confined in a section of a former ghetto, once most of the ghetto inmates had been killed. These Jews were usually retained as labor for sorting out the property from the ghetto or conducting other work. These remnant ghettos resembled labor camps more than ghettos, but as they were housed on ghetto sites, their history is usually dealt with as an extension of the history of the ghetto. In some places remnant ghettos were also used to lure Jews out of hiding. For example, the barracks in Jonava in fall 1941, which held mainly Jews selected for labor after the other Jews had been shot, served also to entice Jews out of hiding by providing food and shelter in return for work.⁹

Another remnant ghetto that closely resembled a labor camp was that in Ostrowiec, in the region transferred in April 1942 to *Generalkommissariat Litauen* (German-occupied Lithuania) from *Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien* (German-occupied western Belarus). Since all the ghettos in this region were subordinated to the labor department for Jews in Vilnius, they increasingly took on the function of forced labor camps as 1942 progressed. From the summer of 1942, groups of Jews from these ghettos were sent to ZALfjs in the countryside such as that in Kena, where they worked cutting peat and constructing a railroad.¹⁰

The Jews of the small towns and villages in the Lithuanian provinces were not always killed close to their homes. Some were transferred to regional killing sites more than ten kilometers away and the residents of some smaller ghettos were transferred first to larger ghettos nearby. For example, Jews from the nearby villages of Stakliskes and Birstonas were brought into the temporary ghetto in Butrimonys, before being shot close to that ghetto together with the local Jews.¹¹ After being held in the synagogue for a few weeks, the male Jews from Kamajai were sent to Rokiskes and the women and children were sent to Obeliai, where they shared the grim fate of the respective ghetto inmates in August 1941. In some districts Jews were brought from several different places to one killing site for reasons of convenience. For example, hundreds of Jews from the ghettos in Kursenai and Joniskis were sent to the ghetto in Zagare, which more than doubled in size. Others were subsequently transferred between various ghettos and camps in the period 1942–1943, mainly for labor purposes.¹²

In the makeshift ghettos established in the small towns of Lithuania, living conditions were appalling. As they were viewed as “useless mouths” by the Germans, the access of Jews to food supplies was restricted.¹³ In some towns Jews were forbidden to visit the marketplace even before ghettos were established. Other restrictions included seizure for forced labor and the wearing of distinctive markings. In some towns Jews could be rented out by local farmers. The ghettos were overcrowded and suffered from poor sanitation. Some were buildings such as synagogues or barns that were not intended for residential use.

Testimony from a postwar Soviet trial indicates that in Jurbarkus:

“...the Jews with their children and the elderly were placed in the ‘ghetto,’ which was a building surrounded by barbed wire.... There the Jews lived under prison conditions. Nutrition was bad, consisting of cabbage soup and a little bread. They were driven to work under guard and had to clean rubbish from the houses and the streets and do other most disgusting and difficult work, with little food.”¹⁴

By the end of September 1941, only about 6 weeks after the ghetto was set up, all the Jews of Jurbarkus had been killed by a murder squad from Kaunas assisted by the local police. The owners and residents of 208 houses were shot.¹⁵

In Lithuania, local collaborators, initially as “partisans” and later as auxiliary police, played a major role in establishing and guarding the ghettos. In some places they also participated directly in the murder of the ghetto inhabitants. For example, in Lazdijai, a ghetto was established on September 15, 1941, in a former Red Army barracks. It was surrounded by barbed wire and strictly guarded by armed Lithuanians. The Lithuanian police chief, Karalius, issued regulations for the ghetto that resembled those of a concentration camp. Jews were not permitted to approach the barbed wire or contact persons outside. The penalty for leaving the ghetto without permission was death. Some Jews managed to escape when they learned that pits were being dug nearby. The remainder were shot in early November by members of the German mobile squad (*Rollkommando*) Hamann assisted by local Lithuanian activists.¹⁶ In Kedainiai, a public meeting was organized on the eve of the ghetto’s destruction, at which local participants, including students at the local Technology College, were recruited for the roundup of the Jews and volunteers came forward to participate directly as shooters. As in the larger ghettos, Jewish women from smaller ghettos were sometimes raped by members of the local Lithuanian police prior to being murdered.¹⁷

7 See Michman 2011.

8 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1034–1035.

9 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1060 (Jonava).

10 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1097–1098 (Ostrowiec); on the Kena forced labor camp, see, for example, Kruk 2002.

11 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1046 (Butrimonys).

12 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1065 (Kamajai) and 1154 (Zagare).

13 Dieckmann 2011, II, 807.

14 Protocol of the confrontation of P. Kairaitis with the witness J. Keturauskas, June 21, 1948, Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas (LYA), B.16816, 69–70.

15 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1062–1064 (Jurbarkus).

16 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1084–1086 (Lazdijai).

17 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1070–1071 (Kedainiai), and 1083, 1091, 1114 (that document instances of rape).

Closely linked to the process of ghettoization was the confiscation and plunder of Jewish property. As soon as the Soviet forces retreated, some local inhabitants exploited the temporary power vacuum to loot Jewish property. Then on the establishment of ghettos, frequently the Jews were permitted to take with them into the ghetto only what they could carry in their arms, such that their remaining property was stolen. Inside the ghetto some communities were subjected to onerous demands for contributions or government regulations declared their property to be confiscated. Many Jews entrusted valuable items to non-Jewish acquaintances for safekeeping, but the chances of retrieving such things after the war remained slim. After the ghetto liquidations, locals looted the empty houses in the ghetto in many locations. More valuable items were generally secured by the German police. Furniture and other household goods were collected by the authorities and sold to the local population at fixed prices. Scenes, such as those in Utena, where local policemen sold looted items to their Lithuanian neighbors were common in the weeks following the massacres.¹⁸

One important ghetto category that needs to be mentioned with respect to Lithuania is that of “Destruction Ghettos.” It should be stressed that this is an ahistorical term that was developed after the war to distinguish between ghettos that functioned for a longer period of time and those that were used primarily to concentrate Jews for a few weeks prior to their murder. For example, Roman Mogilansky uses the term “Nazi Death-Traps for Jews” with regard to ghettos on the occupied territory of the Soviet Union.¹⁹ In some Destruction Ghettos, the murderous intent was thinly veiled, as Jews were given very little food or water.

Due to the division of labor between the military, civilian authorities, and the German Security Police, it remains unclear how many of the short-lived ghettos were intentionally established solely for the purpose of destruction. However, in those created in September 1941, around Vilnius for example, after the mass shootings had been extended to include women and children, ghetto inmates soon heard rumors of the complete elimination of other Jewish communities that warned them of their impending fate. Some of these ghettos were used to consolidate Jews from neighboring communities. By the end of November 1941, almost all of the small ghettos had been cleared and their inhabitants shot, with the exception of only a few Jews selected for work.

Should we use the term “ghetto” for all of these short-lived sites? In my view this is the most appropriate term. Firstly, there were explicit orders issued by the German and Lithuanian authorities in each of the respective regions for the establishment of ghettos between July and September 1941. In addition, in the documents and testimonies from both Jews and local Lithuanians, we frequently find the term ghetto used to describe these concentration points. Admittedly some were in synagogues, barracks, or barns, that perhaps more resembled a camp, but others were located on a few streets within the town, and Jews from the surrounding area were brought there and forced to live in overcrowded conditions. In Birziai, for example, some Jews had to exchange houses with non-Jews to create an exclusively Jewish district and barbed wire was placed around the area.²⁰ However, a number of sites were not determined to be “ghettos,” because the facilities lasted for less than 14 days, because they consisted rather of a labor camp or some other type of camp, or because there was insufficient information to make a clear determination.²¹

A wide variety of sources was used to determine where ghettos existed and where they did not. Among the most important were personal testimonies of survivors. For Mejszagola, for example, the survivor David Rudnik explicitly uses the term “ghetto” to describe the concentration of the Jews. In the case of Ylakai, it is the Soviet Extraordinary Commission report that uses

this term.²² The recollections of Lithuanian policemen in Soviet trials also use the term “ghetto” on occasion. Other references to ghettos can be found in German trials or contemporary documentation.

Nonetheless, in a number of cases the word ghetto is not explicitly used in the available sources. However, the concentration and isolation of the Jews in a few buildings, together with other restrictions, created what appears to have been *de facto* ghettos. Although forced labor was imposed at this time almost everywhere for Jews, the arrest of entire families, makes these improvised holding places much more like ghettos than the labor camps that became more numerous later in the occupation, after most of the elderly Jews and children had been murdered.

A similar process of ghettoization unfolded in Latvia. As in Lithuania, the German and local authorities established many small ghettos and holding camps there in July and August of 1941. The variety of “ghetto” sites included synagogues, schools, fire stations, and the poorest parts of town. In Jaunjelgava, the ghetto comprised one or two synagogue buildings, in which the Jewish men were held separately from the women. The ghetto in Daugavpils was established in an old military fortress, where the living conditions were abysmal. In some cases, prisons were used to confine the male Jews before shooting, while the women and children were held in a designated part of town. The ghetto in Varakļāni was unfenced, but Jews were prohibited from leaving the area. The ghettos were often guarded by Latvian Self-Defense units.²³

Ghettoization in Latvia is well illustrated by the detailed example of Ludza, where in mid-July 1941, the German authorities established a ghetto in connection with the registration of Jews for work. Latvian Police Chief Riekstins instructed the Jews to move into a designated area of town on several streets. The Jews were permitted to take with them clothing, bedding, crockery, and cutlery. Jewish apartments outside the ghetto were then confiscated by the German authorities. The Ludza ghetto was unfenced, but it was marked by signs bearing a six-pointed star and the inscription: “Jews, [entrance] forbidden!” Around 1,000 Jews resided in the ghetto and had to perform physical forced labor such as cleaning streets or washing cars. About 40 Jewish women worked as cleaners in a local hospital. Latvian police terrorized the ghetto residents and sometimes abducted young girls, who were never seen again. On August 17, about one month after the ghetto’s establishment, German and Latvian police shot some 830 ghetto residents near Lake Cirma, six kilometers outside the town. After this around 300 Jews remained in the ghetto. Further mass shootings in late August 1941, November 1941, and April 1942 killed most of these people, although some Jews were transferred to Daugavpils and Rezekne.²⁴

In German-occupied Estonia, only one site has been found that resembled the above-outlined definition of a ghetto. This was in Tartu, where two houses were used to hold the Jews, including women and children, under guard for several weeks before their transfer to the Tartu concentration camp, where they were all shot. Otherwise in Estonia, the small Jewish population was arrested and held mainly in prisons and improvised concentration camps before the Estonian Security Police together with Einsatzgruppe A carried out their murder. Uniquely for Estonia, individual arrest warrants exist for many of the Jews murdered in this manner. In total 963 Jews were killed in Estonia.²⁵

The histories and respective fates of the six main ghettos in Lithuania and Latvia: in Kaunas, Vilnius, Siauliai, Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepaja, differed in many respects from those of the other ghettos. These sites were distinguished from most other ghettos by their large size and longer duration, all existing in some form into 1943. In this short essay there is insufficient space to

18 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1043 (Bataikiai), 1045 (Birzai), 1127 (Swieciany), and 1135 (Utena).

19 Mogilansky 1985, 345.

20 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1045 (Birzai).

21 Dean (ed.) 2012, XLII–XLIII (Editor’s Introduction).

22 Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M-1/E/1689, testimony of David Rudnik; Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF), 7021-94-423, 28–35.

23 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1005 (Jaunjelgava), 1001 (Daugavpils), and 1025 (Varaklani).

24 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1014–1016 (Ludza).

25 On the murder of the Jews of Estonia, see for example, Weiss-Wendt 2009.

examine in detail the complex stories of these ghettos. They were each surrounded by a fence and had a Jewish administration (*Judenrat*) and a Jewish police force. Mass shootings at Paneriai (Ponary), Bikernieki Forest, Fort IX, and other infamous sites, severely reduced the Jewish populations of these ghettos in 1941, which in part was replaced by an influx of Jews deported from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, as well as a few Jews from other smaller ghettos.

As Peter Klein and Andrej Angrick have argued, the acute shortage of labor in the Baltic States by spring of 1942 then caused the situation to stabilize in these large ghettos as most inmates were exploited for work.²⁶ Some Jews were then sent out from these ghettos to forced labor camps for Jews in occupied Latvia and Lithuania in 1942 and 1943. From the Vilnius ghetto more than 7,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps in Estonia in August and September 1943.²⁷ For security reasons, Himmler decided all remaining ghettos were to be converted into concentration camps from the summer of 1943; in Riga all Jews were gradually transferred to the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp, which consisted of numerous subcamps, some of which had previously been external worksites of the Riga ghetto.²⁸

The increasing emphasis on ghetto labor by 1942 is demonstrated also by the 15 ghettos transferred to *Generalkommissariat Litauen* from *Generalkommissariat Weissruthenien* (western Belarus) in April 1942. These ghettos had been established in the fall of 1941 and were soon informed about the murders in occupied Lithuania from the few survivors who managed to flee. On being incorporated into *Generalkommissariat Litauen*, some Jews now fled southeast, as they expected to suffer the same fate. For example, about 150 Jews from Holszany fled to Wolozyn near Nowogrodek in spring 1942.²⁹

In August 1942, a census of the ghetto inmates in the region east of Vilnius was conducted by the Germans for labor purposes. The inmates of these ghettos were also placed under the authority of the Vilnius labor administration and were then systematically transferred to other ghettos and camps for work purposes.³⁰ As a result, the ghettos east of Vilna were consolidated in fall 1942 and the few remaining ghettos then dissolved in March and early April 1943. Those Jews incapable of work were murdered by the SS at Paneriai after being deported there by train. The others were sent either to the Vilnius ghetto or into the growing network of labor camps.³¹ This network included camps in Russia, such as that at Mokrovo, where in 1943 Jews from the Ziezmariai camp were sent to cut down trees in preparation for railroad construction.³²

Such inter-regional transfers of Jewish slave laborers for construction projects were not so uncommon in the areas of Eastern Europe under German occupation. In 1941 and 1942 hundreds of Polish Jews were sent to Lithuania from road construction camps in West Prussia. Initially they were held in a camp at Palemonas, then later in 1942 they were sent on to a network of more than ten small forced labor camps for Jews in Latvia, where they were mainly employed cutting down trees for use in railroad construction. Information about these relatively unknown labor camps in Latvia comes from a handful of Jewish survivors.³³

One camp for Polish Jews run by the *Organisation Todt* (a state-run construction company) was located at Roja in Latvia. David Grabin explained that in Roja the Jews were used by the Germans to make wooden railroad ties from trees. The work was supervised by Germans and

the Jews were guarded by Lithuanians. The food rations were never sufficient, but overall, the treatment was fair. From Roja, Grabin was sent on to another camp in “Plensums” (Plienciems) in late 1942. These lumber camps in Latvia were not large, holding maybe 50 to 100 Jewish men. Men left the camps at times to beg for food from the local farmers. These camps in remote forests can be clearly distinguished from the ghettos established in places of historic Jewish presence. Jews from the Warthegau region passed through the following camps in Latvia: Engure, Eleja-Meitane, Gawesen, Kaltene, Mazirbe, Mersrags, Plienciems, Roja, Saunags, and Upesgriva. All of the Polish Jews that survived these camps were evacuated to Germany in 1944, via the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp.³⁴

Very few Jews managed to survive from the ghettos and camps in the Baltic States. Some ghettos and camps for Jews were closed with many of the inmates being killed and death rates were high in the main ghettos and their related worksites. However, ultimately the conversion of the Riga and Kaunas ghettos into concentration camps may have facilitated the survival of a number of Jews. For example, around 175 Jews are known to have survived the Liepaja ghetto that held 832 people on its establishment in July 1942. Most of these people were transferred from the Riga-Kaiserwald camp to Stutthof in August and September 1944.³⁵ Others survived from the Siauliai, Kaunas, Vilnius, and Riga ghettos mainly after being converted into concentration camp prisoners and deported to Stutthof in Germany in the second half of 1944.³⁶

A comparison of the ghettos in Nazi-occupied Poland with those under Nazi occupation in the Baltic States is difficult to make as the chronology and development of the Holocaust varied quite distinctly in the two regions. The evolution of ghettoization in occupied Poland was more drawn-out and multi-purposed. Ghettoization itself was extended in time from late 1939 through to the spring and summer of 1942, when the last ghettos were created to concentrate remaining parts of the rural Jewish population before their deportation.³⁷ The Jews of the *Generalgouvernement* were then mostly sent to the extermination centers of Sobibor, Belzec, and Treblinka by rail from spring 1942 through to the end of that year in a series of coordinated deportations from the ghettos, mostly focused on specific regions for a few months at a time. Finally, in the *Generalgouvernement* remnant ghettos were retained in a few towns to lure Jews out of hiding and deal with remaining property into the summer 1943, when most ghettos and forced labor camps for Jews were eliminated, with the exception of a few camps that supported the German war effort, some of which were also converted into concentration camps (e.g. Krakau-Plaszow).

The most striking aspect of the pattern in the Baltic States is the rapid establishment of more than 100 short-lived destruction ghettos by the German and collaborationist authorities to facilitate the mass murder of the Jews outside the major cities. This speedy campaign of concentration and destruction, actively assisted by local Lithuanian collaborators, was more or less completed by December 1941. After this, six larger ghettos remained in existence into 1943 (as well as some of those taken over from *Weissruthenien*), largely for the purpose of exploiting the forced labor of the Jews, including that of Jews deported from Germany in 1941 and 1942. From the summer of 1943, the remaining ghettos and forced labor camps for Jews in the Baltic States were then converted into concentration camps, from which part of the Jewish labor force was evacuated into concentration camps in Germany via Stutthof.

Whereas in much of occupied Poland ghettoization was initially deferred and implemented only more comprehensively from the fall of 1941, serving to concentrate Jews further for deportation to the extermination centers, in the Baltic States the Nazi focus on killing by mass shooting led also to a speedier and more comprehensive ghettoization process.

26 Angrick – Klein 2006, 289–290.

27 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1151 (Wilno).

28 Megargee (ed.) 2009, 1231 (Riga-Kaiserwald).

29 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1056–1057 (Holszany).

30 Bubnys 2009, 83–118. See also Tauber 2015, 142–144.

31 Arad 1982, 359–362.

32 International Tracing Service (ITS), Bad Arolsen, 1.1.0.7, fol. 76, 284, “Ermittlungsblatt” completed by Sara Benusiglio (née Riebstein); USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA), # 10678, testimony of Rachel Lendzin; ITS, 6.3.3.2, TD 495273, Rachel Lendzin.

33 On these camps in Latvia, see Jews Sent 2018.

34 USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA), # 30601, testimony of David Grabin (aka Grabinski).

35 Dean (ed.) 2012, 1013 (Liepaja).

36 Megargee (ed.) 2009, 373–374.

37 See, for example, the late ghettoization of many places in Distrikt Radom between December 1941 and June 1942. Dean (ed.) 2012, 190–191 (Distrikt Radom).

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“Ghetto”: The History of a Term and its Relevance for a Proper Understanding of the Holocaust

When, almost two decades ago, the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem embarked on the project of compiling an encyclopedia of all Nazi-era ghettos, the planning demanded clear knowledge of the foreseen extent of the project. Within a short time, it became clear that there was a series of fundamental problems and challenges:

1. How many ghettos existed during “the Holocaust”? No number was known, and the estimates ran between hundreds and thousands.
2. What was the Nazi “definition”/concept of “the ghetto” (and consequently – its “purpose”)? No comprehensive definition could be found.
3. When exactly did the idea of establishing ghettos for Jews take shape? Only a general assumption existed: that this occurred after the invasion of Poland in 1939 – but there was no clear-cut knowledge.
4. What is the “foundational” order for the establishment of ghettos (is there one at all)? Most studies referred to Reinhard Heydrich’s *Schnellbrief* (“urgent letter”) to the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Poland of 21 September 1939 as being that order – but a close reading of the document revealed that this interpretation is wrong (the term “ghetto” appears once, in a sub-paragraph, but there is no section dedicated to ghettos while there is one on Jewish Councils).
5. Who initiated the idea and supported it, and who opposed it (if at all)? This was not clear.
6. What purpose were the ghettos meant to serve, and what purpose did they actually serve? Was the ghetto phenomenon (inherently) linked to the development of the idea of the Final Solution? This was a common assumption, but there was no clear proof for it.
7. Was the ghetto phenomenon (intrinsically) linked to the *Judenrat* phenomenon?
8. And probably most interestingly: why did the term “ghetto” – and not some other term – take root?

Until then – in 2003 - these basic questions had not been adequately addressed, if at all, mainly because it had become axiomatic to presume that the authorities of Nazi Germany regarded ghettos as an integral part of their anti-Jewish policies. Three quotes can present the essentials of this view well. Raul Hilberg in his seminal and influential study *The Destruction of the European Jews*, first published in 1961, stated that

“The preliminary steps of the ghettoization process consisted of marking, movement restrictions, and the creation of Jewish control organs. [...] The three preliminary steps – marking, movement restrictions, and the establishment of a Jewish control machinery – were taken in the very first months of civil rule [in Poland]. [...] In this book we shall be interested in the ghetto only as a control mechanism [for movement restrictions] in the hands of the German bureaucracy. To the Jews the ghetto was a way of life; to the Germans it was an administrative measure.”¹

1 Hilberg 1961, 147, 148, 152–153.

In his study on the Wartheland (the western part of Poland annexed to Greater Germany), Michael Alberti unequivocally assured that

“The establishment of the ghettos provided one of the most effective means to subordinate the Jewish population to a total control and exploitation. With the beginning of the mass murder, they turned into giant prisons, from where the Nazis could deport their inmates to the extermination camps. The ghettos were a milestone on the way to genocide.”²

And Boaz Neumann, when dealing with the spatial aspect of the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, explained that

“The removal of the Jew from the urban space was part of a larger process of removal from the German political sphere and living space. The final aim was to turn them into judenrein. While the space of the new city was reserved for the Aryan German, the ghetto was the urban space allotted to the Jew.”³

As can be seen – these are assumptions: the body of research literature generated up till fifteen years ago did not provide systematic, comprehensive, and historically convincing answers to the above-mentioned questions. Indeed, a first crack in the entrenched view of the Nazi ghettos was provided by Christopher Browning already in the mid-1980s:

“Ghettoization was not a conscious preparatory step planned by the central authorities to facilitate the mass murder nor did it have the ‘set task’ of decimating the Jewish population. Ghettoization was in fact carried out at different times in different ways for different reasons on the initiative of local authorities. [...] The concentration of Jews in Polish cities as a preliminary to their expulsion was part of a policy ordered by the central authorities in September 1939 [= in the Schnellbrief of 21 September], but the subsequent creation of sealed ghettos was not. On the contrary, the sealed ghetto resulted from the failure of Berlin’s expulsion policy. Local authorities were left to improvise and found their way to the sealed ghetto. They did so at different times and for different immediate reasons but always within the common ideological parameters set by the failed expulsion policy – namely that ultimately Jews and ‘Aryans’ did not live together.”⁴

Yet, this was far from sufficing. This situation triggered me to clarify this issue; the following description is a summary of that research.⁵

Jewish neighborhoods - usually voluntary but sometimes compulsory - existed as from the high Middle Ages. The word “ghetto” as a term used for a designated Jewish neighborhood in a city originated in the early modern period in Venice, more precisely: in 1516, when Jews were allowed to settle in the Ghetto Nuovo island of this city. From here the term spread to other places, such as to Ragusa (nowadays: Dubrovnik) on the Croatia seashore. The term was adopted three decades later in the papal state in Rome, this time for the compulsory Jewish neighborhood installed by the Vatican.

2 Alberti 2004, 111-126, quote from 118.

3 Neuman 2002, 145.

4 Browning 1992, 30, 52 (the quote is from the chapter in the 1992 book, which consists of articles published by Browning in the decade before); and similarly, in Browning 2003, ch. 4.

5 For expanded versions of my analysis see Michman 2009; Michman 2011a; Michman 2011b.

Real ghettos were gradually abolished in European countries as part of the emancipation process since the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, the ghetto in Rome being the last one to exist, officially until 1848, actually until 1870. But while the real phenomenon disappeared, the term ghetto spread in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. It was used in a critical, negative meaning by Zionists, antisemites and in scholarly literature; and in a nostalgic meaning by those Jews who lamented the broadening assimilation process. The ghetto discourse consisted of two versions: one, in which the term was used as a metaphor, noting a virtual segregation from the non-Jews; the other, particularly in use in interwar Poland, in which the term related to a physical phenomenon of large, densely populated and poor Jewish neighborhoods in the cities.

After the ascendance of Hitler and the Nazi party to power in Germany in 1933, it was the German Jews who used the term metaphorically in their discourse during the first years of the Nazi regime while relating to their deteriorating social and legal position. From there, the term penetrated into the language of German policy-makers, both metaphorically and (in the summer of 1938) as relating to a possible result of general antisemitic policies and in particular of the housing policies towards Jews which caused internal emigration from the many little communities to some larger ones, and inside cities from various neighborhoods to a limited number. The main concern of the Nazi authorities was the growing concentration of Jews in the capital Berlin.

However, in the fall of 1938 the semantics of the term suddenly changed in a most dramatic way, through the impact of Peter-Heinz Seraphim's book *Die Juden im osteuropäischen Raum* (The Jews in the Eastern European Space).⁶ This product of Nazi *Juden-* and *Ostforschung*⁷ pointed to the existence of physical Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe. These were, as said, the large Jewish concentrations in special densely populated and poor neighborhoods in the Eastern European big cities. In Seraphim's eyes, these were the power centers of "Jewry", as well as sources of maladies and epidemics. His description was based on the internal Jewish critical discourse regarding the life-style and situation of the Jews in Eastern Europe in the interwar period, but in his interpretation its meaning was turned upside down and channeled into the frameworks of Nazi antisemitic thought and imagery. As a result of the migration process of Jews in Eastern Europe to mid-sized towns and large cities, immense closed concentrations of Jews had been created precisely there. He added:

*"One must not forget that these Jews live in the mid-sized towns and large cities in a closed Jewish society, that is, they create a city within a city, the Jewish ghetto. Within this Jewish residential district, the national and religious sense of community can express itself in a fashion that is utterly different and much stronger than it would be where the Jews living scattered among the non-Jewish population of the big city. The ghetto – of course in the sense of a totally voluntary Jewish residential community – is the Jews' unconscious means of defense against the danger of the dissolution of the Jewish religion, the Yiddish language, the Jewish national sense. [...] But the ghetto is at the same time the basis from which the Jewish expansion stems. [...] This is where the merchants live, from the peddlers and rag-sellers through the middle-sized and large merchants and the exporters; this is where the Jewish artisan who has been proletarianized finds his way to the factory; this is where the Jews' religious and political leaders are raised; this is where the Jewish essence is molded in its specific form, as it is found in Eastern Europe, in order to exert from here, from the business centers, an influence on the surrounding, on the nations among whom the Jews live."*⁸

By means of maps of the "Jewish ghettos" in Warsaw, Kraków, Lemberg (Lwów), Vilna, Łódź,

Kovno, and Riga, Seraphim illustrated how all those cities had a solid Jewish core from which the Jews expanded and took over the rest of the city. He added that the medieval ghetto had an external appearance that differentiated the district from the rest of the city. But he emphasized that the modern ghetto was different: the Jews took over existing buildings from non-Jewish citizens and merchants, and consequently no difference could be perceived from the outside. What created a sharp distinction was the lifestyle within, with its "strong oriental stamp" (*stark orientalische Note*).⁹

This understanding caused the SS and Police, which followed research on Nazi enemies, to oppose any ghettoization in Germany,¹⁰ a view firmly expressed by the head of the Security Police and SD Reinhard Heydrich on the highest level of policy-making in the (in)famous meeting in the office of Herman Goering (the second-ranking personage in the country at the time) on 12 November 1938, two days after *Reichskristallnacht*. Toward the end of the session, Goering responded to remarks by Heydrich on the need to intensify the pressure on the Jews to push them to emigrate: "You will not be able to avoid arriving at ghettos in the cities on a very large scale. Their creation is inevitable." In other words, Goering believed that the process of internal migration within Germany, caused by the despoliation of the Jews, would cause them to concentrate in certain districts in the large cities that would transform into dense pockets of poverty – "ghettos." Heydrich immediately stated his opposition to such a development, maintaining:

*"I do not believe that the ghetto, in the form of totally separate sections of a city containing only Jews, is practicable from a police perspective. The ghetto, in which the Jew congregates with the whole of his Jewish tribe, cannot be kept under police surveillance" [emphasis added]."*¹¹

The invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, marked, however, a turning point. Now Nazi antisemites physically encountered *Das Ostjudentum*, including the already existing ghettos (i.e. densely populated, poor neighborhoods), and had to cope with it. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels sent teams to film the ghettos, Heinrich Himmler, Commander of the SS and Head of the German Police, spoke about "*das Gesindel*" (scum), commanders, soldiers and others expressed their disgust when seeing the Jewish Communities and Jewish individuals.¹²

Seen in this context, and through reading without preset assumptions, it becomes entirely clear that (as opposed to Hilberg's view and hinted at above) Heydrich's *Schnellbrief* to the commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* of 21 September 1939 (and the protocol of the meeting on that same day) never spoke about an establishment of ghettos as a new systematic and well-planned bureaucratic measure, but about the concentration of city Jews in (the already existing) ghettos:

"II. Councils of Jewish Elders [...]"

5) The Councils of Elders in the concentration centers are to be made responsible for the appropriate housing of the Jews arriving from the countryside.

⁹ Seraphim 1938, 371.

¹⁰ "SD II 112 an den SD-Führer des SS-O.A. Ost, II 112, Berlin, Betr.: Ghettoisierung der Juden", 1.11.1938, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, Sonderarchiv Moskau 500-1-343, 243.

¹¹ "*Das Ghetto in Form vollkommen abgesonderter Stadtteile, wo nur Juden sind, halte ich polizeilich nicht für durchführbar. Das Ghetto, wo der Jude sich mit dem gesamten Judentum versammelt, ist in polizeilicher Hinsicht unüberwachbar. Es bleibt der ewige Schlupfwinkel für Verbrechen und vor allen Dingen von Seuchen und ähnlichen Dingen. Heute ist es so, dass die deutsche Bevölkerung - wir wollen die Juden auch nicht in demselben Haus lassen - in den Straßenzügen oder in den Häusern den Juden zwingen, sich zusammenzunehmen. Die Kontrolle des Juden durch das wachsame Auge der gesamten Bevölkerung ist besser, als wenn Sie den Juden zu Tausenden und aber Tausenden in einem Stadtteil haben, wo ich durch uniformierte Beamte eine Überwachung des täglichen Lebenslaufes nicht herbeiführen kann. Göring: Wir brauchten nur das Telefonieren nach auswärts unterbinden. Heydrich: Ich könnte den Verkehr des Judentums aus diesem Stadtteil heraus doch nicht ganz unterbinden."*

Stenographische Niederschrift der Sitzung im Reichsluftfahrtministerium am 12. Nov. 1938, in: *International Military Tribunal (IMT)*, Bd. XXVIII, (Dok. 1816-PS), 510, 533–536.

¹² Böhler 2006, 46–48, and notes 178, 181, 182, 194; for more verbal expressions see Roth 2009.

⁶ Seraphim 1938. On Seraphim see Petersen 2007; Steinweis 2006, 142–151; Aly 1993, 96–101; Koonz 2003, 199.

⁷ Burleigh 1988; Schulze – Oexle e.a. (eds.) 1999; Volkmer 1989; Koonz 2003, 193–220; Schwerpunkt 2006.

⁸ Seraphim 1938, 355–356 (all emphases in the original).

For reasons of general police security, the concentration of the Jews in the cities will probably call for regulations in these cities which will forbid their entry to certain quarters completely and that – but with due regard for economic requirements – they may, for instance, not leave the ghetto, nor leave their homes after a certain hour in the evening, etc.”¹³

It can be clearly understood as a reaction trying to cope with the “danger” of the Polish Jews which was now encountered. Sometime later, Hans Frank, the General Governor of the General-Government in Poland, proposed to do the opposite in the case of Krakow, the capital of that General-Government: to drive the Jews out of the city and scatter them all over the area, thus dissolving the ghetto, and allowing for the citizens of the capital of the General Government “to breathe clean German air”.¹⁴

However, even Heydrich’s recommendation was not carried out within the 3-4 weeks he had suggested in the *Schnellbrief*. There was also no pressure from above to apply the establishment of ghettos. It thus became a local decision whether to do so or not, being hesitantly applied in several places, and – even then – usually spanning over a (sometimes very) long time (in Warsaw it lasted from October 1939 to October 1940, and encountered much opposition from other German and local authorities). The functional success – from an organizational point of view – of the Łódź ghetto, which was established in April 1940, turned this ghetto into an example copied later on in many places throughout occupied Poland; it became even a pilgrimage site to learn from. These ghettos of the years 1940-1941 are usually viewed in Holocaust research as the typical “classic” Nazi ghettos; however, their number was limited, and from a mere bureaucratic point of view caused more problems than solving them: city transportation had to be altered, people had to be moved all around, administrative and security forces were needed, etc. They also were clearly not a response to obstacles in the immigration programs (as suggested by Götz Aly),¹⁵ or a bureaucratic interim solution for the clash between the drive for expulsion and its shattering after the first phases of occupation in Poland (as suggested by Christopher Browning).¹⁶

The “classic” ghetto being a response to the danger of *Das Ostjudentum* well explains why the establishment of ghettos did not occur in Western, Northern, Central and Southern Europe or North Africa under German control. Seraphim, who became an adviser to the General-Government and from spring 1941 also headed the *Institut zur Forschung der Judenfrage* (Institute for Research of the Jewish Question) in Frankfurt, stated explicitly, that the ghetto idea was not applicable in Central and Western Europe.¹⁷

A new phase of the establishment of ghettos started with the invasion of the Soviet Union. An assumed number of 500 ghettos were established throughout the areas occupied by Nazi Germany. Now even official military and civil orders of the highest level were decreed, but once again a quite unsystematic process of establishment developed. Moreover, these ghettos emerged in the midst of the escalating murder campaign. On 13 July 1941, General Max

von Schenkendorff, the rear echelon commander of Army Group Center, ordered that “The Jews are to be concentrated [zusammenzufassen] in a closed community in buildings occupied exclusively by Jews.”¹⁸ General Karl von Roques, Commander of the Rear Army Area North, ordered on 28 August 1941, that “Ghettos should be installed in places where the Jews are a large portion of the population, especially in the cities, when their establishment is needed or at least when it serves the goals”.¹⁹ But several days later, on 3 September, he added in another order, that “In no situation is the establishment of ghettos to be seen as urgent”.²⁰

The fact that the establishment of ghettos was a matter of local decision even at this point in time is demonstrated well by the statement of Dr. Karl Lasch, Lemberg (Lvov) District Commissioner in a meeting of the *Generalgouvernement* on 21 October 1941:

*“[It is unthinkable that in Lemberg] the Jews should be treated differently than in Krakow and Warsaw. Therefore, in the forthcoming days the Jews will be contained together in Jewish quarters and removed from the street scene in Lemberg too, similarly to the [situation in the] other cities in District Galicia.”*²¹

The ghettos were clearly not needed as a stage *leading* to the murder campaign (which was implemented anyhow and already before and alongside the ghettoization), and in many cases served another goal: keeping needed Jewish labor force for a shorter or longer while. But in other cases, ghettos were apparently established just as a result of the inertia of the idea – which had rooted in the preceding 1-2 years – that anti-Jewish policies *should* inherently include the erection of a ghetto. As to the essence of these ghettos – they were now closer to being concentration or labor camps in cities than to the kind of “containing neighborhoods” which the ghettos had been before. In many cases, the time-span of their existence was very short, but there were exceptional cases (such as Kovno/Kaunas which existed for more than two years).

With the change in the substantial meaning of the ghettos for German policy-makers, some ghettos also emerged as transit-stations for further deportation. This was the meaning attributed by Heydrich in the so-called Wannsee conference (20 January 1942) to Theresienstadt.²² It would later be applied also to the short concentration (*Ghettisierung*, as it was called in one document)²³ of the Salonikan Jews in three neighborhoods, as the preparatory step for their deportation (February 1943), a concentration which entirely paralleled the function of the *Juden-durchgangslager* (Jewish transit camps) Westerbork, Mechelen and Drancy in Western Europe.

In Romania, on its own initiative, Marshal Ion Antonescu, in reference to Bucharest Jews, stated on 7 February 1941, that:

“Were times normal ... I would deport them all en masse from the country, beyond its borders. I cannot do that today, however. ... Where would I send them? I cannot leave them to perish of hunger and die. I see this problem as unique in the current international situation. We must deal with it and solve it, for the Jews of Bucharest and the country. I would like to establish a special Jewish neighborhood in the capital [Bucharest], along Văcărești and

13 “Die Ältestenräte in den Konzentrierungsstädten sind verantwortlich zu machen für die geeignete Unterbringung der aus dem Lande zuziehenden Juden. Die Konzentrierung der Juden in den Städten wird wahrscheinlich aus allgemeinen sicherheitspolizeilichen Gründen Anordnungen in diesen Städten bedingen, daß den Juden bestimmte Stadtviertel überhaupt verboten werden, daß sie stets jedoch unter Berücksichtigung der wirtschaftlichen Notwendigkeiten – z.B. das Ghetto nicht verlassen, zu einer bestimmten Abendstunde nicht mehr ausgehen dürfen usw.” Documents of the International Tribunal at Nuremberg, PS-3363, In: Arad – Gutman – Margalio 1981, 175.

14 “Er [Frank] beabsichtige deshalb, die Stadt Krakau bis zum 1. November 1940, soweit irgend möglich, judenfrei zu machen und eine große Aussiedlungsaktion der Juden in Angriff zu nehmen, und zwar mit der Begründung, daß es absolut unerträglich sei, wenn in einer Stadt, der der Führer die hohe Ehre zuteil werden lasse, der Sitz einer hohen Reichsbehörde zu sein, Tausende und Abertausende von Juden herumschlichen und Wohnungen inne hätte [...] Das Ghetto werde dann gesäubert werden, und es werde möglich sein, saubere deutsche Wohnsiedlungen zu errichten, in denen man eine deutsche Luft atmen könne.” Prag – Jacobmeyer 1975, 165 (12.4.1940).

15 Aly 1995, 131.

16 Browning 2003, 111–168.

17 Seraphim 1941, 43–44; quoted by Friedman 1980, 64.

18 “Der Befehlshaber des rückw. Heeres-Gebietes Mitte, H.-Qu., den 13. Juli 1941, *Verwaltungs-Anordnungen Nr. 2*“, Yad Vashem Archives, DN-7–2. Also cited in Benz – Kwiet – Matthäus (eds.) 1998, 120–121.

19 „Anordnung des Befehlshabers des rückwärtigen Heeresgebietes Nord, 28. August 1941, betr. Die Einrichtung von Ghettos“, Bundesarchiv-Marburg, RH 22/6, quoted by Benz – Kwiet – Matthäus (eds.) 1998, 123 (Doc. 85).

20 Anordnung des Befehlshabers des rückwärtigen Heeresgebietes Nord, 3. September 1941, betr. Die Einrichtung von Ghettos im Befehlsbereich, Bundesarchiv-Marburg, RH 26–285/45, quoted by Benz – Kwiet – Matthäus (eds.) 1998, 123 (Doc. 86); also in Müller 1982, 71.

21 “[Es sei nicht einzusehen, daß in Lemberg] die Juden anders behandelt werden sollen, als in Krakau und Warschau. Die Juden sollen deshalb in den nächsten Tagen auch in Lemberg, wie in den übrigen Städten des Distrikts Galizien, in jüdischen Wohnvierteln zusammengefaßt werden und aus dem Straßenbild der Stadt verschwinden” - quoted in Sandkühler 1996, 155.

22 Poliakov – Wulf 1955, 123.

23 “Massnahmen gegen die hiesigen Juden” (Memo of the German Consul Schönberg to Berlin,) Salonik [sic!], 26. Februar 1943, Yad Vashem Archives TR.3 1003.

*Dudești streets, its boundaries to be demarcated, and require all the Jews of the city to move into it, into this Jewish bastion, within two years, while all the Romanian inhabitants left it. After that the kikes could live among themselves, with their own commerce and their own synagogues, until more settled times arrive and we can deport them beyond our borders, to territories to be set aside for them. This is a problem that the Romanian people cannot solve alone, because it is an international question pertaining to the entire European continent.*²⁴

A first decree, in the beginning of April 1941, ordered the concentration of all Bucharest Jews in a special neighborhood. However, this idea was not implemented, but from the summer of 1941 it emerged regarding other places, and was implemented in a most horrific way, in Transnistria. In the local vocabulary “ghettos,” “camps” and “colonies” became interchangeable terms – a fact which leads in the historiography to differing counts of the number of ghettos in Transnistria (between 50 and 150). In any case, the Transnistrian ghettos were often more chaotic than the German ones, but after Ion Antonescu’s decision in 1942 to change his policies of annihilation, these ghettos turned into places where the Jews who had survived until then, could live on until the end of the war.²⁵

The Hungarian regime would adopt it too for the concentration of Jews in city neighborhoods throughout the country, often at the outskirts of cities, within the overall deportation scheme of Hungarian Jewry to Auschwitz which was coordinated with Adolf Eichmann’s *Sondereinsatzkommando* (April–July 1944). Thus, these ghettos represent the last stage of the semantic evolution of the term. Starting in mid-April, approximately 180 physical detention facilities were established, all of them intended to serve as collection camps for Jews in advance of their deportation by rail to Auschwitz. These places went by various names. The Interior Ministry order of April 7 uses the terms “collection camp” (*gyűjtőtábor*), “Jewish building” (*zsidóépület* and *zsidóház*: parallel terms that may imitate the *Judenhäuser* established in Germany at the start of the war), and “ghetto” (*gettó*). A later order, dated 28 April 1944, referred to the transfer of Jews to a “new domicile” (*lakóhely*), without using the word “ghetto.”²⁶ In the field, the most common term applied to the urban concentration and detention sites was “ghetto,” but sometimes also “Jewish ghetto” (*zsidógettó*). Other terms were used in rural areas, such as “collection place” (*gyűjtőhely*) and “settlement” (*lakótelep*). Some of the ghettos, by whichever name, were not under Jewish administration. Many were established in brick factories on the locality’s outskirts. Their physical layout, too, was quite distinct from that of the ghettos in Poland in 1940–1941, although they resembled some of the later ghettos in the Soviet Union. In other words, both the purpose and meaning of the concept changed and became less precise when it was adopted in Hungary.²⁷

Miklós Horthy, the regent of Hungary, suspended the deportation of the Jews on 7 July 1944. By that time, however, only one large concentration of Jews remained in Hungary – in Budapest. In the capital, since 24 June, Jews had been housed in approximately 2,100 buildings scattered all over the city, marked with a yellow star (“star houses” [*csillagos házak*]); this was understood as “ghettoization” and referred to as such by the Jews. Fundamentally, however, these buildings were more like the *Judenhäuser* in Germany. The authorities began planning the concentration of the Jews of Budapest in May and had initially spoken about resettling them in seven districts. But as in Warsaw and Amsterdam some years earlier, the plans changed after they were presented to the municipal authorities, over arguments that a closed ghetto would interfere with the functioning of the city. “Jewish houses” offered an easy way to bypass such problems.²⁸ On 20 November 1944, after the October coup that brought the Arrow Cross Party of Ferenc Szála-

si to power, the “little ghetto” (*kisgettó*), as it was popularly known, was established, as was the “protected ghetto” (*vedett gettó*) or “international ghetto” (*nemzetközi gettó*) for Jews with documents issued by neutral diplomatic missions. On 10 December, 1944, the ghetto in Pest (*Pesti gettó*), also known as the “large ghetto” (*nagygettó*), was sealed off, and became the new living quarters of all the Jews of Budapest who had been living in the *csillagos házak*.

The Budapest ghetto existed for only a few months, until the liberation of the city by the Red Army. It was established after the end of the major wave of deportations, but not on the assumption that the treatment of the “Jewish problem” was complete. In a sense, the Budapest ghetto was a reprise of those in Poland in 1940 and 1941: a concentration of Jews in anticipation of a new decision about what to do with them. But the conditions in Hungary in late 1944 and early 1945 were different: these were the twilight months of the World War II, and the short-lived Arrow Cross regime in Hungary along with German involvement fueled uncertainty and brutal scenes of murder.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Having examined the entire ghetto phenomenon during the Shoah we can conclude the following:

- 1) that the “classic” Nazi ghetto was a reaction to the perceived danger of the *Ostjuden* with the intention to “contain” these dangerous bearers of evil, and thus a result of the internalization of antisemitic images shaped some time before – not of well-calculated, bureaucratic “rational” decisions intended to segregate all Jews;
- 2) that the emergence of the “classic” ghetto phenomenon at the turn of 1939–1940 expressed a radicalization of Nazi thought, within the contours of historical antisemitism; it nevertheless remained a reaction crystallized and carried out by lower echelons of the Nazi regime;
- 3) that the term ghetto changed its semantics several times throughout its history in general and during the Shoah in particular, and that – consequently – one cannot speak of a “typical” ghetto; thus, one should refer to the phenomenon by using the plural form “ghettos”, not the singular form “ghetto”;
- 4) that “ghettoization” and “concentration” were two *separate* developments, and not Siamese twins, as assumed by Raul Hilberg and ensuing historiography;³⁰
- 5) that the emergence of the ghetto idea and of the *Judenrat* concept derived from entirely different sources and emerged at different times, that they were only partially overlapping, and that they were not inherently linked to each other;³¹
- 6) that the emergence of ghettos was neither ideologically nor factually a step leading to the Final Solution:³² the decision on the Final Solution to the Jewish Question in the summer of 1941 was a strategic leap, decided upon at the highest level – by Hitler himself. However, in many places they were used also for the implementation of the Final Solution.

24 Benjamin 1993, 292. English translation in Michman 2011b, 129.

25 For the general situation in Romania see: Anceal 2011; Ioanid 2000; Deletant 2006; *Final Report* 2004.

26 Benoschfsky – Karsai (szerk.) 1958, 124–127, 244–250.

27 I wish to thank Dr. Kinga Frojimovics for providing me with this information. For a recent in-depth study of the countryside ghettos and Jewish Councils in Hungary see Bernat 2023.

28 Cole – Smith 1995.

29 Baruch 1997; Frojimovics – Komoróczy – Pusztai – Strbik 1999, 382–423.

30 Michman 2017a.

31 On the history of the Jewish Council concept see: Michman 2003, 159–175 (Hungarian edition: 131–168); Michman 2004; Michman 2006; Michman 2017b.

32 Michman 2010.

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A ghetto without walls

Between 1942 and 1944, some 25,000 Jewish men, women and children were sent from Belgium to Auschwitz-Birkenau. This deportation left barely 5% survivors. Half of the Jewish population was killed during the Judaeocide. This percentage of destruction is much lower than in Central and Eastern Europe and the Netherlands. However, it equally makes part of the Nazi genocidal policy. The historian may question the importance of this rate of extermination in a country where the occupier was faced with a complex situation.

WHEN CONCERNS CONVERGED

On 10 May 1940, the Nazis invaded Belgium, despite its political neutrality. Faced with the strategic and military superiority of the *Wehrmacht*, the Belgian army resists as much as it can. But the German advance was relentless, while the French and British allied headquarters lacked coordination. Belgian losses, both military and civilian, were numerous.

On 28 May, faced with a situation that he considered hopeless, King Leopold III decided to surrender unconditionally. Moreover, he chose to constitute himself a prisoner. These decisions were made against the advice of the Belgian ministers. The government, which was determined to continue the struggle alongside the Allies, went into exile. Hubert Pierlot, the Prime Minister has confirmed the King incapacitated to reign. The break between the monarchy and the government triggered a political crisis.

As a result of the defeat, Belgium has been thrown into deep chaos and was totally disorganized. More than 200,000 prisoners of war were sent to Reich camps. Some two million people took the road to exodus. Among them, a large number of civil servants and authority officials decided to leave and to abandon their duties. The Belgian population was still traumatized by the German occupation during the Great War and its trail of massacres, exactions, looting, deportation and other war crimes. The majority of citizens felt resentment, even hate, towards the Germans, whom they nicknamed 'the Krauts'.

In order to avoid a repetition of such a situation, the Belgian authorities gave instructions to fill any power vacuum with their own men.¹ This task was entrusted to the general secretaries of the Belgian ministries. Those civil servants are the highest state officials behind the ministers. Ensuring the continuity of the State in the absence of the government was their duty.

The general secretaries had to cope with urgent and essential challenges. They had to secure the supply of the population, to re-establish transport, fight inflation and unemployment, to solve the lack of public personnel and to manage the refugees' crisis.² But all Belgian political authorities agreed on the absolute priority of restoring the economy. This principle of presence and protection of the Belgian population's interests led to the development of a policy of the "lesser evil".³

The "lesser evil" implies the "loyal collaboration"⁴ of the different levels of power with the occupier. The Belgian authorities accept making inevitable and increasing concessions to the enemy, even if this means violating the Belgian Constitution and its principles of equality and liberty. This was especially true in the implementation of the Nazi anti-Jewish policy.

On the occupier's side, Hitler had no specific plans about Belgium's status in the future Nazi Europe. No ideological mission had been outlined. The Nazis pursued the same main goals as the Belgian authorities, namely the maintenance of order and the reactivation of the economy – and its extreme exploitation for its own profit.⁵

Consequently, the occupier established a military administration under the command of General von Falkenhausen. This regime depended directly on the German army's higher command, the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH), and neither on Hitler nor on Himmler. SS General Eggert Reeder headed the military administration. Reeder intended to conduct an extremely pragmatic policy, taking into account the delicate Belgian context as well as the lack of German manpower.

As a result, the military administration had to reluctantly accept the presence of the *Sicherheitdienst-Sicherheitspolizei* (Sipo-SD). This Security Police-Security Service depended directly on the Reich's Central Security Office, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA), headed by Heinrich Himmler. The Jewish Department of the Sipo-SD viewed the 'Jewish question' in a much more radical way than Reeder. This led to a power struggle between the military administration and the Sipo-SD, which pressed for more radical action. Reeder often came up against the pressures of Berlin, not in terms of the goals pursued but, on the way, to achieve them.⁶

The occupier could not do without Belgian relays. Reeder usually pointed out the need to avoid creating upheaval and to spare Belgian sensitivities in order to preserve the cooperation of the local structures and gain in efficiency. So, the German military administration's goals and those of the General Secretaries were aligned. The 'Jewish question' was only subsidiary to them.

Within the framework of the 'lesser evil' doctrine carried out by the Belgian authorities, the concept of "passive execution"⁷ emerges. The civil servants restricted themselves to implementing the occupier's requests, without ever taking any initiative. This doctrine adopted by the General Secretaries applied in all areas, including the persecution of the Jews. Especially at this point, the conflict between loyalty to the Belgian Constitution and laws and the participation of civil servants in the anti-Jewish policy was the most obvious.⁸

1 Commission d'étude 2001, 37–38.

2 Van Doorslaer – Debruyne – Seberechts – Wouters 2007, 229–230.

3 Steinberg 1999, 46–47.

4 CDJC LXXVIIa-29-30.

5 Steinberg 2004, 35.

6 Schram 2010.

7 Steinberg 1983, vol. 1, 111–113.

8 Schram 2000, 140.

LESSER EVIL AND PASSIVE EXECUTION

The complex political conditions prevented the occupier from locking the Jews into a geographical ghetto. However, the Nazis did not give up on attacking the Jews. It was through the economy, and not via Nazi racial ideology, that the antisemitic policy in Belgium was established. The occupier was indeed deeply convinced that Jews in Belgium were rich and held prominent economic positions. But this fantasy was very far from reality.

On the eve of the invasion, an estimated 70,000 Jews were living in Belgium, of whom only 6% had Belgian nationality.⁹ All others were recent immigrants who came to Belgium after 1918, fleeing from unfavorable political, social or economic climates. On the whole, this population was characterized by widespread poverty. The weight of Jews in the economy was modest, except in the diamond sector.

Even if this vision is extremely far from the reality, the German military administration pursued its objective: the de-Jewishisation of the economy. To achieve this, Reeder needed to promulgate measures against the Jews, to define who was a Jew, and to force those identified as such to declare their property, assets, businesses...

The General Secretaries considered three choices. The first one was to promulgate and execute themselves the anti-Jewish ordinances. The second was to refuse the whole thing and let the occupiers act as they pleased. And the last possibility was to let the German military administration legislate and limit themselves to applying the measures.¹⁰ The latter option was chosen.

In order to justify their choice, the Secretaries General requested the opinion of the Permanent Committee of the Council for Legislation. On 21 November 1940, the magistrates recommended the “passive execution”, a juridical version of the policy of “lesser evil” in the “Jewish question”.¹¹ In the context of the ‘Jewish question’, the Council should have underlined the illegality of this position, both under Belgian and international law.

The high magistrates based their position on the metaphor of the hangman and his victim. To participate means to collaborate in the elaboration or implementation of the measures. The victim of the sanction, by undergoing it, does not execute it. The hangman fulfils a sentence, he executes the sentenced person. The latter is being punished and does not participate in the execution, even if he spontaneously places his head on the block.¹²

So, the General Secretaries refused to legislate or to take any initiative but agreed to carry out the “measures against the Jews”.¹³ This was the starting point for the moral ghetto.

FROM THE FIRST REGISTRATION TO DE-JEWISHISATION

The occupier therefore issued the first ordinance against the Jews on 28 October 1940. Its content is dense. Its first paragraph defines the term “Jew” as anyone who has at least three grandparents of Jewish descent. If one has only two Jewish grandparents or if his case is doubtful, the determining factor is membership of the Jewish faith. People over 15 years old considered as Jews were forced to report to the Belgian local administrations to be recorded in a special register.

⁹ Van Doorslaer – Debruyne – Seberechts – Wouters 2007, 46.

¹⁰ Van Goethem 2006, 137.

¹¹ Steinberg 2004, 59.

¹² Steinberg 1983, vol. 1, 112.

¹³ Verordnung 28. Oktober 1940.

The argument of the executioner and his victim takes on its full meaning here. It was the Jewish population that must ask to be registered. The Belgian authorities listed the Jews at their own request. The good conscience was thus saved: the registry office did not take any initiative except to keep a Register of Jews. No objections were raised to this measure, although it was contrary to the Belgian Constitution.

The civil servants were even hiding behind falsely charitable arguments by avoiding imprisonment, financial penalties for the Jews and confiscation of their property by the Nazi forces.¹⁴ This ordinance also forbade Jews who had fled from Belgium since the invasion to come back.

The definition of who is a Jew was essential to identify those who would be targeted by the economic measures. The following paragraphs of this first ordinance have all an economic aspect. Jews were obliged to report their businesses, trades, associations and establishments with an economic aim, agricultural, forestry, horticultural and fish farming businesses... The *Gruppe XII's* Office for the Registration of Jewish Property, which depended on the German Military Administration, was in charge of this census.

Afterwards, all acts of disposal relating to the targeted businesses were forbidden. The catering sector was particularly affected by the obligation to display a trilingual poster on its shop windows: “*Jüdisches Unternehmen – Joodsche Onderneming – Entreprise juive*” [“Jewish Business”]. Once again, it was up to the Jewish owners to ask the municipality to put up posters. Later, on 31 May 1941, a new measure extended this obligation to all Jewish businesses and shops.¹⁵

In addition, another part of the first ordinance of 28 October 1940 excluded Jews from the civil service.¹⁶ Jews were to be excluded from the civil service, from the judiciary, from non-specifically Jewish education and from the newspapers and radio. These must be dismissed or retired on 31 December 1940. The occupier banned them from practicing these professions.

This professional ban was imposed on Jews of Belgian nationality, fewer than 4,000 individuals. Although the impact of the ban was extremely limited – it affected about 100 Belgian citizens of Jewish origin – it shocked Belgian officials. The Brussels judiciary as well as the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* protested to the German military administration. Nevertheless, the occupier continued its policy, with the loyal collaboration of the Belgian authorities.

On 31 May 1941, the third ordinance concerning economic measures against Jews set in motion the spoliation of property and the liquidation or Aryanization of businesses.¹⁷ According to this decree, the military commander had the power to forbid Jews from pursuing their business. He was also empowered to force Jews to cease their business or to alienate it as well as other valuables.

Other decisions were added to this measure in the spring of 1942. The occupier froze the assets of the Jews and seized their enterprises and businesses.¹⁸ He soon realized that the level of wealth of this Jewish population was far from his expectations. Jewish businesses or shops were mostly small and family-run, or even itinerant. Profitable Jewish businesses of interest to the war effort represented only 3% of some 8,000 businesses and industries.¹⁹

On the threshold of the war, Belgium had more or less 8,000 Jewish businesses. In December 1940, 7,729 Jewish-owned businesses had been registered. After the Liberation, fewer than 1,300 businesses were still operating. Half of them were close to bankruptcy.²⁰ The few viable businesses were “Aryanized”, i.e. they passed into the hands of non-Jewish, “Aryan” entrepreneurs. The others, more than 83% of the family, industrial and craft companies, were simply liquidated, depriving a third of the Jewish families of any professional activity.

¹⁴ Steinberg 1996, 62.

¹⁵ *Verordnung 31. Mei 1941.*

¹⁶ *Verordnung 28. Oktober 1940.*

¹⁷ *Verordnung 31. Mei 1941.*

¹⁸ *Verordnung 11. Marz 1942.*

¹⁹ Commission d'étude 2001, 82 and 93.

²⁰ Commission d'étude 2001, 93.

On 22 April 1942, the military administration ratified the confiscation of the goods of Jews who had lost their German nationality to the profit of the third Reich.²¹ On the 1st of August, the management of these assets was entrusted to the *Brüsseler Treuhandgesellschaft* (BTG). This trust company was created on 12 October 1940 in order to identify Jewish and enemy property. This task was later expanded to manage those goods and to liquidate them.²² The BTG appointed provisional administrators to manage the businesses, industries and movable or immovable property of the Jews.

But here again, the mechanism of spoliation did not achieve the result expected by the military administration. The Nazis could only rely on their own services for this purpose. As the BTG was created under Belgian law, its actions had to respect this same law. The consequence was that while the occupier could control and manage the property looted from the Jewish victims, he could neither have it at his disposal nor for its own profit, constrained by the obligations imposed by Belgian law.

Even if the de-jewishisation of the economy was a failure for the occupier, it was nevertheless an essential step in the “final solution”. It contributed breaking the Jews’ professional and economic ties with the country from which they later had to be expelled.

In addition to these measures aimed at de-jewishisation, other anti-Jewish laws aimed at the total physical exclusion of Jews from civil society. They could be mentioned in a chronological approach, as we have done for the economic measures. However, considering that they contribute to the social and physical isolation of Jews, they deserve a more thematic focus.

A MORAL GHETTO

84 The starting point remains the definition of a Jew and the keeping of a register of Jews enacted on 28 October. This first census of the Jews was classified by municipality and then alphabetically according to the last names of individuals. The places and dates of birth, address, professions, nationality and religion must appear in the form. The same information is recorded for the spouse, children, parents and grandparents. Married women are listed under their maiden name.

The obligation was imposed on all Jews over 15 years of age.²³ Usually, children under 15 years of age had to be registered on the head of the family’s document, in most cases their father. Some local administrations have been overzealous by inviting children who had just reached the age of 15 to register in their offices. It has even happened that Belgian civil servants have drawn up forms for children who have not yet reached that age.²⁴

Upon completion of the enrolment in the Register of Jews, the public servants applied a stamp “has requested his enrolment in the Register of Jews” in both national languages, French and Dutch.²⁵ The consultation of the Jewish register was open to any person who requested it, without having to show his or her identity papers to the local administration.²⁶

From February 1941 onwards, Eggert Reeder ordered putting copies of the registers at disposal of the German services for their own use. He was very satisfied when he noticed the rigorous work carried out by the Belgian administrations.²⁷ From a Nazi point of view, the test of loyal collaboration was successful. It should also be noted that the occupier did not refrain from replacing senior state officials deemed uncooperative.

21 *Verordnung* 22. April 1942.

22 Commission d’étude 2001, 40–41.

23 *Verordnung* 28. Oktober 1940.

24 Kazerne Dossin 2020, 137–139.

25 Kazerne Dossin, 142–143.

26 KD, *KD_00011_A004699*.

27 De Jonghe 1978, 139–140.

For example, Gerard Romsée, was appointed Secretary General of the Interior and Health in March 1941. On 29 July 1941, this Flemish collaborator issued a circular, at the Nazis’ simple request: the Belgian municipalities had to affix a “*Jood-Juif*” stamp in red ink on the Jews’ identity cards.²⁸ Moreover, Romsée pushed the local authorities to denounce Jews who did not show up to have their identity cards stamped. This double marking of identity cards proved to be very dangerous for the Jews. They risked being arrested at any time during ordinary identity checks or when collecting their ration coupons.

On 29 August 1941, the occupier restricted the free movement of Jews. It placed them under curfew from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. This curfew was stricter than the one imposed on non-Jewish people. Jews must stay at their official residence at these times. This restriction obviously has an impact on Jews who sometimes have to travel far from home to work. The occupier also stipulated that Jews could not settle in any city other than Antwerp, Brussels, Liège or Charleroi.²⁹

By the end of 1941, new orders excluded Jews physically from the non-Jewish people. On 25 November 1941, the Military Administration established the Association of Jews in Belgium (Association des Juifs en Belgique, AJB)³⁰ at the initiative of the Sipo-SD. The chosen title is revealing. It is about all Jews in Belgium and not only about Belgian Jews. The Nazi lawmakers had taken into account that the majority of the Jewish population was made up of foreigners or stateless people.

The AJB was a kind of Jewish self-administration, comparable to other “*Judenräte*”, the Jewish councils which the Nazis set up in the conquered territories. The AJB operated under the supervision of the Nazis, especially the Sipo-SD. They allocated the charges into the Association’s Steering Committee to seven well known respected Jewish personalities as it follows³¹:

- President: Salomon Ullmann, the military chaplain and Chief Rabbi, residing in Brussels;
- Vice-President: Nico Workum, an engineer from Antwerp;
- Members:
 - Maurice Benedictus, a cigar manufacturer from Antwerp;
 - Salomon Vanden Berg, a furniture manufacturer from Brussels;
 - Judas Mehlwurm, a merchant tailor, domiciled in Charleroi;
 - Noé Nozyce, a furrier, from Liège;
 - Joseph Teichmann, a managing director of a shipping company, from Antwerp.

The Jewish notables did not accept these charges without scruples. In a post-war testimony, Salomon Ullmann states that he sought advice from “the highest ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Their advice was to accept the measure – above all, not to adopt a heroic attitude; to remain on the spot, to alleviate as much as possible the fate of the Jewish population and to inform the Ministry of Justice of the measures taken”.³²

Maurice Benedictus and Salomon Vanden Berg also consulted Belgian official personalities, among whom was undoubtedly the Secretary General Gérard Romsée. These men had bowed to the Nazis in the name of the lesser evil and ironclad legalism. In their eyes, the Secretaries General embodied the Belgian state, even if some of them were pro-Nazi. With the exception of one of them: Joseph Teichmann never fulfilled his obligations within the AJB and never at-

28 FelixArchief, 678# 144, 29/07/1941.

29 *Verordnung* 29. August 1941.

30 *Verordnung* 25. November 1941.

31 *Moniteur belge, Statuts de l’AJB*.

32 AGR-SAVG, Papiers Ullmann, 3.

tended any meetings.³³ This devoted patriot refused to compromise with the occupiers, in any form whatsoever.

The composition of the AJB's Steering Committee turned out to be very unrepresentative of the Jewish population in Belgium. Its members all came from a prosperous background and were assimilated. Five of them were Belgian citizens. From the very beginning, this fracture caused great distrust among the Jews in the country.

Unconsciously, the leaders of the Jewish Association had become more or less zealous tools in the hands of the Nazis. The first and main mission of the AJB was to "activate the emigration of Jews" while the occupier had already forbidden Jews to leave Belgium.³⁴

On 23 October 1941, Heinrich Müller, one of the highest officials of the "final solution" in Berlin, communicated to the Sipo-SD in Brussels Heinrich Himmler's decision to prevent any migration of Jews, while pointing out that 'evacuation actions remain unchanged'.³⁵ "Evacuation" was the codename to refer to the genocidal deportation to the "East", where the mass extermination was already carried out a few months earlier.

All Jews living in the territory were obliged to become members of the AJB. This third census campaign started at the beginning of March 1942. Maurice Benedictus, the administrator of the AJB, specified that "[...] each form had to be drawn up in triplicate, one for the Gestapo, one for the Local Committee and one for the central archives of the AJB".³⁶

The registration form contained information useful to the occupier: the names of the members of the household and their degree of relationship, their nationalities, dates and places of birth, their address, the identity of the possible owner of the home and the number of rooms occupied. The documents were ordered by city, street and number, which was very helpful when it comes to gathering Jews for deportation.

Besides, the statutes of the AJB stipulated that the Jewish Association were responsible for other secondary social, charitable and teaching functions. For "all fundamental decisions relating to its activity", the AJB was entirely under the control of the Sipo-SD. This service also reserved the right to impose on the AJB any additional tasks it deemed necessary, without further details. The reader will later discover the full tragic significance of this paragraph.

As in other occupied or conquered countries, the financial burden of the "final solution" was to be borne by the Jewish population itself. So, in order to finance the activities of the AJB, a compulsory membership fee for all members is introduced. The basic amount of this contribution was set at 10 francs per adult. Meanwhile, the professional and economic prohibitions greatly impoverished the Jewish population. In May 1942, the A.J.B. reported the difficulties it was encountering in collecting dues, and therefore the difficulty members were having in paying them.³⁷

On the 1st of December 1941, the military commander targeted Jewish children by excluding them from non-Jewish schools. The organization of Jewish schools was added to the tasks of the AJB. The occupier deprived them of an inherent right in Belgium. He knew that he could count on the obedience of the Belgian relays, who were indifferent to the fate of these pupils³⁸...

Shocking as it is, this exclusion does not provoke great indignation from the authorities. When it does, "It is not so much the discriminatory nature of the order that is questioned as the practical difficulties encountered in carrying it out."³⁹ In any case, Jewish pupils or students left their classes to attend Jewish schools or to abandon their studies.

After the removal of Jewish children, Jewish workers had to be banned from the Belgian society. The liquidation and Aryanization of Jewish firms deprived one third of the Jews in Belgium of their job and income. On 11 March and 8 May 1942, special labour conditions for Jews were decreed⁴⁰. They had to work in groups and be housed separately. Forced labour camps reserved for them were set up, notably within the framework of the Todt Organisation. From 13 June to 12 September 1942, more than 2,250 men were deported to those *Judenlagern*.⁴¹ There they were used as slaves on the Atlantic Wall.

The last professional prohibitions, promulgated on 1 June 1942, stipulated that "Jews are forbidden [...] to practice the profession [...] of healing or caring for the sick".⁴² The counterpart of this prohibition is the creation of an Israelite hospital in Brussels, where staff and patients are exclusively Jewish. The Nazis exceptionally allowed Jewish doctors, nurses and dentists to practice their art in order to provide the necessary care to their community.

THE YELLOW STAR

This was the most brutal measure that the entire Jewish population had to endure before its deportation. On 27 May 1942, the yellow star completed the social and physical isolation of the Jews⁴³. From the age of six, every Jew had to wear this sign of infamy publicly. The compulsory badge was a palm-sized star of David printed in black on a yellow cloth. The occupier took into account the Belgian language split. He opted for a "J." - imitating the Hebrew script -, which stood for "Juif" in French or "Jood" in Dutch.

The Jews had to obtain these yellow stars by their own means. The price of a strip of cloth with three stars was set at seventy-five cents. The Jews were now stigmatized, identifiable by all. For some weeks, the children concerned went to school marked with this sign of infamy. The appearance of the "starred Jews" caused a real shock in Belgian opinion, which had been largely indifferent to their fate until this moment.

This passivity can be explained by the absence of objections, or even by a mute approval, of the anti-Jewish laws adopted by the occupier. The mayor Jules Coelst, who headed the Brussels mayor's conference, provides a meaningful example of this state of mind:

*"I do not like the Israelites as a community with immoderate love. [...] We are not so naïve as to ignore the fact that if Jews are required to wear the Star of David, it is in order to seize them at the first turn and without exception. As long as their children were kept in separate schools, I had no major problem with it."*⁴⁴

Eggert Reeder had always been careful not to arouse the attention of the Belgian population and authorities and especially not to provoke any reaction from them. The compulsory wearing of the star forced him to come out of his silence. He noticed that many Belgians, who had previously been unconcerned to his antisemitic policy, took pity on the Jews and showed them empathy.

The occupiers relied on the goodwill of the municipal administrations to deliver the badges. In Charleroi and Antwerp, and perhaps also in Liège, they distributed the yellow stars without a second thought. The Antwerp civil servants were even so zealous as to stamp a star of David on the identity cards of Jews. Only the Brussels mayors refused in the name of human dignity.⁴⁵ Therefore, in the capital, the Nazis transferred this ungrateful task to the AJB.

33 Steinberg 1983, vol. 2, 112.

34 Moniteur belge, *Statuts de l'AJB*.

35 MdS, XXVb-7, Heinrich Müller, 23/10/1941.

36 Kazerne Dossin, *La question juive en Belgique*, 8.

37 KD, A007404, *Compte-rendu du 28 mai 1942*.

38 Schram 2019.³⁵

39 Dickschen 2004, 182.

40 *Verordnung*, 11. März 1942 and 8. Mai 1942.

41 <https://kazernedossin.eu/onderzoeksproject/left-behind2/>.

42 *Verordnung* 27. Mai 1942.

43 *Verordnung* 1. Juni 1942.

44 Coelst 1942.

45 CEGESOMA, *Lettre de Jules Coelst* 05/06/1942.

This order put an end to the status of the Jews. On 15 June 1942, Reeder “can consider the legislation concerning the Jews in Belgium as completed”.⁴⁶ He also notes that “Jews have only very limited possibilities of existence left. The next step would be their evacuation from Belgium”.

NEXT STEP: ‘EVACUATION TO THE EAST

Men, women and children were identified, herded into a moral and compulsory ghetto, stripped of their possessions, deprived of their livelihoods, excluded from the economy and removed from civil society. They were so deeply vulnerable that the Sipo-SD could start the genocidal deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Sipo-SD imposed the most critical mission on the AJB: the so-called putting to work of the Jewish population within the borders of the Reich. The Sipo-SD planned to discreetly bring 10,000 Jews fit to “work” to the Dossin barracks for an allegedly work assignment.

On 15 July 1942, Maurice Benedictus was summoned to the Sipo-SD headquarters in Brussels. Anton Burger, Eichmann’s representative and “evacuation” specialist, informed him that the AJB was entrusted with this task. Burger asserts that

“it would be done in a calm and humane way and [...] that Jews should understand that if thousands of German heroes [...] sacrificed themselves for Europe, it was elementary that Jews should work and replace part of the German labour force.”⁴⁷

Then he threatened: “In case the AJB should refuse, he would use methods that had proved their efficiency in other countries”. Burger adds that if Benedictus tried to involve any German or Belgian authorities, “Jewish population [...] would have to suffer the consequences”.

88 Benedictus certainly did not have much room for manoeuvre against Obersturmführer Anton Burger. The latter left a very unpleasant and worrying impression on him. Burger greeted the AJB administrator very rudely, forcing him to stand at attention in front of him.

Benedictus, once exiled to Portugal, later describes the horrific tragedy playing out in his conscience. He is not allowed to consult his colleagues. He is alone to carry the burden of a decision on which the fate of many Jewish families would depend.⁴⁸ Surrendering to pressure, Benedictus agreed to become the one responsible for the alleged putting to work of his co-religionists.

Benedictus’ case of conscience arose:

“In this regard, some of my colleagues considered me a traitor while others approved of me, understanding that by accepting, there was a way to soften fairly the fate of those who had to leave.”⁴⁹

In the name of the lesser evil, the administrator of the AJB kept his good conscience, despite what he revealed further on:

“He had been brought to our attention that in Holland, the Joodsche Raad was in the same situation and had to bow down, without being able to save anyone, the Germans making raids from the very beginning of the work assignment.”⁵⁰

Salomon Vanden Berg is clear about what lies behind the word putting to work. In his diary he notes: “I fear that this is the mass deportation of the Jewish population to Poland. I

hope I’m wrong, but I’m so afraid.” The next day, this fear remains nagging: “It is becoming increasingly clear that mass deportations of Jews are to be feared.”⁵¹

At that time, the AJB leadership was unaware of the decisions taken in Berlin that organized the genocidal deportation from Belgium. On 11 June 1942, Himmler and Eichmann informed Kurt Asche, the responsible for Jewish Affairs in Belgium, that 10,000 Jews must be evacuated to “the East” in the first stage. They planned that the first deportations of Jews should start from the mid of July, or at the latest by mid-August. On 15 July 1942, the Military Administration charged SS Major Philipp Schmitt, Nazi party member since 1925 and head of the nearby Breendonk terror camp, to establish the *SS-Sammellager für Juden Mecheln*, the SS assembly camp for Jews.⁵²

The employees of the AJB started to draw up lists of “workers”, i.e. deportees on 17 July under the management of Alfred Blum, son of Marcel Blum, the president of the Jewish community in Brussels. Appointed head of the local committee’s offices, Alfred Blum worked with zeal and did everything possible to deliver the lists within the established deadlines of 10 days.⁵³

On July 25, Blum delivered 12,000 names, 2,000 more than what the occupier had requested... The distribution of convocations to go to the “*SS-Sammellager für Juden*”, the assembly camp in Mechelen, began the same day. The AJB especially hired young Jewish employees to deliver the documents personally to the interested parties.

These summonses instructed recipients to report to the Dossin barracks on a specific date. They described what one had to bring: nonperishable supplies for 15 days, clothes and shoes, a bowl, a cup, a spoon and identity cards, supply cards and other useful documents, including the summons. The supply card was not to be forgotten, as the Sipo-SD used them to supply the assembly camp.⁵⁴

From the very first days, the Sipo-SD noticed the disobedience of those summoned. More than 12,000 *Arbeitseinsatzbefehlen* were released, but only one third of the people came “voluntarily” to the SS-Assembly camp. Facing this failure, the Sipo-SD commanded the AJB to recall the Jewish population to obey.

As of August 1, 1942, the “AJB Call” was attached to the work orders. This text intends to be comforting: “According to the assurances given by the Occupying Authority, this is indeed a labour service, and not a deportation measure.”⁵⁵ But the end of the text clearly threatens that “non-observance of the summons to work could have unfortunate consequences, both for the members of your family and for the entire Jewish population of the country”.

The call of the AJB was perceived by Jewish people as one “Cain’s sign”⁵⁶ The accusation is terrible: in the name of the lesser evil, the AJB sacrificed its brothers. If then nobody suspected that systematic and industrial extermination was carried out, everyone felt that the issue was dangerous, perhaps even fatal.

The “collaboration” period of the AJB lasted some four months when the association served as a Jewish dreadfully docile weapon manipulated by Sipo-SD. After October 1942, the tasks of the AJB, which has become useless for the Sipo-SD, were restricted to its social role, within the limits of the margins defined by the nazis.

46 CEGESOMA, *Tätigkeitsbericht Nr. 20*, A 50.

47 Kazerne Dossin: *La question juive en Belgique*, 13.

48 Kazerne Dossin: *Historique du Problème juif*, 13–14.

49 Kazerne Dossin: *Historique du Problème juif*, 14.

50 Kazerne Dossin: *Historique du Problème*, 14.

51 KD, *Vanden Berg*, 17 juillet 1942, 47.

52 AGR-AM, Harry von Craushaar, 15 July 1942.

53 Schram 2004, 254–255.

54 Schram 2004, 256.

55 KD, Appel de l’AJB.

56 Struye 2002, May 1944.

THERE IS "GHETTO" AND "GHETTO".

The Nazis did not have a free hand in Belgium. They had to take into account the country's political and religious authorities as well as public opinion. They could not draw attention to the *Judenpolitik*, in order to avoid potential protests in favour of the Jews. Too few in number, they had to ensure the participation of local administrations and institutions, of the Belgians people, of pro-Nazi movements ... and even of the Jews themselves.

The chosen policy was therefore coldly administrative, calm, tempered but also frighteningly effective: no ghettos, as little violence as possible, as much organization as possible. Given the complexity of the occupation, it was inconceivable to develop the "final solution" with the same unconditional violence and cruelty as in the East.

It resulted in the murder of half the Jewish population. Jews in Belgium and Northern France were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, an extermination centre which was especially open to carry out the genocide of the Jews from the West. A place designed to bring victims to their killers and carry out the mass murder 1,200 km away.

The occupier's fears about the attitude of the Belgian State and the clergy proved unfounded. Almost none of these institutions protested against the measures taken against the Jewish population. They were generally indifferent to their fate. Sometimes they even approved of this exclusionary policy. The same applies to the non-Jewish population, which was too preoccupied with its own problems.

In his wartime diary, Paul Struye, a Catholic politician and former municipal councilor of the commune of Ixelles, also adds the factor of a latent antisemitism well anchored in Belgian society:

*"The multiple measures of exclusion and constraint to which they [the Jews] had already been subjected had hardly stirred up opinion. Certainly, they were considered unjust. But, on the whole, people remained rather indifferent. The average Belgian certainly does not accept the persecution of a category of citizens for racial or religious reasons. But there is no doubt that he 'does not like Jews' and that there is, at least in Brussels and even more so in Antwerp, what could be called a moderate antisemitism."*⁵⁷

Antisemitism, indifference or complicit passivity was the mainstream. Add to this cowardice and even fear. Sacrificing the unloved to supposedly save everything that can be saved is the essence of the politics of the lesser evil. Belgian officials were able to use the room for manoeuvre left by the weaknesses of the occupier in various matters, but hardly ever in the "Jewish question".

Lesser evil was imposed even within the Association of Jews in Belgium. During the few months of its "collaboration" period, the AJB counted the Jews, drew up lists with zeal, distributed the summonses for the Mechelen camp... In Brussels, it even sold the yellow stars. Obviously, the room for manoeuvre left to the AJB was very limited, but it did exist. Some Jewish men and women spoke out against the Nazis. They took advantage of their relatively protected status as members of the AJB committees to act in the shadows.

Jewish leaders in Belgium were faced with the same cases of conscience as their homologues in the eastern ghettos. What was to be done? Obey and satisfy the Nazis in all circumstances and hope to escape the worst? Flee, go into exile, hide, resist? These questions are complicated when you are left to your own and are sometimes met with hatred, sometimes with indifference. Far be it from us to judge the choices that the Jewish leaders had to make, without knowing the end of the story.

In spite of itself, the AJB turned out to be a Jewish weapon, fearfully docile, wielded by German hands in order to eliminate all Jewish existence on Belgian soil. After October 1942, the occupier lost interest in the AJB, which was now useless for catching Jews who had gone mas-

sively into hiding. From that moment on, the AJB only carried out a social and charitable role, within the limits granted by the German authorities.

The Jews in Belgium were counted, listed, dispossessed of their property, excluded from the professional and economic world, relegated to the fringes of society, humiliated by the distinctive signs, put to work, deprived of all their fundamental rights, dehumanised, deported. As were the Jews in the ghettos of Central and Eastern Europe... Even if there, the isolation of the Jewish populations was much more severe and the measures were unleashed with so much violence, cruelty, barbarity for an even more radical human toll. Even if the method of accomplishing the annihilation of the Jews differed, the macabre objectives were the same, as was the arsenal of legal measures deployed to achieve it.

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FELEKEZET-, TÁRSADALOM- ÉS HELYTÖRTÉNETRŐL MÁSKÉNT...

Ács Péter – Kovács Anita: Egy filantróp nemes a 19. század zsidóságának soraiban: dr. Várhelyi Rósa Izsó.

Szegedi Zsidó Hitközség, Szeged, 2023. 64 oldal

Ács Péter és Kovács Anita könyvét, ha címszavakban kellene jellemezni, akkor tömören annyit lehetne mondani, hogy egy szegedi zsidó története egy újra formálódó világban. Az újjáépülő Szegedre, a kiépülő modern magyar államra, és abban a zsidóság helyzetére vonatkozóan ez egyaránt lehetne állítható Rosenberg Izidorról is. Az emancipáció, a recepció, a Szegedi Ügyvédi Kamara, a városépítés, a nők szavazati jogának támogatása és a hitközség jótékonyági, oktatási és kulturális ügyeinek előmozdítása egyszerre kapcsolódik a tevékenységéhez. Egy tehetséges ügyvéd, hitközségi elnök és politikus életútján és cselekedetein keresztül társadalmi folyamatokat láthatunk alulnézetből. Mindezt számos dokumentumrészlet, újsághír, fotó, festmény és emlékhely képszerű közlése hozza közelebb az olvasóhoz.

Miért fontos örökség az emancipált zsidó polgár a szülővárosának? Szeged modern önképét, és részben mai turisztikai örökségét, a nagyárvíz és az újjáépítés határozta meg. Szeged középkori – zegzugos, communitas-ok hagyatékát őrző – városképét ekkor váltották fel a körútjai és sugárútjai. Ez számos konfliktust, érdekütközést idézett elő a telekrendezések, kiigazítások és kisajátítások során. Ennek részeként épültek fel a szecessziós bérpaloták is. Az emancipált zsidóságnak a város életébe történő belépésével mindez párhuzamosan zajlott. A kötet az újjáépítés egyik izraelita szegedi polgáráról szól, aki hitközségi elnök is volt a szegedi új zsinagóga építésének idején. A könyv a szegedi új zsinagóga avatásának 120. évfordulójára jelent meg.

Hogyan ragadható meg Rósa személyében a neológ izraelita polgár alakja? Rosenberg Izidor (1842–1918) családtörténete jól példázza a szegedi neológ zsidók útját és közép-európai gyökereit. A család anyai Auslander-ága szegedi, az apai Rosenberg-ág bazini (Pozsony vm.). Rosenberg Dávid, a későbbi nagyapa, 1835-ben települt át Szegedre, ahol fia, Rosenberg Jakab, már előkészítette az érkezését. Jakab két fiatalabb fivére is a városba költözött, ahol terménykereskedelemmel foglalkoztak. Rosenberg Izidor szülei a születése előtti évben, 1841-ben, házasodtak össze. Anyai dédnagyapja, Spitzer Izrael, Óbudáról költözött Szegedre 1785-ben. 1788-tól tizennégy éven át volt a hitközség első bírása. A 19. század végén, az anyai dédnagyapa útjára lépve, Rosenberg Izidor lett a hitközség elnöke. A matuzsálemi kort megért nagyapák végig kísérték életútjának nagy részén.

A közügyeket tekintve Rosenberg Izidor gróf Tisza Istvánnal dolgozott együtt a szegedi nagyárvíz utáni újjáépítést intézve. Nézeteit Deák Ferenc politikája határozta meg. Az 1914. évben a szegedi nemzeti munkáspárt jelöltje volt, majd Szeged város I. kerületének parlamenti képviselőjelöltje lett.

Szakmai téren szintén tevékeny életet élt. A Szegedi Ügyvédi Kamara az 1875. február 21-én tartott alakuló ülésén Rosenberg Izidornak, a választmány tagjaként, bizalmat szavazott. Ő dolgozta ki a Kamara ügyrendjét is. 1878-tól az elnökhelyettesi tisztséget töltötte be, 1884-től haláláig pedig a szervezet elnöke lett. Az 50 éves ügyvédi jubileumát kollégái 1917 januárjában ünnepelték meg.

Rosenberg Izidor az izraelita felekezet történetének fontosabb állomásain szintén jelen volt. Budapesti és bécsi joghallgatóként a Magyar Izraelita c. lap munkatársa volt. A hitközség a magyar zsidó kongresszusra, 1868. december 14-én, Rosenberget küldte a jegyzői feladatok ellátására, Lichtenberg Mór oldalán. Az 1869. november 29-i gyűlésen pedig az alapszabályok kidolgozásában is részt vett. A recepció ügyében Eötvös Józsefhez írt felirat egyik indítványozója szintén ő volt.

A Szegedi Zsidó Hitközségi pályáját 1874-ben kezdte meg pénzügyi elöljáróként, 1879-ben pedig a közgyűlés iskolai elöljáróvá választotta. Haláláig a 22. izraelita községkerület elnöke volt. A hitközség régi zsinagógájának nagyárvíz utáni renoválása és az új zsinagóga építése egyaránt a hitközségi elnökségéhez kötődik. A kötet egyik érdeme, hogy Rosenberg Izidor hitközségi emlékezetét – archív fotókra is támaszkodva – ismerteti.

A kiadvány várhelyi Rósa Izsót, az emancipált és nemesített szegedi izraelita polgárt mutatja be, akit munkája során zsidósága miatt többször támadtak. „Vezetői pozíciói, a kapott nemesi rang mellett is az emberi kapcsolatokban maradt a szelíd, alázatos egyéniség, aki kimagasló eredményt tudott felmutatni a megegyezésre törekvő tárgyalásainál, képes volt sokakat mozgósítani maga mellé egy-egy kiemelkedő cél megvalósítása érdekében. Életét tisztelet övezte, akihez bárki fordulhatott segítségért.” – összegezte Rósa Izsó kortárs megítélését a kötet előszavában Ács Péter.

A kötet a hitközségéért, a szakmájáért és a városi közösségért dolgozó izraelita táblabírókat mutatja fel korunk olvasóinak. Az évfordulós könyv mégsem idealizálás vagy nosztalgikus visszatekintés. Számos történeti forráson, szemelvényen keresztül vezeti az olvasóját, és világít rá egy olyan személyre, aki Szeged örökségében felmutatható lehet.

Glässer Norbert

BODÓ BÉLA: A FEHÉRTERROR

Antiszemita és politikai erőszak Magyarországon 1919–1921.

Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 2022. 351 oldal.

Vörösterror – fehérterror. Ezek azok a fogalmak, amelyek erőteljesen meghatározták Magyarország történetét az első világháború végét követő 2–3 esztendőben. Míg a vörösteror szervesen kapcsolódik a Tanácsköztársasághoz,¹ addig a fehérterror – az önmagát ellenforradalmiként és nemzeti-keresztényként meghatározó – Horthy-korszak első éveire kötődik. Mindkettőt erőteljesen eltúlozta, és a lehető legsötétebb színben festette meg az ellenoldal emlékezetpolitikája.

Bodó Béla, a Bonn-i Egyetem közép- és kelet-európai történelem tanszékének oktatója dokumentált, és forrásokra alapozott monográfiát szentelt a fehérterror jelenségének és történetének. A mű eredetileg angolul jelent meg, 2019-ben.² Magyarul Konok Péter szakszerű fordításának köszönhetően olvasható.

A monográfia előszava egy vidéki akasztás részletébe menő leírását kínálja, amely, mint egy rávilágít a fehérterror ideológiai hátterére és módszertanára; miközben feltárja a Horthy-rendszer sajtósági viszonyait is. „1919. augusztus 27-ének kora délutánján katonai őrzőerő érkezett a Balaton déli partján fekvő kies Fonyódra, amely a kirándulók kedvelt célpontja volt (...). Az egység parancsnoka gróf Salm Hermann főhadnagy volt; Prónay Pál századostól, a legjelentősebb magyarországi paramilitáris csapat vezetőjétől azt a parancsot kapták, hogy keressék meg és tartóztassák le Marcali járásban a kommunistákat és terjesszék a Nemzeti Hadsereg propagandáját.” (11). Elsősorban két személyt kerestek: dr. Tószegi Albertet (fiatalon megkeresztelkedett zsidó), aki a Budapest VI. kerületi önkormányzat adóosztályát vezette, és Gráner Albertet (izraelita), a Tószegi-birtok jószágigazgatóját. Mindkettőjüket sikerült letartóztatni. Tószegi felesége viszont azonnal lépett. Sürgőnyt küldött Svastics Nándor megyei kormánybiztosnak Kaposvárra, és személyesen elutazott Horthy Miklóshoz, a Nemzeti Hadsereg főparancsnokához, Siófokra. Svastics kormánybiztos még aznap este elrendelte a két letartóztatott szabadon bocsátását. Hajnalban megérkezett Horthy személyes levele is, amelyben Salm gróftól személyesen vette felelőssé a foglyok életéért. Sőt! A letartóztatás nemzetközi botrányá fajult.

A különítmény mind Svastics kormánybiztos, mind pedig Horthy üzenetét semmibe vette. Augusztus 28-án egyfajta népgyűlést szerveztek az iskola udvarán, ahol Tószegi és Gráner mellett már a „zsidó” Hamburger Ede is a vádlottak között szerepelt. Helyi parasztokkal mindhármukat felakasztatták. Tószegi felesége végignézte férje kivégzését; a különítmé-

nyeseket nem érdekelte különösebben, hogy kifejezetten Horthyra hivatkozott. A leírásból az is kiderül, hogy maga Prónay is semmibe vette Horthy parancsát! Mi bontakozik ki ebből? Egyértelműen az, hogy a nemzeti-keresztény Horthy rezsim tulajdonképpen hazugságban és önkényes erőszakban született. Egy olyan admirális készült az ország legfőbb közjogi méltóságává lenni, akit a saját emberei is semmibe vettek. A fonyódi eset és Prónay magatartása fényében már semmi meglepő nincs abban, hogy 1944. október 15-én a magyar honvédség szembe fordult legfőbb Hadurával, akire egyébként felesküdt.

A fonyódi akasztást nem lehetett eltusolni, ezért vizsgáló bizottságot alakítottak, amely elsősorban az áldozatok becsületét igyekezett helyreállítani, és morális igazságtételt szolgáltatni. Angol nyomásra végül letartóztatták a három parasztot. Horthy viszont a november 27-i levelében szabadon bocsátásukat kérte az igazságügy miniszertől. Álláspontja szerint ők csak „a nép akaratát” hajtották végre (19). Az igazságszolgáltatás (államügyész, miniszter, Kúria) ellenállt. Ez azonban csak ideig-óráig tartott. A kaposvári hatóságok 1920. június 25-én a három férfit csendben szabadon engedték. 1921. májusában Horthy kormányzó pedig hivatalosan is amnesztiában részesítette őket. Ezt követően „1921. november 3-án kiadott rendeletében Horthy amnesztiát adott minden különítményesnek és helybéli büntörtszállásosoknak, akik az előző években ‘hazafias felbuzdulásuk’ miatt büncselekményeket követtek el.” (20–21). Mi ez, ha nem a gyilkosságok utólagos legalizálása? 1923-ra már maga a Kúria is álláspontot változtatott: az áldozatokat becsmélő újságírókat felmentette!

A fonyódi esettörténet nagyszerű betekintést kínál magába a monográfiába, amelynek középpontjában az erőszak különböző formái, és megnyilvánulásai állnak. A szerző nemzeti történeti, szélesebb regionális, sőt kontinentális perspektívákat jelenít meg; nem riadva vissza az összehasonlításoktól sem (pl. spanyol polgárháború, a XX. század elején az Amerikai Egyesült Államok déli államaiban történt lincselések). Megfogalmazása szerint: „a kötet fókuszában a Magyarországon és a Kárpát-medencében 1916 és 1924 között történt események, társadalmi és politikai folyamatok állnak.” Ily módon kerül tárgyalásra a résztvevők motivációja és lelkiállapota, az egyes csoportok interakciói, a strukturális változók, „a földbirtoklás formái, a társadalmi hierarchiák, a gazdasági és szociális trendek”, „az ideológiák és az ideológiai bevésődések ereje”, valamint a társadalomnak, illetve a politikai, a társadalmi és a kulturális elitnek a felelőssége (22). „Bár a referenciák regionális, sőt globális keretekbe illeszkednek, az esettanulmányok lokálisak, lehetővé teszik az erőszak belső dinamikáinak vizsgálatát, a pszichológiai, tudati és motivációs faktorok értelmezését az erőszak kölcsönhatásairól szóló elméletek mentén. Mindezt egy kritikai egoforrás, Prónay Pál alezredesnek – a két világháború közötti időszak leghírhedtebb ‘fehér’ szabadcsapata vezérének – a naplója kapcsolja össze.” (22–23).

1 Erre vonatkozóan lásd Hatos Pál 2021: *Rosszfiúk világháborúja. Az 1919-es Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság története.* Budapest.

2 Bodó Béla 2019: *The White Terror. Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921.* New York.

A monográfia első fejezete („A Tószegi-eset. A szóbeszéd szerepe”) részletekben tárgyalja és elemzi a fonyódi gyilkosságot, mintegy „mikrokozmoszként” mutatva be a korabeli Magyarország társadalmát, kibontva a fehérterror aspektusát és érvrendszerét. Tárgyalja az ideológia és antiszemita sztereotípiák hatásait, a helyi elitek, az uszítók és az elkövetők paranoiáját, az áldozatok zavarodottságát, valamint a lokális és az országos vezetők és elitek felelősségét.

A második fejezetben („Az erőszak ritmusai”) az antiszemita, a politikai és a paramilitáris erőszak már folyamként jelenik meg, aminek köszönhetően a harmadik fejezet („A fehérterror, mint a vörösterorra adott válasz”) magát az elkövetést veheti górcső alá, összehasonlítva a vörös- és a fehérterror különböző formáit. Ebben a fejezetben vizsgálja a szerző az áldozatok társadalmi és felekezeti hátterét, a számháború problematikáját, és tárgyalja mind a vörös-, mind pedig a fehérterror területi kiterjedését és intenzitását, mintegy európai kontextusba helyezve a történéseket.

A negyedik fejezet („Az erőszak tere”) az erőszak megnyilvánulásainak fizikai helyeit – az épületeket (rendőrőrs, községháza, laktanya, szálloda stb.) – vizsgálja, kiemelt figyelmet szentelve az internálótáboroknak, amelyek ezen korszak sajátos fogvatartási helyszínei. Ezekhez a helyekhez mintegy hozzátartozott az erőszak és a halál.

Az ötödik fejezet („Az erőszak formái”) az erőszak megnyilvánulásait (népítéletek, lincselések és önbíráskodások, pogromok, kitelepítések) taglalja. Mindebben fontos szerepet játszottak a röpcédulák és a plakátok, amelyek az érzelmek felkorbácsolását célozták és szolgálták, mintegy megjelölve a célszemélyeket, akiknek bántalmazása, meggyilkolása mondhatni büntetlenül megtörténhetett. A szerző álláspontja szerint az erőszak – egyfelől „az intellektuális tervezés és a külső hatások interakcióinak” terméke, másfelől pedig helyi és egyéni kezdeményezés – valójában egy olyan látens potenciál és tudás, amely kész arra, hogy válsághelyzetekben reaktívalódjon (23).

A hatodik fejezet („Szexuális bántalmazások”) az erőszak egy sajátos formáját, a nemi erőszakot veszi górcső alá. Ez nőket érintett elsősorban, viszont előfordult, hogy férfi áldozatai is voltak. A szerző szerint: „Az érettségizett, vagy éppen egyetemest végzett, középosztálybeli tiszték sokkal jobban élvezték a foglyok megkínzását és megalázását, mint az alsóbb osztályokból való, félig írástudatlan újoncok” (262).

A hetedik fejezetben („Az erőszak, mint társadalmi helyezkedés”) Bodó Béla az 1920-as numerus clausus törvényt és a további zsidóellenes rendelkezéseket vizsgálja. Itt az erőszak eszközként és stratégiaként jelenik meg, és az abban résztvevők gazdasági helyzetének javítását, illetve társadalmi státuszuk növelését szolgálja. A szerző vélelmezi, hogy „az aránytalan nyomás és erőszak hiányában ezek a törvények nem születhettek volna meg” (24).

A nyolcadik – és egyben utolsó – fejezet („A burzsoá lázadók”) „olyan szolgálatként tárgyalja az erőszakot, amelyet a különítményesek Horthynak, a társadalmi és politikai eliteknek és a nyugati hatalmaknak tettek, amelyek mindegyike a közép-kelet-európai forradalmak elfojtásában és a térség stabilizációjában volt érdekelt”. A szerző szerint abban, hogy ezek az aktorok végül

mégis a különítményesek ellen fordultak nem morális megfontolások, vagy az áldozatok iránti együttérzés játszott szerepet, hanem elsősorban az a felismerés, „hogy a politikai stabilitás és a gazdaság helyreállítása szempontjából az erőszak immár kontraproduktív és kedvezőtlen, és a paramilitáris egységek az ő egyeduralmukat veszélyeztetik” (24).

Monográfiája epilógusában a szerző a vörös- és a fehérterrorra a kollektív emlékezetben érzékelhető helyéről ír összegzést, kitérve arra, hogy ezek az emlékezetek miképpen járultak hozzá a rendszerváltás utáni Magyarország bel- és külpolitikájának polarizációjához.

A válogatott szakirodalmat és a használatot megkönnyítő mutatót tartalmazó monográfia joggal mondható megkerülhetetlennek mindazok számára, akik a tárgyalt korszakkal kívánnak foglalkozni. Ugyanakkor jelezniük kell, hogy Bodó Béla a közelmúltban egy másik, a fehérterror humorának szentelt angol nyelvű monográfiát is megjelentetett.³ Reméljük, hogy a magyar nagyközönség számára ez is mielőbb hozzáférhetővé válik.

Jakab Attila

3 Bodó Béla 2023: *Black Humor and the White Terror*. New York.

TÖMEGGYILKOSSÁG NYÁRON

*Eisen, George: A Summer of Mass Murder
1941 Rehearsal for the Hungarian Holocaust.*

Purdue University Press, West Lafayette (Indiana), 2023, xxv+379 oldal.

Az 1941 augusztus végén Kamenyec-Podolszkijban (ma Kamianec-Podilskij) végrehajtott – és mintegy 23 600 (köztük a kb. 14 – 16 000 Magyarországról kiutasított) ártatlan zsidó áldozatot (köztük nők, gyermekek, idősök) követelő – tömeggyilkosságnak, mint a magyar holokauszt előjátékának, ma már komoly szakirodalma van. A történéseket feltáró és elemző tanulmányok azonban többnyire különböző részkérdéseket, aspektusokat világítanak meg. Mindmáig hiányzott egy összefoglaló, és a szélesebb kontextust, perspektívákat megjelenítő tudományos igényű monográfia is. Az Amerikai Egyesült Államokban élő, magyar származású, és maga is holokauszt túlélő tudós és egyetemi oktató, az angol nyelven most megjelent könyvében gyakorlatilag ezt a hiányt pótolja.

A tudományos igénnyel megírt – forrásokra és visszaemlékezésekre alapozott, valamint lábjegyzetelt – munka a maga módján mégis rendhagyó. A szerző a feldolgozott témát távolságtartással szemlélő és objektivitásra törekvő tudományos megközelítés mellett, mintegy azzal összeötvözve – az érintettség okán –, egy személyes szálát is beleszó a munkájába úgy, hogy az semmit nem veszít a tudományos jellegéből. Ezzel viszont a könyv egy sajtószerű színt kap, a rendkívül tragikus történet mondhatni emberközeli válik. Az író ugyanis a két nagybátyjának – Samunak és Karcsinak – állít emléket, akik ezen tömeggyilkosság áldozatai lettek. Ők habár Budapesten születtek – még az első világháború előtt –, mégsem rendelkeztek magyar állampolgársággal. Egyik kocsisként, másik szabóként dolgozott. A szerző nagyapja és apja végül elkerülték a kiutasítást és a deportálást, de a két fiú nem. A nagyapa csak néhány hónappal élte túl a fiai, és a szintén deportált – galíciai születésű – felesége halálát.

George Eisen megfogalmazása szerint: „A jelentős mennyiségű új anyag és az ismert források ismételt vizsgálata nem csupán a holokauszt története egy véres fejezetének, hanem a magyar és a transznacionális történelem egy vitatott epizódjának a rekonstrukciójában is segítenek minket.” A könyv maga „túlmutat a hagyományos historiográfia határain”, mélyreható kérdéseket boncolgat az erkölcsről, a bűnösről és a felelősségről, megszólaltatva mind az áldozatokat, mind pedig az elkövetőket (xix).

Az 1941 nyara történéseivel kapcsolatban olyan kérdésekre keresi a választ, mint: 1941 július–augusztusban a magyar hatóságok miért utasítottak ki több ezer zsidót Magyarországról? És miért éppen Galíciába? Miképpen illeszkedik bele ez a tömeggyilkosság a magyar és az egyetemes holokauszt történetébe? Az elkövetők viselkedése (a szadizmus és a kapzsiság ötvözése) miként egyeztethető össze a népi náci ideológiával, valamint az erkölcsi kettősséggel?

2008 nyarán George Eisen csupán azt szerette volna megtudni, hogy 1941 nyarán a két nagybátyját miért, és hogyan gyilkolták meg, és miért éppen ebben a podóliai városban? A tömegsír (mint emlékhely) mellett egy kis piacot és egy játszóteret talált. És ekkor találkozott a virágárus Valentinával, aki 7–8 évesen szemtanúja volt a kivégzéseknek: „a magyar menetoszlopoknak megparancsolták, hogy a tömegsír szélén sorakozzanak, és lelőtték őket (...) hallottuk az élve eltemetett sebesültek nyögéseit (...) Megtörtént, hogy a gödörbe élve beledobott emberek kimásztak belőle, hogy aztán újra visszakerüljenek, mert azt hitték, hogy a 'másik oldalon' vannak. Beleőrültek.” (xx). Ott, abban a pillanatban született meg benne az elhatározás, hogy ezt a könyvet meg kell írnia. Találkozása Valentinával jelentette az üzenetet a palackban.

George Eisen meggyőződése, hogy a holokauszt sokkal több, mint egy egyszerű történelmi esemény; az emberiség és a lélek próbatételének kell tekinteni. Ezért a könyvében elbeszéltek tulajdonképpen az emberiség hiányáról, és az értelmetlen istenkeresésről szólnak. A megszállt szovjet területeken elkövetett tömeggyilkosságok pedig leegyszerűsítik a népi náci ideológiát annak pusztán lényegére: egy jól – mondhatni német precizitással – megtervezett folyamat, egy sajtószerű mechanizmussal a döntéstől, a kivitelezésen keresztül, egészen a nyomok eltüntetéséig és a rablott holmi szétszételéséig.

Monográfiája prologusában a szerző bevezetést kínál a Holokausztba, mint történelmi eseménybe. Kihangsúlyozza, hogy a hontalannak minősített (menekült, magyar állampolgársági papírokkal nem rendelkező, vagy még nem lezárt igazolási folyamat hatálya alá eső) zsidók kiutasítása a magyar hatóságok önálló akciója volt, amely nélkülözött mindenfajta gazdasági és katonai racionalitást. Ír a „tisztogatási akcióról”, megmagyarázza, hogy miért Galícia lett a helyszín, és megvilágítja a Holokauszt kontextusát is.

Műve első fejezetében George Eisen a keleti zsidókról (Ostjuden) ír, részletesen kifejtve, hogy a „galiciánér” mit is jelentett a korabeli magyar képzeletben. Álláspontja szerint a vallását gyakorló, és hagyományaihoz ragaszkodó zsidó jelentős mértékben hozzájárult a „más/másik”-ról alkotott elképzelés, illetve a rossz / jó zsidó dichotómia kialakulásához. Ennek mentén forrott ki a „gyűlölet jogalkotása”.

Ezt követően tárgyalja az „ismeretlen” Galíciába történő kitoloncolást, amely akció rendelkezett a törvényesség minden látszatával. A magyar hatóságok eléggé ügyeltek arra, hogy minden jogszerű legyen! Az ország területén összegyűjtött zsidókat Körös-

mezőn koncentrálták, és ott tették át őket a határon,¹ ahol gyakorlatilag teljesen magukra maradtak. Több ezren kerültek a határtól kb. 250 km-re fekvő Kamenyec-Podolszkijba, ahol megpecsételődött a sorsuk. Ebben jelentős szerepet játszott az, hogy a magyar hatóságok semmiféle német tiltakozást nem akartak figyelembe venni, a német hadvezetést pedig egyre jobban zavarta a frontvonal mögött folyamatosan növekvő, Magyarországról kiutasított zsidó tömeg. Ezek együttesen vezettek a tömeggyilkossághoz, amelynek anatómiáját George Eisen részletesen taglalja. Szerinte az 1941. augusztus 27–28-án Kamenyec-Podolszkijban elkövetett tömeggyilkosságnak volt egy „előszobája”. Galíciai túlélők és a náci bűncselekményeket vizsgáló szovjet bizottság egybehangzó tanúsága szerint ugyanis a náci 1941. augusztus 26-án, Orynynban, mintegy 2 000 Magyarországról kitoloncolt zsidót gyilkoltak meg.

Azonban ez a tömeggyilkosság csupán a kezdetét jelentette egy olyan – nemi erőszakkal és szexuális jellegű atrocitásokkal tarkított – eseménysorozatnak, amely a megszállt szovjet területek teljes zsidó lakosságának a megsemmisítését célozta meg. Galíciában ugyanis 1941 ősztől 1942 tavaszáig folytatódott a tömeges kivégzések. A túlélőket végül marhavagonokban a belzeci haláltáborba szállították.

A történések természetesen nem maradtak teljesen titokban. Ebben szerepet játszott Herbert C. Pell, az Amerikai Egyesült Államok budapesti nagykövete, Schlachta Margit, a Szociális Testvérek Társasága alapító főnöknője, gróf Szapáry Erzsébet vagy báró Weiss Edith. Nagyon kevesen voltak viszont azok, akiknek sikerült (mint pl. Zóbel László) visszaszökni/visszajutni Magyarországra.

A szerző természetesen felveti a felelősség kérdését is. A kérdésnek szentelt fejezetben szó esik Werth Henrik vezérezredestől, a Magyar Királyi Honvédség vezérkari főnökéről, Pásztóy Ámon, a KEOKH vezetőjéről, Bárdossy László miniszterelnökről és Kozma Miklós-ról, Kárpátalja kormányzói biztosáról.

A tömeggyilkosságnak a széleskörű feltárása ellenére még mindig maradtak megválaszolatlan kérdések. Ilyen pl. az is, hogy miképpen lehet megtalálni egy teljesen értelmetlen történésnek az értelmét! És a neveket; a sokezer kivégzett magyarországi zsidó áldozat nevét.

Atérképekkel, fényképekkel és dokumentumokkal gazdagon illusztrált könyv a legátfogóbb monográfia arról a tömeggyilkosságról, amelyet Friedrich Jeckeln SS-tábornok parancsára 1941. augusztus (közismerten) 27–28-án (de valójában 26–28-án) a náci kivégzőosztagok az ukrajnai Kamenyec-Podolszkijban (ma Kamianec-Podilszkij) elkövettek. Reméljük, hogy mielőbb magyar nyelven is hozzáférhetővé válik!

Jakab Attila

¹ Arra vonatkozóan, hogy a korabeli magyar közvélemény mit tudhatott a történésekről lásd Jakab Attila 2023: A körösmezői deportálások és a Kamenyec-Podolszkij-i tömeggyilkosság korabeli sajtóvisszhangja. In: Szécsi József (szerk.): *Keresztény-Zsidó Teológiai Évkönyv 2023*. Budapest, 75–86.

KOVÁCS SZABOLCS: A NAGYSÁRMÁSI ZSIDÓK MEGGYILKOLÁSA.

Múlt és Jövő – Clio Intézet, Budapest. 2022. 316 oldal

1944. augusztus 23-án Románia, egy jól előkészített és széles körű politikai támogatást élvező akció keretében átállt a szövetségesek oldalára, és szembefordult a náci Németországgal. A román politikai osztály és a hadsereg összezárt I. Mihály király mögött. Rövid időn belül ez a váltás hadiállapotot eredményezett a német szövetségben kitartó Magyarország, és a most már szovjet szövetségesnek számító Románia között. Erdély területe hadszíntérré változott. Az előre nyomuló magyar csapatok elfoglalták Tordát és környékét, így Nagysármást is, ahol legyilkolták a helyben maradt zsidó lakosságot.¹

Kovács Szabolcs - a források teljességre törekvő feldolgozására alapozott - monográfiájában ennek a tömeggyilkosságnak a történetét tárja az olvasó elé. Rekonstruálja „a nagysármási zsidók kivégzéséhez vezető utat”, magát a tömeggyilkosságot, valamint „az azt követő vizsgálatokat”. A források jellege miatt (nyomozati- és periratok, kihallgatási jegyzőkönyvek) a mészárlást elsősorban „a gyilkosok szemszögéből” vizsgálja”. Munkája két alapkérdése, hogy „mi motiválta az intézkedő parancsnokokat a kivégzés végrehajtásában, és hogyan oszlik meg’ a felelősség a helyi lakosság, az összegyűjtést irányító csendőrök és a kivégzést végrehajtó honvédek között?” (10).

A szerző véleménye szerint ez a tömeggyilkosság, a „módszereit tekintve a megszállt Szovjetunióban elkövetett tömeges zsidókivégzések sorába illeszkedik”, amely most már a „Golyók általi Holokauszt”-ként vonult be a történetírásba.² A könyv teljes mértékben alátámasztja Kovács azon előzetes hipotézisét, miszerint „a tömeggyilkosság megszervezése és levezénylése a katonák korábbi háborús brutalizálódásából³ fakadt”(9). Ugyanakkor az is elmondható, hogy „a nagysármási zsidók meggyilkolása kirívó esete egy magyar katonai és csendőri egység gyilkos együttműködésének” (178). Míg a tiszték (pl. Lánosz László százados) felelőssége vitathatatlan, addig a parancsra cselekvő honvédek többféle magatartást tanúsítottak: Voltak, akik a) szenttelenül, sőt lelkesen részt vettek a gyilkosságban; b) mások ódzkodtak ugyan, de teljesítették a parancsot; c) és végül voltak néhányan, akik kivonták magukat.

1944. szeptember-októberben zsidók, román polgárok és romák több esetben is atrocitások áldozatai voltak (12 településen mintegy 228 halálos áldozat), viszont a Pusztakamarás határában tömegsírba lőtt nagysármási zsidók lemészárlását ebben a kontextusban mégis az teszi egyedivé, ahogy ezt maga a szerző megfogalmazza: a tömeges kivégzést előre eltervezték, megszervezték és mondhatni precízen végrehajtották. Elmondható róla, hogy valójában a golyók általi Holokauszt „módszertanát” követte.

A kutatástörténeti és historiográfiai áttekintést követően a szerző az első világháború után román fennhatóság alá került – és a második bécsi döntés eredményeképpen továbbra is Romániához tartozott –, etnikailag vegyes területnek számító Nagysármás és környéke történetét ismerteti. A következő fejezetben az olvasó az elkövetőknek – mindenekelőtt Mátyássi Miklós századosnak – a megszállt Szovjetunióban tanúsított magatartásával (partizánvadászat, kivégzések, bűncselekmények elkövetése) ismerkedik meg.

1944 szeptemberében a román átállás miatt kitört a magyar – román háború, amely 107 kezdeti szakaszában némi magyar sikert eredményezett. Nagysármás és környéke így került magyar fennhatóság alá. A harcok hírére sokan (főképpen zsidók és románok) elmenekültek. Mivel „a helyi magyar elit több tagja... a megszállást ideiglenes állapotnak tartotta” ezért „igyekezett meggátolni a románokkal és zsidókkal szembeni kilengéseket” (58). Sikertelenül!

A magyar megszállást követően azonnal elkezdődött a helyi közigazgatás megszervezése. Ugyanakkor fosztogatásokra és rekvirálásokra is sor került, miközben a rendvédelmi feladatok ellátására rövid időn belül megérkezett a zilahi csendőr tanzászlóalj. Szeptember 9-én már sor is került a helyben maradt nagysármási zsidók (52 nő, 43 gyermek és 31 férfi; összesen 126 személy) internálására. Szeptember 16-án elszállították őket Pusztakamarás határába, ahol a 17-re virradó éjjelen tömegsírba lőtték őket.

Túlmenően a zsidók meggyilkolásán a magyar közigazgatás bevezetése a román lakosságot sem kímélte: internálások és civilek meggyilkolása. Emellett folytatódott a bujkáló zsidók elleni hajsza is, aminek eredményeképpen újabb 42 fős zsidó csoportot gyűjtöttek össze. Őket viszont Újházy Zsigmond alezredes, a helyőrség újonnan odavezényelt parancsnoka fellépése megmentette a haláltól. Október 10-én pedig a szovjet és román csapatok bevonultak Nagysármásra. „A nagysármási zsidók kivégzésében érintett katonai egységeket – biztosító alakulatokként – az általános kivonulás kezdete előtt visszavonták a hátszárba. Mátyássi törzsszázada Bonchidára, míg Józsa őrszázada Kötelendre települt. Mindkét község a magyar uralom alatti Észak-Erdélyben helyezkedett

1 Lásd https://tv.transindex.ro/?film=1170&nagysarmasi_zsidok_egy_kozosseg_kiirtasa (utolsó letöltés: 2023. október 2).

2 Erre vonatkozóan lásd Desbois, Patrick 2022: *A golyók általi holokauszt. Halál fényes nappal*. Fordította Jakab Attila. Budapest.

3 Lásd *Természetes fény* 2021. Rendezte Nagy Dénes.

el, egymástól mintegy tíz kilométerre. A két század új állomáshelyein is sor került erőszakos cselekményekre: Nagysármásról a túszként elhurcolt román ügyvéd kivégzésére és a két román civil halálával járó kötelendi gyilkosságra.” (129).

Mindezek után nem lehet csodálkozni azon, hogy a visszatérő román közigazgatás égisze alatt elkezdődött a bosszúállás a magyarokon. „A bírósági jegyzőkönyvek és a csendőrségi jelentések alapján megállapítható, hogy a helyi magyarság elleni erőszakos cselekmények oroszánrészre a helybéli románsághoz kapcsolható. A magyar uralom alatt elkövetett sérelmekért többen kollektíven a helyi magyarságot tették felelőssé.” (139). Továbbá elkezdődtek a bírósági eljárások is a tömeggyilkosságok kapcsán. Perek zajlottak Kolozsváron, Bukarestben és Budapesten. „A háború utáni felelősségre vonásokban [azonban] a politikai célok felülírták a valós tényfeltárást.” (180). Az osztályharcos szemlélet jelentős mértékben hozzájárult ahhoz, hogy a kolozsvári eljárásban fővádlottak helyi földbirtokosok és a korábban Nagysármáson szolgáló római katolikus plébános lettek”. Ezzel szemben a bukaresti törvényszék „a valós tényállás feltárására törekedett. Ez a kettőség [sic] vezethetett ahhoz, hogy végül nem született ítélet az ügyben” (181).

Ami a tömeggyilkosság emlékezetét illeti – jóllehet létezik az áldozatok temetője és az emlékmű –, „a mai sármásiaknak ez a történet nem létezik”, annál is inkább, mert a „tömeggyilkosságra hamar rátelepedett a hivatalos román emlékezetpolitika” (182). Lassan elmaradtak a háború utáni megemlékezések, a megmaradt zsidó lakosság fokozatosan elvándorolt. „A helyi emlékezetben a tömeggyilkosság nagyon hamar nemkívánatos témává minősült.” (183). A „tömeggyilkosság emlékezte az eltelt majdnem 80 év távlatából nagyon homályos, számos legenda kering, és a legfiatalabb generációknak már fogalmuk sincs arról, hogy mi történt a településen, illetve Pusztakamarás határában. Ennek egy érdekes vetülete a felelőségáttolás szándéka”, mégpedig a német katonaságra (184). A szerző összegzését olvasva egyértelmű, hogy a múlttal való szembenézés még egy ideig várat magára. Vannak azonban reménysugárakra okot adó megnyilvánulások is, miszerint: „Pusztakamaráson magyar emberek öltek meg zsidó embereket, de magyarok voltak azok is, akik próbáltak segíteni nekik. Ideje elfogadni, hogy a nemzet nem homogén kategória, a történelem pedig nem fekete-fehér.” (187).

Kovács Szabolcs fényképekkel illusztrált monográfiája példaértékűnek mondható. Mintája lehet annak, hogy a Magyarország területén, vagy magyar zsidókkal szemben máshol elkövetett tömeggyilkosságokat milyen formában lehet(ne) – és kell(ene) – feltárni és megírni.

Jakab Attila

KLACSMANN BORBÁLA: *Holokausztörténetek.*

Park Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2023. 353 oldal.

A szerző, Klacsmann Borbála, 2021-ben szerezte meg doktori fokozatát a Szegedi Tudományegyetem Történelemtudományi Doktori Iskolájában. Disszertációját Pest megyei holokausztúlélők 1945–1989 közötti kárpótlási és jótételi ügyeiről írta.¹ További tanulmányai főként ebben a témában jelentek meg, internetes újságok számára is évek óta ír ismeretterjesztő cikkeket. Ma már több mint 2000 követővel rendelkezik a 2020-ban indult Holokausztörténetek című Facebook-oldala,² amelyből ezen ismeretterjesztő kötet kinőtte magát.

Pető Andrea bevezetője után a könyv célját, keletkezésének körülményeit a szerzői előszóból ismerhetjük meg. A szerző tévesen nevezi az első magyar holokausztról szóló ismeretterjesztő műnek,³ azonban jelenleg valóban ez az egyetlen, amely az olvasók számára nemcsak antikváriumokban, hanem nagykereskedelmi forgalomban is elérhető. Egy minimalista történelmi bevezetőben áttekintést ad a magyarországi zsidóság helyzetéről 1848–1849-től, ismerteti az 1920-as numerus clausus törvényt, a későbbi zsidótörvényeket, majd a kamenyec-podolszkiji mézárólástól kezdődően tömören felvázolja a magyarországi holokauszt eseményeit egészen a háború utáni Országos Zsidó Helyreállítási Alap elindulásáig.

A kötet alapját a történésznek a Pest Vármegyei Levéltárban és a Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Vármegyei Levéltárban folytatott kutatásai adják, de „holokausztörténetei” leginkább Pest vármegyére koncentrálnak. Ezeket 18 különböző témájú fejezetbe rendezte. Érezni a szerző főbb kutatási területét. Több hosszabb fejezet foglalkozik a zsidók kifosztásával és a háború utáni kárpótlási ügyekkel. A fejezetek kis szemelvényekből állnak, mindegyik alapja egy levéltári forrás. A forráskiadványoktól eltérően a szerző ezeket itt elemzi és kontextusba helyezve szerepelteti. A könyv nem tartalmaz lábjegyzeteket, de minden szemelvényél fontosnak tartotta feltüntetni a felhasznált források hivatkozását.

Klacsmann Borbála már a bevezetőben leszögezi, hogy a kötete összeállítása során nem volt célja a holokauszt teljességét megragadni. A könyv alapját levéltári források adják. Személyes forrásokat csupán ezekhez kapcsolódóan használt, így nem is lett volna lehetősége a teljesség megteremtésére. A holokausztnak sok olyan aspektusa van, amelyek nem ragadhatóak meg levéltári, „hivatalos iratok” segítségével, így a kötetből kimaradt a deportálás és a hazatérés közötti időszak ismertetése. Erőssége, hogy olyan

témákat is megismertet az olvasóközönséggel, amelyek nincsenek a köztudatban: ilyen a kamenyec-podolszkiji deportálás, az üldözöttek és a hátrahagyott javaik kifosztása, majd a visszatérés utáni kérelmezési és kárpótlási ügyek. Egy rövid fejezet erejéig a romák üldözéséhez kapcsolódóan is szerepelnek források és azok elemzése. Számomra az egyik legmegdöbbentőbb annak a forrásnak az ismertetése, amelyben 1945 márciusában, a háború után írják össze az Aszódi járás cigányságát, elkobozzák a kezükön lévő lovakat és kocsikat, és a község elhagyását az előjáróság előzetes írásbeli engedélyéhez kötik.

A kötetben található szemelvények segítségével betekintést nyerhetünk a kor közigazgatásába, közhangulatába, és egyes emberek sorsába. A laikus olvasó számára viszont nehézséget okozhat az egyes fejezeteken belüli időbeli ugrálások követése. Így a könyvet azoknak ajánlom, akiknek már megvan az alaptudásuk a holokauszt magyarországi eseményeiről és mélyebben érdekli őket a téma. A szerző az előszóban is kiemelte, hogy fontosnak tartja a jövő generációjának oktatását és empátiára nevelését. Kötete mind tartalmában, mind pedig szerkezetében ajánlható erre a célra.

Nagy Adél

1 Klacsmann Borbála 2021: *A holokauszt túlélőinek kárpótlása és jótétele Pest megyében, 1945–1989.* (PhD-disszertáció.) Szegedi Tudományegyetem, Szeged (<http://doktori.bibl.u-szeged.hu/id/eprint/10833/> – utolsó letöltés: 2023. augusztus 4.

2 <https://www.facebook.com/holokausztortenetek/> – utolsó letöltés: 2023. augusztus 4.

3 2004-ben jelent meg Horváth Cecília *A magyar zsidóság és a holokauszt* című rövid kötet, amely kifejezetten ismeretterjesztő szándékkal íródott: Horváth Cecília 2004: *A magyar zsidóság és a holokauszt.* Budapest.

VALÓBAN A ZSIDÓ VEZETŐK A FELELŐSEK A SZLOVÁKIAI ÉS MAGYARORSZÁGI ZSIDÓK HALÁLÁÉRT?

Landau, Ruth: The Jewish Leaderships in Slovakia and Hungary During the Holocaust Era.

The Price of Silence.

Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 2023. 312 oldal

Az elmúlt időszak újra előtérbe hozta a Budapesti Zsidó Segély és Mentőbizottság, valamint Kasztner Rezső szerepének vizsgálatát. Ezek a munkák jellemzően a történészszakmán kívül álló, de a vizsgált eseményekhez családi vagy ideológiai szálon kapcsolódó értelmiségiek által, és igen polemikus hangnemben íródtak.¹ Nincs ez másképp Ruth Landau könyvével sem. Landau a Tel-Aviv-i Egyetem professzora, karrierje azonban nem a történelemtudományok, hanem a szociális munka és etika témakörében teljesedett ki.² Szlovák és magyar holokauszt túlélők gyermekeként késztetést érzett arra, hogy a két országban lezajlott tragikus eseményeket a zsidó vezetőség gondatlan viselkedésén keresztül vizsgálja. A kötet közzétételében vállaltan egy átélt családi trauma is motiválta: felmenőinek jó része a holokauszt áldozatává vált, még egyik nagyapja is, akinek lehetősége lett volna felszállni a Kasztner vonatra, de idős anyját és testvérét, annak családjával együtt, nem akarta elhagyni.

A könyv fő állítása, hogy a szlovákiai és a magyarországi zsidó vezetők döntő többségének korrupt és elvtelen magatartása miatt szlovák és magyar zsidók tízezrei pusztultak el a holokausztban. Mielőtt a fő érveket megvizsgálánánk fontos megjegyezni, hogy a kötetben olyan sok tárgyi tévedés fordul elő, hogy ennek felsorolása messze meghaladná a recenzió kereteit. Jellemző banális hibák, amelyek egy egyszerű Wikipédia szócikk elolvasása után is könnyűszerrel korrigálhatók lettek volna, a következők: a szerző állításával ellentétben Komoly Ottó nem Jugoszláviában nőtt fel (bár néhány évet valóban élt ott) és nem az Ichud-Mapai párthoz tartozott, hanem a Klálcionistákhoz. A kolozsvári Mentőbizottság elnökének neve helyesen Marton Ernő (nem Márton). A leírtakkal szemben 1944. április 7-én még nem született döntés az egész magyarországi zsidóság deportálásáról, csak a kárpátaljai zsidók deportálását körvonalazták.

A kötet legszembetűnőbb hiányosága, hogy a vezető („leadership”) kulcsfogalma nincs meghatározva, így teljesen rejtve marad az olvasó előtt, hogy a szerző a vallási vagy a világi zsidó intézmények vezetőire, a gazdasági elit egyes szereplőire, a kimagasló vagyoni helyzettel rendelkező személyekre vagy az országos politikában részt vett egyénekre gondol. Ennek hiányában értelmezhetetlenek a szerző állításai. Önkényesen (minden módszertani meghatározás nélkül) elsősorban a budapesti neológ zsidó hitközség és a baloldali cionista vezetőkkel – akik szerint uralták a cionista intézményeket – azonosítja a zsidó vezető fogalmát. Szlovákia tekintetében pedig a Zsidó Központ és Munkacsoportban helyett fogláló, hasonló szerepet betöltő személyekre gondol.

A fogalom meghatározás hiánya valószínűleg abból fakad, hogy a szerző nem is érti a korszak zsidó társadalomszerkezet összetettségét. Számára a különböző vallási irányzatok eltérő kulturális sajátosságokkal tarkított közösségeket, mintsem sokszor párhuzamos társadalmakat takarnak. Példának okáért unos-untalan bizonygatni próbálja, hogy Stern Samu az egész magyarországi zsidóság legfőbb vezetője volt. Miközben a ténylegesen komoly autoritást képviselő haszid rabbik (pl. Joel Teitelbaum) szinte teljesen hiányoznak a kötetből. A valóságban egy szombathelyi ortodox, vagy egy máramaroszi haszid zsidó semmilyen tekintélyt nem tulajdonított volna Stern Samunak. Sőt egy átlagos haszid és ortodox zsidó még egymás rabbijának sem fogadta el az útmutatását, főleg, hogy az együtt imádkozástól is tartózkodtak.

Ilyen formán a könyvben kikiáltott legfőbb ellenség, Kasztner Rezső, státuszának megértése is hatalmas problémába ütközik. A szerző szemében ő egy kimagasló, bár a zsidó tömegek által meg nem választott vezetővé lép elő, aki 1944-ben precedens nélküli hatalmat vont magához a magyar zsidó közéletben. Ebből adódóan hatalmas a felelőse az általa megismert információ továbbadásában. A valóságban Kasztner egy újságíró és politikai háttérszervező volt, akinek nevével az Új Kelet néhány tízezres olvasókörösége találkozhatott. Kolozsváron szélesebb körben is ismerhették, de valószínűleg a magyar zsidók nagy többségének 1944-ben fogalma sem volt a kilétéről. Sokatmondó a közvetlenül a háború után felvett több ezer DEGOB jegyzőkönyv, amelyekben Kasztner neve csak két alkalommal, pozitív konnotációban szerepel. Teljes meggyőződéssel állítható, hogyha Kasztner 1944 tavaszán azzal az információval hívta volna fel a nagyváradi, pécsi vagy miskolci Zsidó Tanácsot, hogy a közösségüket deportálják, majd szinte kivétel nélkül lemészárolják, az illető vezetők elmeogyintézetet javasoltak volna az ismeretlen informátornak. Annál is inkább gondolhatjuk ezt, mivel a magyar zsidók számára felfoghatatlan információnak számított a magyar zsidók tömeges leggyilkolásának lehetősége.

Itt elérkeztünk Landau másik problémás megállapításának sarokkövéhez: a holokauszt-ról szóló információ mibenléte és annak internalizálása. Szerinte a szlovákiai és a magyarországi zsidó vezetők vagy szándékosan, vagy hanyagságból mulasztották el a tömegek felvilágosítását az európai holokauszt eseményeiről, pedig 1944 május-júniusában már számukra is ismertek voltak a Vrba-Wetzler jelentés részletei. Temérdek kutatás foglalkozott már mindkét ország esetében azzal, hogy az ott élő zsidó lakosság milyen ismeretekkel rendelkezett a zsidók ellen addig lezajlott tömegmészárlásokról. Ezekből kiderül, hogy a rádióadások, a menekültek, a katonák és még a sajtó révén is igen átfogó ismereteket lehetett szerezni a zsidók ellen elkövetett szörnyűségekről.³ A szer-

¹ Bogdanor 2016; Brand 2020.

² Prof. Ruth Landau oldala a Tel-Aviv-i Egyetem The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare tanzékén. <https://en.sw.huji.ac.il/people/ruth-landau> (utolsó letöltés: 2023. szeptember 19.)

³ Karsai 2014b: 1365–1374; Veszprémy 2023: 15–40.

ző megemlíti néhány ilyen állítást (Yehuda Bauer és Gila Fatran megállapításait), de ragaszkodik ahhoz, hogy mivel ezek az információk nem a „vezetőktől” származtak, így nem bizonyulhattak valódinak, ezáltal az átlagzsidók nem is adtak hitelt nekik. Példának okáért említi az Elie Wiesel Éjszaka című regényében elmondott történetet, miszerint az egyik templomszolga elmesélte a Kamenyec-Podolskij-i deportálások történetét, és a németek bevonulása után figyelmeztette a közösséget a közelgő veszélyre. Landau szerint nem volt elvárható a közösségtől, hogy egy ilyen alacsony státusszal rendelkező, a közösség által nem tisztelt személynek higgyen. Azonban azt már elmulasztja hozzátenni, hogy miként viselkedtek a közösségben tényleges autoritással bíró haszid elöljárók, akiknek véleménye és iránymutatása hallgatásra talált. Joel Teitelbaum például, a lengyel haszidizmuson keresztül, 1942-től pontos értesüléseket kapott a lengyel zsidóság megsemmisítéséről, de ezt a gyülekezetével nem közölte. Ellenkezőleg, követőit óva intette attól, hogy Palesztinába vagy más országba kivándoroljanak, vagy a cionistákkal bárminemű együttműködésben részt vállaljanak. Mindeközben ő többször sikertelenül próbálta elhagyni az országot. Ismeretes, hogy végül a Kasztner-vonaton menekült meg. A háború után a holokausztot Isten büntetésével magyarázta, amit elsősorban a cionizmus támogatásáért küldött a zsidóságra.⁴

A szerzőnek szintén felróható, hogy nem citálta azokat az eseteket, amikor a zsidó vezetőknek nevezhető egyének a szigorú cenzúra kijátszásával továbbították a zsidó közönség számára az általuk ismert információkat. Így tett például Grünwald Fülöp, aki az Izraelita Magyar Irodalmi Társulat évkönyvében következetesen ismertette az Európa szerte a zsidóság ellen elkövetett atrocitások és jogfosztások sorát. Az 1942-es kiadásban - többek között - a következő árulkodó mondat is nyomdába került: „A földön élő zsidóság nagyobbik fele, több mint nyolcmillió, szenvedő alanya lett zsidóellenes rendszabályoknak. Magáról Németország zsidóságáról ugyan azt jelentik, hogy már maradéktalanul végeztek vele [...]”.⁵ Az 1943-as évkönyvbe szánt kéziratában Grünwald szintén háborzongató pontossággal írta le a 150 ezer román zsidó Transznisztriába való deportálását, Adam Czeriakówn öngyilkosságát, és a hárommillió lengyel zsidó elpusztítását. Azonban a cenzúra szűrőjén az írás már nem jutott át, így az évkönyvben nem jelenhetett meg.⁶ Mindazonáltal a fennmaradt kézirat bizonyíték arra, hogy a viszonylag gazdag forrásból informálódó zsidó vezetők az információkat lehetőség szerint továbbadták, ameddig az információs tér áthatolhatatlan részre nem szűkült számukra. Grünwald nem tudta átadni az olvasóknak a népi társaságokról szerzett ismereteit. Marton Ernő annál inkább. Az 1943-ban megjelent kionista propagandafüzete úgy tűnik átcsúszott a cenzúra rostáján, mivel nyíltan írt benne a „Lengyelországban elpusztult milliós zsidó emberanyagáról”.⁷ Az ilyen esetek természetesen nem fértek bele a szerző elfogult narratívájába.

A közvetlenül a háború után keletkezett tanúvallomásokból az tükröződik, hogy a zsidóság pusztítása „közismert volt”. Némely túlélő egyenesen azt állította, hogy mindenki tudott róluk.⁸ Laczó Ferenc tanúságtételeket elemző tanulmányából viszont az is kiderül,

hogy sokaknak még a haláltáborok barakkjaiban is nehezebbre esett elhinni a gázkamrák valóságát.⁹ Az itt citált két szerző írásait Landau is megemlíti, de csak azokat a részeket veszi át, amelyek saját narratíváját alátámasztják. Így összességében egyetérthetünk Karsai László, Vági Zoltán, Kádár Gábor és a magyarországi történészek döntő többségének azon állításával, hogy nem az információ hiánya, hanem annak befogadása (internalizációja) okozta a problémát.¹⁰

A szerző a különböző forrásokból származó információk meglétét általában azzal az érveléssel utasítja el, hogy azok nem a vezetőktől érkeztek, és nem tartalmazták a halálgyárakról, a Vrba-Wetzler jelentésben megismert részleteit. Ha ebben a jelentésben rejlő információ a tömegekhez eljutott volna, akkor többen a szökést, és az ellenállást választják. Azonban egyetlen egyszer sem teszi fel a kérdést, hogy 1944 májusában (ekkor került a jelentés Magyarországra) mégis milyen módon lehetett volna 800 ezer embert felvilágosítani a jelentés tartalmáról? Landau talán a teljes kontrol és cenzúra alatt működő Magyar Zsidók Lapját gondolta megfelelő felületnek, vagy Kasztnernek és a Központi Zsidó Tanács tagjainak kellett volna sebtében összehívott gyűléseken elmondani? A kérdés költői, egyik sem volt kivitelezhető. Mindeközben a zsidókat szigorú korlátozó rendelkezések (rádió, valamint telefon birtoklásának tiltása, utazási és lakhelyelhagyási korlátozások stb.) sújtották, a „rémhírek” terjesztéséért járó büntetéssel (internálás vagy börtön) pedig mindenki tisztában volt.

A jól informált szerző sajnos annak az esetnek a következményeit sem említi meg, amelyben a Központi Zsidó Tanácshoz tartozó személyek egy renitens csoportja megpróbálkozott egy ilyen felvilágosító kampány kivitelezésével. Röpiratok formájában akarták tájékoztatni a zsidó és keresztény társadalmat a deportálások valódi céljáról. A hatóságok néhány napon belül lefűlelték a kezdeményezőket, akik csak a belpolitikában beállt változásoknak köszönhetően szabadultak ki a börtönből. A kinyomtatott illegális röpiratot egyáltalán nem tudták terjeszteni (egy forrás szerint kétezret mégis sikerült szétszórnia).¹¹

Amennyiben pedig az információ el is jutott volna több emberhez, és hitelt is adtak volna azoknak (ami elég valószínűtlen), akkor is kérdéses, hogy az emberek milyen módon tudták volna elkerülni sorsukat. Főleg, hogy ebben az időszakban a vidéki településeken már javában folyt, vagy már befejeződött a gettósítás. A szerző meggyőződéssel állítja, hogy biztos információ tudatában számtalan lehetőség állt volna rendelkezésre, többek között menekülés, elrejtőzés vagy határokon való illegális átlépés. Igaz, sikeres szökésre vagy elrejtőzésre példát csak kettőt tud felhozni (a Zsidó Tanács tagjait leszámítva), míg a megannyi kudarcba fulladt próbálkozás közül egyetlen egyet sem említi. Pedig számtalan ilyen esetről van tudomásunk. Csak néhány példával élve: Nyíregyházán a gettóba hurcolás során a tömegben pánik tört ki, néhányan ki akartak törni a csendőrkordon mögül, amikor is figyelmeztető lövések dördültek.¹² Miskolcon 131 izraelitát internáltak a

4 Keren-Kratz 2014: 110–112.

5 Grünwald 1942: 333.

6 Schweitzer 2020: 201–210.

7 Marton 1943: 117.

8 Laczó 2016: 58.

9 Laczó 2016: 77–78.

10 Karsai 2014b: 1365–1374; Kádár-Vági-Csösz 2013: 247–248.

11 Benoschofsky-Karsai 2017: 51.

12 Karsai-Molnár 2004; Kovács 2004: 37.

rendeletek megszegése és szökés miatt,¹³ Pécsen egy szökés ügyében indítottak eljárást,¹⁴ Munkácson a gyűjtőtáborba kísérték tömegéből lemaradt embereket lelőtték,¹⁵ Kassán és Szolnokon szökés közben lőttek le embereket.¹⁶

A szerző a magyar-román határon való szökésnek tulajdonít nagy jelentőséget, de azért azt sem tagadja, hogy a román hatóságok az illegális határátlépésért halálbüntetést helyeztek kilátásba. Azonban szerinte Kasztner pontosan tudta, hogy ezt a büntetést nem alkalmazzák, és arra utasította a kolozsvári zsidó tanácsot, hogy az embereket lebeszélje erről az útirányról. A valóságban Kasztner és a Mentőbizottság támogatta a halucok Románia irányába szervezett szökéseit, Kasztnernek pedig nem lehetett fogalma, hogy a törvényt nem alkalmazzák (a törvényt Kasztner kolozsvári útja után hozták), főleg mert május végéig a román határőrök egyáltalán nem bizonyultak engedékenyeknek az illegális határátlépőkkel. Landau természetesen nem említi azt a számos forrásban szereplő tényt sem, hogy több száz embert fogtak el a román-magyar határon március és június között, akik magyarországi internálótáborokban, kémelhárítás börtöneiben vagy deportáló vonatokon végezték.¹⁷ Landau az illegális határátlépés mellett a menekülés alternatív lehetőségeként megemlíti Freudiger Fülöp, az ortodox zsidó közösség egyik vezetőjének és a Központi Zsidó Tanács tagjának, legális úton - palesztinai beutazási engedéllyel, Románián keresztül - történt kimenekülését. A javaslat szépséghibája, hogy Freudigernek Dieter Wisliceny SS százados hathatós közreműködésével sikerült elhagynia az országot. Ezek szerint a témát több éven át vizsgáló kutató számára is tudatosítani kell, hogy a magyar zsidók döntő többségének nem volt lehetősége egy SS tiszttel kapcsolatba lépni és jelentős anyagi ráfordítással annak jóindulatát megvásárolni.

116 A tárgyi tévedéseket talán csak az állandóan visszaköszönő ellentmondások halmaza múlja felül. Ezt látjuk amikor a szlovák zsidó vezetők, a Zsidó Központ egyes tagjai, de még inkább a Munkacsoport (Working Group) vezetőinek zsidóságot segítő számtalan törekvését a szerző minduntalan igyekszik bagatellizálni és őszinte szándékukat megkérdőjelezni, illetve az ortodox zsidó vezetők sikerével szembe állítani (például: nem sikerült sok ember kivándorlását elősegíteni – mindeközben az ortodoxoknak igen; munkatáborokat hoztak létre – mindeközben az ortodoxok ellenezték ezt a tervet, mert tudták, hogy megkönnyíti a zsidók majdani deportálását stb.). Szintén súlyos ellentmondásba kerül a szakirodalom állításával, miszerint a szlovákiai zsidók deportálását az állami szervek végezték,¹⁸ mivel a szerző ennek ellenkezőjéről próbálja meggyőzni az olvasót. Vagyis azt sulykolja, hogy az állami szervek a Zsidó Központ listáit használták (nem azt használták) és a vezetőknek a deportálás elleni tiltakozása csak a privilegizált zsidókat segítette (69–70).

Sehol nem annyira szembetűnő az ellentmondás, mint a magyarországi halucok felvilágosító és menekítő kampánya kapcsán. Miután forrásokra és Asher Cohen munkájára hivatkozva kénytelen elismerni, hogy a halucok a Mentőbizottsággal, így Kasztnerrel is szoros együttműködésben tevékenykedtek, amibe beletartozott a szöktetés, az informálás

13 Csíki, 2001: 341.

14 Hábel, 2014: 45.

15 A beszámolók 30 és 50 közötti áldozatot említenek. Lásd Brahm 2007: 274.

16 Csíki, 2003: 393.; Kaposvári 1975: 27.

17 Tibori 2001: 80–84.

18 Nižňanský 2014: 64.

és a mentési munkálatok (163). Ezzel szemben néhány oldallal később kijelenti, hogy Kasztner azon állítása, hogy a halucok segítségével figyelmeztetni próbálták a gettókba zárt embereket, nem felel meg a valóságnak (199). Gondolatébresztő lehetett volna a szerző számára, hogy a végső megoldásról a szlovákiai és a lengyel bajtársaiktól nagyon jól informált halucok többsége a vidéki otthonaikban és a gettóknál a menekítést végző bajtársak megérkezésekor nem voltak hajlandók hátra hagyni a családjukat. (Ez a kötetben szerepel is a 160. oldalon). Mindeközben Landau meg van arról győződve, hogy az átlagos zsidó polgár egy ismeretlen cionista újságírónak, vagy a budapesti neológ zsidó vezetők egyikének azon nyomban elhitte volna a halálgyárakról szóló híreket, családját, barátait, beteg hozzátartozóit hátrahagyva, vállalva a számtalan kockázatot, azon nyomban szökésre, menekülésre vagy ellenállásra szánta volna el magát (190–191).

A rengeteg ellentmondás forrása egyfelől abból fakad, hogy a szerző saját elfogult véleményét próbálja artikulálni a tényekkel szemben. Másfelől, a szerző megpróbál egy szakmai színvonalat is fenntartani, ezért a kötetben nem saját egydimenziós narratíváját közvetíti, hanem érveit a szakirodalom és a jól összeválogatott források halmazába csomagolva tálalja. Azonban a történészek neki nem tetsző véleményét minden esetben saját ellenérveivel, „logikai következtetésekkel” vagy más szakirodalmi hivatkozásokkal cáfolja. Jellemző módszere, hogy - néhány kivételtől eltekintve - a szakirodalomból csak a saját érvelését alátámasztó részeket citálja. Így például Szita Szabolcsnak a Mentőbizottságról írt könyvéből tudhatjuk meg, hogy a Gestapo és az SS lefoglalta Kasztner a tárgyalásokkal, így véve elejét bármilyen ellenállás megszervezésének. Azonban egyetlen egyszer sem tesz említést a Szita könyvének legfontosabb állításáról, miszerint Kasztner és társai bátor embermentők voltak, akik kénytelen-kelletlen részt vettek a nagy embervásárban, mivel 117 ezt látták a zsidómentés egyetlen lehetőségének.¹⁹

A kötetben a valódi elkövetők csak egy-két bekezdésben jelennek meg. Eichmann például egy kiváló tárgyaló, illetve szavahihető mellékszereplőként ismerhetjük meg. Szinte már az az érzése az olvasónak, hogy a szlovákiai és a magyarországi zsidóság ezreinek halálért a zsidó vezetők a legfőbb felelősök, a nácik csak a lehetőséget adták meg számukra sorstársaik legyilkolásához. A holokauszt során közel 6 millió, fajilag zsidónak minősített embert gyilkoltak le, így ésszerűtlen az a feltételezés, hogy míg 90%-át a náciknak és csatlósáiknak szinte minden probléma nélkül sikerült elpusztítaniuk, addig 10%-ának gettósítása és deportálása Fleishman Gizi vagy Kasztner Rezső nélkül nem tudott volna megvalósulni.

Mindeközben a kötetben megjelennek valódi hősnek kikiáltott zsidó személyek, így mindkét országban az ortodox zsidó vezetők, Magyarország esetében pedig kiváltképp Krausz Miklós, a Palesztinai Hivatal vezetője, és Komoly Ottó, a Magyarországi Cionista Szervezet és a Mentőbizottság elnöke. A források, főként Komoly Ottó naplójának barbári meggyalázása, ahogyan a szerző Komolyt Kasztner valamiféle bábjaként állítja be, aki Kasztnerrel és a Mentőbizottságtól teljesen különállóan végezte a mentéseket, elsősorban zsidó gyerekek mentését. Mindeközben a naplóból pontosan kiderül, hogy ők 1943-tól együtt dolgoztak, hetente több alkalommal tanácskoztak, s ott megbeszélték a követendő stratégiákat és leosztották a feladatokat.

19 Szita 2005: 167–169.

Krausz Miklós Ayala Nedivi könyve alapján kerül kitüntetett pozícióba. Mind a forrás-munka, mind Landau könyve Krausz valós érdemeit erős túlzással kezeli, de közben nem reflektálnak Krausz problémás munka- és vezetési stílusára, amiért a cionista vezetés végig ösztűz alatt tartotta.²⁰ Továbbá mindkét szerző elmulasztja azt a fontos ténytet is megemlíteni, miszerint Krausz Kasztnerhez hasonló kivándorlást akart szervezni, amelynek folyamán ő is választásra kényszerült a kivándorlási listájának összeállításakor. A 2000 ember kivándorlását a magyar és a német hatóságok tudtával és beleegyezésével szervezték, majd szeptemberben a csoport emigrálását a deportáció folytatásához kötötték. Végül a háborús helyzet miatt a kivándorlás elmaradt. Ebből a helyzetből indult ki tehát a menlevelekkel kapcsolatos jól ismert mentési akció, és ennek keretében került sor Krausz és a halucok konfliktusokkal tűzdelt együttműködésére.²¹

A kötet szerzőjénél az már valódi tudathasadásos állapotra utal, amikor egyes zsidó vezetőket, jellemzően a vallásos közösség tagjait, ugyanazért a cselekedetért felment, amiért más - baloldali cionistákat vagy neológ zsidó - vezetőket súlyosan elítél. A belzi reb-bét, Aharon Rokeachot igen jelentős anyagi- és eszközráfordítással sikerült kimenekíteni a bochniai gettóból. Landau, egy visszaemlékezésre hivatkozva, azzal érvelve menti fel a rabbit, amiért elhagyta a közösségét, hogy a rebbe távozása másoknak is bátorságot adott a szökésre. A történetből csak az az apróság maradt ki, hogy a széles kapcsolatokkal és anyagi háttérrel nem rendelkező „nyáj” tagjaninak esélye sem volt a sikeres szökésre. Szinte mindenkit a közeli erődben vagy valamilyen haláltáborban végeztek ki.²²

Bár a holokauszt időszakában zajló információáramlás egy jogos kutatási irány lehet, azonban a kutatás kivitelezését a történelemtudomány módszertanát és annak szabályait betartva, nem egy szélsőséges előítélet alapján összekompilált érvelő szöveg formájában kell elvégezni. Landaunak tudóshoz egyáltalán nem illő módon, bosszúvágytól vezérelve, sikerült ezt az összetett témát néhány vezetőnek titulált személy hibáztatására lecsupaszítani. Egyszersmind újra megszólaltatni azokat a hangokat, amelyek az 1950-es évek izraeli közéletében a túlélőket, a kápókat, a zsidó tanácsokat vagy Kasztner Rezsőt vádolták a holokausztért. A kötetben előbukkanó ellentmondások, de legfőképpen az elhallgatott források, illetve a negligált történészi megállapítások alapján nyugodtan feltételezhetjük, hogy a szerző nagyapja akkor sem hagyta volna el a családját, ha maga Kasztner vagy valamelyik Landau általa kijelölt zsidó „vezető” pontos információkat szolgáltatott volna neki Auschwitzról.

A magyar holokausztot több tízezernyi korabeli forrás felhasználásával tanulmányozó kutatók mind arra a megállapításra jutottak, hogy ha valami csoda folytán lehetőség is lett volna az emberek tömeges felvilágosítására (nem volt) és el is hitték volna a gázkamrák létét (nem hitték), akkor sem tudták volna sorsukat elkerülni. „[...] mit tehettek volna? Fegyvertelenül, a lakosság zömének jóindulatában alapos okkal nem reménykedve, szemben az egész magyar hivatali, csendőri és rendőri apparátussal? Akkor amikor a 18 éven felüli zsidó férfiak többsége munkaszolgálatos.”²³ – teszi fel a kérdést Karsai

László, amire sajnós Landau nem tudott meggyőző válaszokat szolgáltatni. Ehelyett az igazi felelősök elkendőzésével, az izraeli holokauszt emlékezetpolitika egy régen elfelejtett módszerét felélesztve, az áldozatok hibáztatását teszi meg könyve alapgon-dolatának.

20 Yad Vashem Archive. P.31. 39/217–218; Braham 1997: 1067–1068.

21 Cohen 1986: 150.

22 The ghetto in Bochnia. *Virtual Shtetl* (https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/b/462-bochnia/116-sites-of-martyrdom/44810-ghetto-bochnia#footnote6_dd7s9oo) (utolsó letöltés: 2023. szeptember 20)

23 Karsai 2001: 265.

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Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága, Budapest, 2020. 203 oldal.

Novák Attila könyve izgalmas, olvasmányosan megírt történeti rekonstrukció, amely olyan emberi szituációkat mutat be, amelyekkel az olvasók azonosulni tudnak a környezetük-től hallott, vagy a saját életükből származó történeteken keresztül. A kötet precíz tudományos filológiája ellenére nemcsak a szakmabelieknek, de a történelem iránt általában érdeklődőknek is élményt adhat.

Novák Attila azon ritka történészek egyike, akik képesek belülről értelmezni a vizsgált közösség, mozgalom múltját. Életének egy szakaszában a Cionista Szövetség élén állt, így úgy kutatta, hogy benne élt mozgalomban. Héberül remekül tudó, Izraelt járt kutató, aki érti a zsidó világot. Képes a saját szempontjaik szerint nézni a szereplőket. A kötet egy kulcsszereplőjéhez, Engländer Tiborhoz személyes jó viszony fűzte, ami néha talán megnehezítette a kutatói szerepben maradáást, mindazonáltal a forrásbázis sajátosságai miatt támaszkodnia kellett a korábbi cionista vezetővel készített beszélgetésekre.

A kötet forrásbázisa sajátos forráskritikát igényel. A kommunista államvédelem dokumentumai nem olvashatóak szó szerint, nem csak az ideológiai keretek kell figyelembe venni, hanem azokat a személyes tényezőket is, amelyek befolyásolták egy-egy jelentés vagy jegyzőkönyv szöveganyagát. Ezek az indítékok nehezen fejthetők vissza, ezért ezeket a szerző kellő szkepszissel kezelte. A koncepciós perek alapját szolgáló vádak még a kommunista diktatúra kor jogi keretei között sem nyújtanak kellő alapot perbefogásra. Mai erkölcsi és jogfelfogásunk szerint pedig még annyira sem.

A kortárs nyilvánossághoz ezek a perek nem jutottak el a kitűzött hatással. A vádak és az ítéletek később sem váltották ki a nagyközönség elítélő reakcióját. A történész szakma előtt sem bírt jelentős súllyal a téma, így alap kutatása sokáig elmaradt. Az első figyelemfelkeltő rövid munkát Toronyi Zsuzsa írta meg, ezért Novák Attila könyve mindenképpen hiánypótló.

A hazai történészek érdeklődése a cionista szervezetek működése iránt az 1948-as évet követően többnyire eltűnik. Novák Attila vizsgálata ezzel szemben tovább tekint ezen a dátumon, bemutatja az illegalitásban működő cionista mozgalom működését, szerkezetét, a különböző irányzatok – és az aktivisták – egymáshoz és az államhatlomhoz való viszonyát, konfliktusait.

A perek érdekessége – ahogy a szerző is utalt rá – a vádlottak személyes életútjában van. Többségük erősen baloldali, a kommunista rendszerrel rokonszenvező, a holokausztot átélte, a főváros belvárosában élő, a középosztály alsóbb rétegeihez tartozó zsidó fiatal volt. Elköteleződésükre jellemző volt, hogy izraeli anyapártjukon is számon kérték a Szovjetunió iránti lojalitást.

A magyarországi események nem szemléelhetők izoláltan, nemzetállami keretek között. A perek szovjet zsidó összeesküvéspercek mintázatát követték, ezen túlmenően a cionista mozgalom történetét sem lehet a kor nemzetközi kontextusának ismerete nélkül értelmezni. Novák ezért oldalakat szentelt a témával összefüggő hazai és nemzetközi történések ismertetésére.

A koncepciós perek sorozatában nem volt elégséges a zsidó származású káderek bűnösségének felmutatása, hanem a zsidóságot esszenciálisan vallás voltában megjelenítő hitközségi intézményi vezetőkre is kiterjesztették. Perbe fogták például Stöckler Lajost, a MIOK (Magyar Izraeliták Országos Képviselő) elnökét, Csengeri Leót, a debreceni hitközség elnökét, Domonkos Miksát, a Pesti Izraelita Hitközség korábbi főtitkárát, valamint orthodox részről Groszberg Ervint.

A kor koncepciós pereire viszonyítva az enyhe ítéletekkel zárult perek vádlottjai jelentős pályát futottak be külföldön vagy idehaza. A könyv külön értékeként emelhető ki, hogy nem csupán a perre fókuszál, hanem legalább ilyen fontosak az emberi sorsok is. Ezeket végig követi a holokausztól, a cionista mozgalmon és peren keresztül az egyéni karrierig.

Zima András

KOMORÓCZY GÉZA: JOGOT, MERT EMBEREK VAGYUNK. Zsidó történeti tanulmányok.

Pesti Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 2023. 339 oldal.

Komoróczy Géza szövegeit olvasni mindig öröm. Szépen, veretesen vannak megírva. A Jogot, mert emberek vagyunk című legújabb kötete két tucat, már megjelent tanulmány és cikk egymásba fűzésével állt össze. Az írások zöme a 2000-es évekből származik, de találunk köztük néhány korábbi, és néhány egészen friss, 2020 és 2023 közötti munkát is. Noha az írások nem túlságosan terjedelmesek, mégis úgy érzi az olvasó, hogy magukban is kis foglalatok olyan gondolatokról, melyek újra meg újra felbukkannak a szövegekben. Sűrű és információdús, leginkább publicisztikai jellegű, ilyen-olyan felkérésre írt nagyobb lélegzetű cikkek, melyek olvasása során a tartalmi ismétlődések egyáltalán nem zavaróak, mi több, inkább segítik a befogadást.

Az újraközlést sokszor lábjegyzetekkel, olykor betoldott szövegrészekkel egészítette ki a szerző, amelyekben az eredeti megjelenés óta eltelt időszak eseményeiből vett új példákkal és „történelmi” fejleményekkel aktualizálta a szöveget. Sőt, az Ezredforduló – egy ókortörténész szemszögéből című, 1996-os írását több helyen bővítette, és az idegenellenességről szóló záró részben kifejezetten a politikai felelősséget, jobban mondván felelőtlenséget elemzi, amikor is az uralmon lévők politikai számításból meghatározott csoportok ellen szabadjára engedik „az idegengyűlölet gonosz szellemét” (50).

Vannak visszatérő motívumok és témák, melyek taglalása során korántsem kizárólag a zsidók kerülnek nagyító alá. Ilyenek pl. az eszmék primátusa a technikai újítások és felfedezések fölött, az identitások, az egyéni és közösségi autonómia előnyei és hátrányai, a népek vándorlásai, a kultúra-találkozások és konfliktusok, továbbá kifejezetten a magyar témák között említhetjük az ország és a főváros zsidók által benépesített helyeit, a letelepedések és kiűzetések folyamatát, Buda „el” és „vissza” foglalását – attól függően, hogy kinek a szemszögéből nézzük. A zsidók számára a keresztény hadak bevonulása sokkal fájdalmasabb és tragikusabb volt, mint a török uralom alatt élni. Folytatva a felsorolást, nem maradhatott ki a magyarországi emancipáció folyamata és kihívásai, az 1848-as forradalom két centrumának, Pozsony és Pest városának pogrom és lincshangulata, és így tovább, egészen a máig. A történeti leírások önmagukban is érdekesek, de valójában szinte mindig reflektálnak a jelenre. Nincs mit tagadni, szilárd liberális meggyőződésen alapuló politikai könyvet forgat az olvasó. Részint, mert a zsidó identitás körül mindig zsiszeg a levegő, a rengeteg felfogás és intézményesült, vagy intézményesülni szándékozó irányzat egymással is perlekedik, részint mert a körülvevő társadalommal is folyamatosan zajlik a hol békés, hol feszültségekkel teli interakció. Az eredetileg ókortörténész Komoróczy nem habozik állást foglalni modernkori eseményekkel kapcsolatban, pl. az 1849-es függetlenségi nyilatkozatot Kossuth végzetesen téves lépésének tartja, de kiváltképp a 2010-es évek kormányainak kisebbségi és emberjogi politikáját marasztalja el. A „történelmi egyház” fogalmával szemben is megfogalmazza ellenvéleményét, és kifogásolja az összes érintett felekezet, így a Mazsihisz beleegyezését a privilegizált, de állami függéssel járó státuszba.

A könyv címe nem is hagy kétséget, a Jogot, mert emberek vagyunk minden kisebbségi csoport és egyén egyenjogúságát, ha szükséges, törvényi védelmét követeli, vagy finomabban fogalmazva, azt látja üdvösnek. A társadalmi diszkrimináció felszámolásának folyamatában a mindenkori kormányzat felelőssége, hogy normamutatással segítse, és jogi eszközökkel biztosítsa a kisebbségi és vallási autonómiát anélkül, hogy túlzottan lekenyerezze, és ezáltal a markában tartsa a képviselői szervezeteiket. A jelenkori világszintű menekültválság, vagy a cigányságot ért hátrányos megkülönböztetés gyakran megjelennek a szövegekben, de ezek mélyebb elemzését Komoróczy másokra hagyja, ő inkább a saját szakterületéből, a zsidók évezredes (kényszer)vándorlásaiból, és különösen a magyarországi zsidók történeti eseményeiből és ideológiai vitáiból mutat érdekesebbnél érdekesebb példákat azzal a nyilvánvaló szándékkal, hogy az olvasó is vegye észre az analógiákat – ennyiben tartom publicisztikáinak a tudományos igényű szövegek többségét.

Ami a közelmúlt jelenségeit illeti, néhol túlzottan idealista: a kilencvenes évek derekán megfogalmazott gondolatait a Nyugat-Európában letelepült „diaszpóra muszlimok”-ról nem árnyalta az eredeti írás 2022-ig kiterjesztett változatában sem. „Ezeknek a diaszpóra[sic!]-muszlimoknak kezd megszilárdulni a polgárjogi helyzete. [...] Parlamenti képviselők, polgármesterek, miniszterek kerültek ki közülük. Törökország előbb-utóbb az Európai Unió tagja lesz. A diaszpóra-muszlimok második-harmadik nemzedéke ugyanúgy európai, mint török vagy pakisztáni.” Noha a nehézségekre is utal, „vannak az integráció zavarát jelző tünetek is: itt-ott, mint mostanában Németországban, brutális fellépés az ott itthoni idegenek ellen. Nem veszélytelen, nem lehet elnézni mellette; de az igazság nem ez” (42). A gondolatmenete egyértelműen optimista, mondhatnánk túlzottan optimista a muszlim csoportok európai integrációját illetően. Ráadásul, a kötet szövegszerkesztési és szövegátírási gyakorlata az olvasó számára ezen a ponton követhetetlen, vagyis az eredeti publikáció tartalmának ismerete nélkül nem tudhatjuk, hogy 1996-os vagy 2022-es megállapításokat olvasunk.

Ha már a szöveggondozásnál tartunk, először csak becsúsztott hibának véljük azokat a furcsaságokat, amelyek az írások végére érve szisztematikus helyesírási problémává nőnek. Nem akarok túlzottan rigorózus lenni helyesírási kérdésekben, de néhány zavaró írásmódot mégis szükségesnek tartok megemlíteni: a görög orthodox szó melléknévi használatakor, a magyar helyesírás betűjét követve, nincsen „h”, és ugyanez az analógia érvényes a katolikus szóra is. Rendben, ennyi még elfogadható volna az ókori nyelveket kiválóan ismerő tudós szerzőtől, csak hogy a Kalligram kiadó szövegszerkesztőjében úgy látszik probléma támadt a hosszú magánhangzókkal, különösen az í-nek jutott mostoha sors. Akkor most jöjjön egy rövid felsorolás további kommentár nélkül: etymologia, stilus, alternativa, fiktív, normatív, intenzív, deskriptív, alijja, diktaturában, diaszpóra, és

ami igazán kellemetlen: Scheiber Sándorné dr. Bernáth Livia. És még egy apró észrevétel: az egyes írások végén pontosan adatolva van az eredeti megjelenési hely, de ezeken felül a kötet végén jó lett volna az áttekintést megkönnyítő listászerű felsorolás is.

De nem ilyen kicsinységekkel szeretném zárni a nagyon szerethető kötetéről szóló recenziót, hanem egy 1993-ban megjelent, más 20. századi tudósok mellett elsősorban Scheiber Sándor munkásságát bemutató írás egyik tételszerű bekezdésére való rövid reflexióval. A szerző a zsidóság mibenlétéről a Scheiber professzor által összeállított zsidó bibliográfia kapcsán ekképp nyilatkozott: „Talán morbidnak hangzik, amit mondok, de valamit jelezhet a valóságból: a jelen bibliográfiában¹ Scheiber nem azokat a hírlapokat regisztrálja, amelyeknek a főszerkesztői székében történetesen zsidó származású személy ült, vagy amelynek nagyjából zsidó munkatársai, zsidó előfizetői és vásárlói voltak. (Nem tartozott a bibliográfia gyűjtőkörébe Bálint György, Molnár Ferenc, Szép Ernő, Zsolt Béla, sem a rákosi- vagy Kádár-korból sok más név.) Csak azokat a lapokat vonta be, amelyek a zsidó közösségnek szóltak. Ez a különbség az egyetlen hiteles mérce. Más lapokat, melyeknek zsidó munkatársai voltak, zsidó sajtónak nevezni antiszemitizmus.” (109.)

Én sem érzem helyénvalónak a zsidó sajtó fogalmának ilyen kiterjesztését, azonban kihallani vélem a megfogalmazásból a zsidó szó bántó és sértő használatának a mai vitákban is megjelenő vádját. A származási alapú zsidóság fogalmát, noha a zsidó történelem egészén átvonul, a náci faji ideológia diszkreditálta, és Komoróczyhoz hasonlóan ma sokan úgy vélekednek, hogy akit annak ellenére, hogy magát nem zsidóként jeleníti meg a nyilvánosságban, vérségi alapon mégis zsidónak titulálnak, náci jellegű megbélyegzés áldozata. Elismerem az érvelés jogosságát, mégis úgy gondolom, hogy éppen a zsidó identitás és integráció a kötetben is tetten érhető változatos megjelenési formái, sajátos generációk közötti vagy egy életen belüli bújócskaja miatt nem feltétlen antiszemitizmus az idézetben szereplő szerzőket „lezsizózni”. Szép Ernő és Zsolt Béla élete és művei pedig par excellence a magyarországi holokauszt kutatás ismert és mondhatjuk kedvelt témái. Egy lépéssel továbbmenve, ha teszem azt, egy kommunista politikus magát nem tartja zsidónak – mint ahogy a legtöbben így voltak vele és kerülték a témát –, és kikéri magának, hogy mások erre utalgassanak, de a szülei, később netán a gyerekei a zsidó identitás valamely elemét magukénak érzik, akkor a köztes generáció tagjáról, esetünkben a kommunista elkötelezettségű politikusról, el kell-e hallgatnunk, hogy zsidó? Mondhatjuk-e, hogy nem zsidó? Azt hiszem ezekre a kérdésekre nincs mindenkit megnyugtató válasz, de remélhetőleg van még néhány évszázadunk, hogy a magyarországi hebraista tudomány doyenje példáját követve, szabadon gondolkodjunk és elmerengjünk a részleges válaszokat ígérő alapkérdéseken. Mindehhez az is szükséges, hogy Komoróczy Géza nyomában minél mélyebben megismerjük a zsidóság történetét.

Lénárt András

¹ Scheiber Sándor 1993: *Magyar Zsidó folyóiratok és hírlapok bibliográfiája, 1847-1992*. Budapest.

