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The Tale of the Jew

The Codes of Post-World War Two Antisemitism in Hungary (1944–1946)

Abstract

This article focuses on the themes and tropes of the antisemitic imagination in the immediate post-World War Two period in Hungary. It argues that, during this period, the notion of the "Jew" represented a malleable identity that encapsulated qualities and modes of behaviour which industrial and agricultural workers attached to the definitions of their alleged enemies. The article first explores how debates of property restitution framed the struggle for material survival in the countryside as an essentially Christian-Jewish conflict and, hence, affirmed the idea of discernible "Jewish" interests and a "Jewish" social class. Second, it follows the perceptions of material conflicts and interprets the rumours against surviving Jewish communities which were accused of kidnapping Christian children to allegedly make sausages out of them, which was the most common form of antisemitic accusation during the immediate post-war months. Second, the article argues that these accusations framed by notions of food and nutrition were tales that metaphorically encapsulated popular perceptions of the Jews. The Jews in these stories acted as shortcuts to the broader social category of privileged and better-off groups. Third, the article highlights how the belief that Jews were wealthier than others had been crafted in the interwar period and particularly during the war. As the article points out, the politics of discrimination were stimulated by a desire to discover and acquire "Jewish wealth", which was a central theme of the contemporary antisemitic imagination. Nonetheless, as the article argues, "Jewish wealth" was the product of ghettoisation and of institutionalised robbery, which garnered petty property from deported Jewish citizens together and, thus, rendered the previously only imaginary "Jewish treasures" visible.

Introduction

"We're taking the black-marketer to the resort of Tapolca to show him to the Jews who are on holiday there."[1] So recalled the lynchers at a police station a few weeks after they had beaten to death their victim, a mill owner in the northern Hungarian city of Miskolc, and seriously wounded another one, on 30 July 1946. Antisemitic vocabulary was an important part of the language of the workers' riots which erupted in Hungary in the first two years after the end of World War Two and culminated in a sequence of anti-Jewish atrocities in the spring and summer of 1946. Factory Communist Party leaders reporting on the demonstration of 10 May 1946 in the large steel and machine factory in Diósgyőr, an industrial district of the city of Miskolc, were alarmed to hear antisemitic shouts from the crowd.[2] Three months later,

1 Indictment. The Case of Alfréd Dudás and Co. Budapest City Archives, BFL 4260/1946, 22. Lajos Varga's confession. Miskolc, 22 August 1946. BFL 4260/1946, 512.

2 Report of the Hungarian Communist Party, Branch of Újdiósgyőr. Újdiósgyőr, 20 January 1946 and 28 May 1946. National Archives of Hungary County Archives of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, MNL BAZML X 5. 5. d. 63. f. 16. őe., 202.

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workers at the ironworks explained their planned demonstration on 30 July as "going to Miskolc for two Jews".[3] For many, the two Miskolc mill owners, Sándor Rejtő and Ernő Jungreisz, were really two "Jews". According to his own testimony given at the police station, one of the workers asked his colleagues in the factory the day after the lynching "whether it was true that the two black-marketing Jews had been beaten to death".[4] It is clear that Rejtő and Jungreisz were identified by their "Jewish" identity in the conversation. The narrator did not know the names of the victims: "some mill owners", he recalled.[5]

The antisemitic language known and used by a large part of Hungarian society did not suddenly become a thing of the past after the war. It was noticeable among industrial workers in Budapest[6] and in the countryside, and no less so among the peasants of the Southern Great Plain *(Alföld).* The Janus-faced policy of the Communist Party leadership, which hoped to give credibility to a class-warrior language and win votes among the radicalised industrial and agricultural workers by denouncing the "Jewish" capitalists, also gave space to antisemitic language. It lived on as well in the radical petit bourgeois language of the National Peasants' Party and in the occasional anti-communist vocabulary of "Judeo-Bolshevism".[7]

The reinvigoration of antisemitism was visible throughout Europe immediately after World War Two. Violence against surviving Jewish communities escalated in late 1945 and 1946 in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. Antisemitic rhetoric that had accompanied previous atrocities appeared elsewhere in the region, even in places where there had been no comparable series of violence, such as in Romania or Ukraine.[8] There were also many visible signs of resurgent antisemitism in post-1945 Britain, France, and Austria. According to contemporary surveys, a third of French citizens did not believe that Jews could be good citizens of the Republic, and the Austrian authorities explicitly encouraged the emigration of Jews and were hostile to their claims for reparations.[9] Whilst such antisemitic language had continuities with preceding periods, particularly the extreme anti-Jewish campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s, it also entailed new elements. This article, using empirical cases from Hungary, maps the transformations of antisemitic rhetoric in the immediate post-war years, focusing on the popular imagination detectable in the local press and legal cases. It explores how the category of "the Jews" helped industrial and agricultural workers make sense of the divisions in post-war society between the rich and the poor, workers and non-workers, or the privileged and the underprivileged. The article argues that, in the antisemitic language of the post-war period, and unlike the quintessential racist antisemitism before and during the war, Jews were a malleable category defined not necessarily by ethnic or religious roots, but were in many ways instead understood as a chosen social and political identity.

3 Zoltán Horváth's confession. Miskolc, 12 August 1946. BFL 4260/1946, 312–313.
4 Lajos Tóth jr's confession. Miskolc, 24 August 1946. BFL 4260/1946, 562.
5 András Hornyánszky's confession. Miskolc, 24 August 1946. BFL 4260/1946, 561.
6 See the reports of the political police made in factories in Budapest. Records of the Political Department of the Hungarian State Police. ÁBTL 1.1.5. d. 10th district folder.
7 Éva Standeisky, *Antiszemitizmusok* [Antisemitisms] (Budapest: Argumentum, 2007), 15–16, 35–38, 131–138; Viktor Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők. Fejezetek a magyar zsidóság szociológiájából 1945 után* [Survivors and New Beginners: Chapters in the Sociology of Hungarian Jews after 1945] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002), 35–46; Róbert Szabó, *A kommunista párt és a zsidóság Magyarországon (1945–1956)* [The Communist Party and the Jews in Hungary (1945–1956)] (Budapest: Windsor, 1995), 117–122.
8 Péter Apor et al., "Post-World War II Anti-Semitic Pogroms in East and East Central Europe: Collective Violence and Popular Culture," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, no. 6 (2019): 913–927.
9 Robert S. Wistrich, "Anti-Semitism in Europe Since the Holocaust," *The American Jewish Year Book* 93 (1993): 6–8.

The idea of who a Jew was, was constructed and understood within a set of social and political processes. In 1945 and 1946, the "Jew" as a social category helped to understand the political cleavages in local communities: the rapid rise of new and often dominant Communist organisations and their apparently privileged positions in controlling institutions and resources. Political divisions did not represent the most pressing concern for everyone and they were not the most important factor that spurred the antisemitic imagination. Jews appeared most frequently as part of a strange sequence of folkloric tales about Christian children kidnapped and processed into meat products. Such folk horror stories voiced the understanding of a deep social and cultural division between Jews and Christians. The notion that society was divided between Jews and Christians was largely the outcome of property restitution processes that involved deported Jewish individuals and communities which survived the Holocaust, and their neighbours not affected by anti-Jewish persecution. The disparate categories of Jews and Christians helped also to conceive the inequalities and imbalances of food supply and the emerging black market. The seamless identification of Jews with illegal wealth was also the direct consequence of antisemitic legislation and Nazi practice before and during the war. This was a practice that framed working class politics and interests in an antisemitic language and, thus, rendered Jews as a social category defined by the ignorance, abandonment, and betrayal of the interests and community of the working population. An idea of Jews was thus constructed as a way to signal enemies of given communities. Nonetheless, these hostile Jews were not to be recognised by immutable features endemic to religion or race. On the contrary, actually committed deeds that were perceived as endangering given communities could reveal who a hostile Jew was. Jews, therefore, represented an elastic social identity which was the outcome of particular positions actively taken in a variety of social conflicts.

Jewish Communities in Hungary in 1945 and 1946

By the end of World War Two, more than half of the roughly 480,000-strong Hungarian Jewish community (the figures apply to the territory of the post-1945 Hungarian state) had been killed. The figures represented a more dramatic loss in the provinces where, unlike in the capital, Jewish residents almost without exception had been deported to concentration camps by June 1944. Only approximately one quarter of the Jewish population outside of Budapest survived the Holocaust. Most of the approximately 80,000 to 85,000 Holocaust survivors, including former inmates of concentration camps and those who survived military labour service, returned to Hungary by the end of December 1945. They, together with the roughly 120,000 survivors preponderantly in the Budapest ghetto, formed the Jewish community of post-1945 Hungary.[10]

The post-Holocaust Jewish community of Hungary represented an extremely urbanised population that lived mostly in Budapest and its surroundings.[11] It was a community of poverty: during the war, Jewish citizens had been deprived of their

10 Tamás Stark, *Zsidóság a vészkorszakban és a felszabadulás után 1939–1955* [Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust and after the Second World War, 1939–1949] (Budapest: MTA TTI, 1995), 41–54.

11 Viktor Karády, "Szociológiai kísérlet a magyar zsidóság 1945 és 1956 közötti helyzetének elemzésére" [A Sociological Attempt to Assess the Conditions of Hungarian Jewry between 1945 and 1956], in *Zsidóság az 1945 utáni Magyarországon* [Jews in Hungary after 1945], eds. Viktor Karády et al. (Paris: Magyar Füzetek, 1984), 61–71.

property and, thus, often of their means of living. Survivors, who returned with barely anything, often had difficulties in finding shelter, food, or jobs. The Jews of Hungary in 1945 were also a severely traumatised community: whilst in the capital there were no families without a member lost, in the provinces there were no families that survived intact. A particularly painful loss for the dismembered families was the missing generation of children who perished in the Holocaust in larger numbers than other generational cohorts. Many of the surviving children were orphans who suffered from grave psychological traumas of loss, including regression and the inability to feel pleasure. The inability of equally traumatised adults to provide emotional support exacerbated the sense of alienation of these children and hampered their chances for smooth social integration.[12] In 1945 and 1946, therefore, the most pressing issue of the Jewish community in the country was to provide support and care for the survivors. The assistance of the American Joint Distribution Committee was critical for the surviving Jewish community of Hungary. The Joint operated a network of homes for children and the elderly and regularly distributed aid in money and in kind from early 1945 onwards. In addition, from March 1945, the Israelite Congregation of Pest *(Pesti Izraelita Hitközség)* and the National Office of the Israelites of Hungary *(Magyar Izraeliták Országos Irodája)* appealed to the new Hungarian government to help organise the transportation and medical treatment of the deportees and to act rapidly with the restitution of rights and property.

The post-World War Two Hungarian government was a coalition of the centrist Smallholders' Party and a bloc of the political left consisting of the Communist, Social Democratic, and National Peasant parties. Although the majority of voters supported the Smallholders from which, hence, came the prime minister, the Communists enjoyed the backing of the Soviet military command and were able to secure critical positions in the government, including by controlling the Ministry of Interior and political police. The new government was unanimous in publicly condemning antisemitism and in restoring citizenship and property rights for the victims of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the government was unable to remedy quickly the hardships of general privation and the specific troubles related to confiscated Jewish property. The Hungarian economy was in a miserable state in 1944 and 1945. Most of the means of production, such as machines and work stock, had been looted by the retreating German troops or destroyed in fighting. Important parts of the transportation infrastructure, such as railways, roads, and bridges, were in ruins, and most of them were unusable. Practically, neither capital nor credit was available.[13]

Surviving Jewish citizens began to rebuild community life in a range of areas. The reopening of schools and the establishment of new religious ones were often given priority. Schools, and especially religious ones, were seen as the institutions for the reinvigoration of cultural traditions, which many Jewish citizens hoped to return to following their homecoming. The preservation and teaching of cultural traditions were reckoned as the means of keeping Jewish communities alive. Specific Jewish

12 Viktória Bányai and Eszter Gombocz, "A traumafeldolgozás útjain. Holokauszt-túlélő gyerekek Magyarországon, 1945–49" [Working Off Trauma: Holocaust Survivor Children in Hungary], *Regio* 24, no. 2 (2016): 31–48.

13 Zoltán Kaposi, *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete 1700–2000* [An Economic History of Hungary 1700–2000] (Budapest and Pécs: Dialóg Campus, 2002), 324; Iván Pető and Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története 1945–1985* [A History of Four Decades of Hungarian Economy 1945–1985]. Vol 1: Az újjáépítés és a tervutasításos irányítás időszaka 1945–1968 [The Period of Reconstruction and Comannd Economy 1945–1968] (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 19; Iván T. Berend, *A szocialista gazdaság története Magyarországon 1945–1968* [The History of Socialist Economy in Hungary 1945–1968] (Budapest: Kossuth, 1976), 11.

children's homes for orphans were founded after 1945, and bringing surviving Jewish children who had been hidden by Christian families back to Jewish families and institutions was attempted. The sense of a need for shoring up the pillars of Jewish identity was conducive to the strengthening of cultural and in some cases political nationalism. The young generation especially was prone to Zionism, and Zionist movements and organisations enjoyed growing membership after 1945.[14] In some cases, nationalism entailed the severing of ties with Hungary and the search for a new homeland in Palestine. Nevertheless, emigration remained low profile: up to March 1946, only 5,000 to 6,000 Jewish persons left Hungary for the Middle East.[15] A more typical route in an attempt to leave the Holocaust behind was the increasing politicisation of Jewish citizens after 1945. Holocaust survivors played a particularly prominent role in the tiny urbanite liberal parties, the Hungarian Radical Party *(Magyar Radikális Párt)* and the Civic Democratic Party *(Polgári Demokrata Párt).* More importantly, however, Jews, unlike before World War Two, chose in great numbers membership in leftist political organisations, the Social Democratic and the Communist Parties, where they often represented the most active groups.

Antisemitism and Political Anxieties

On the night of 29 August 1945, political investigators saw homemade posters reproduced by hand printing in five locations in the city of Szeged, including on a building adjacent to the political police station. The latter banner read: "Brother, do you know that behind democracy lies the Jew?"[16] In late September, the police station received reports of a large number of antisemitic leaflets. These leaflets were, as the mood reports stressed, clearly pro-German, anti-Soviet, and anti-communist in tone. They praised Hitler and the death camps and blamed the financial policies of the "Jews" for the runaway prices. According to the political police, these leaflets directly linked Jews and communists ("Intellectuals! The Communists are putting Jews in the top jobs instead of Hungarians!") and Jews and the Soviets ("The Communists and Jews have sold our country to the Russian bandits!").[17] Some reports linked the growing antisemitism to an alleged "Jewish revenge". The police captain of Szolnok reported in late 1945 that "antisemitism has been rife lately. Certain Jewish elements and groups are desperate to get revenge for past injuries to their fellow Jews. They are not afraid to use unjust and, in many cases, brutal means."[18]

As soon as the war was coming to an end, many in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, Romania, and Hungary, began to fear an alleged Jewish revenge. Such anxieties implied more than the concerns of those who had acquired Jewish property or were implicated in crimes. These anxieties implied even more than the general fear among societies that returning Jews, who many non-Jews feared considered national societies collectively responsible for the Jews' fate in the Holocaust, now sought to violently settle scores. In Poland, Romania, and Hungary, many feared that the advance of the Soviet Red Army forebode the imposition of communism, which many

14 Attila Novák, *Átmenetben: A cionista mozgalom négy éve Magyarországon (1945–1948)* [In Transition: Four Years of the Zionist Movement in Hungary (1945–1948)] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2000), 46.

15 Kinga Frojimovics, "A Bricha kezdetei Magyarországon (1945 nyara–1946 márciusa)" [The Beginnings of Bricha in Hungary (Summer 1945–March 1946)], *Korunk* 26, no. 5 (2015): 63–65.

16 I. K., Mood Report. Szeged, 31 August 1945. ÁBTL 1.1.3. d. folder 22, 68, 73.

17 I. K., Mood Report. Szeged, 30 September 1945. ÁBTL 1.1.3. d. folder 22, 85–88.

18 Lajos Polónyi Szűcs, Situation Report. Szolnok, 22 August 1945. Records of the Political Department of the Hungarian State Police Department of Szolnok County. ÁBTL 1.1.3. d. folder 19, 34.

simply associated with "Jewish rule". The spectacular rise of previously unknown communist political leaders of Jewish background, such as the leader of the Polish secret police Jakub Berman, Romanian foreign minister Ana Pauker, or the Hungarian secretary general Mátyás Rákosi, into prominent positions in the political life of the nation affirmed fears of Judeo-Bolshevism. In these countries, public propaganda before and during the war was saturated with images of a "Jewish world conspiracy" that secretly advanced communist parties and instructed them to wage a war for global domination.[19] The reinvigoration of such myths of "Jewish communism" helped make sense of the unpredictability and uncertainty of the forthcoming political changes, the political and social inequalities, and the anticipated Jewish privileges that these changes inferred.

The parties of the political left, and especially the Communists, who had been illegal in the interwar period, had obtained antifascist credentials, which clearly appealed to surviving Jews after 1945. The Communists, who had difficulties in recruiting in 1945, were also willing to accept Jews, who provided a cohort of unquestionably trustful antifascist cadres. For some of the survivors, and particularly for those who joined the political police, this proffered the opportunity to actively engage in the hunting down of war criminals and perpetrators of the Hungarian Holocaust and, sometimes, to revenge their own suffering. Nonetheless, on a broader level, membership in the Communist Party offered the chance to wield political power, engage in the construction of a new world free of antisemitism and ethnic discrimination, and replace a former cultural Jewish identity with a non-Jewish and de-ethnicised political one.[20]

In this context, Communist politicians had to balance very carefully between the struggle to contain antisemitism and the effort to refute accusations that they were privileging Jews and, thus, to confute implications of Judeo-Bolshevism. The Communists in Szeged became concerned about the antisemitic atmosphere in the city's factories.[21] They reported that "antisemitism could not yet be eradicated here".[22] Communist Party activists also demanded the removal of the yellow stars still visible on the walls of the former Szeged ghetto.[23] At the same time, "communists of Jewish origin" working in the Szeged party organisation issued a memorandum condemning Zionism as a fascist movement for, in their view, emphasising Jewish separatism.[24] This was also referred to by the Communist Party member from Szeged who proposed to the party the recall of a Communist of Jewish origin who had been nominated for membership of the People's Court. In a letter to the party organisation, he explained that, although he personally was not antisemitic, the people of Szeged were, and in this situation they would see the revenge of the Jewish People's Court in the sentences handed down to Christian workers.[25]

19 Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 166–182.
20 Karády, "Szociológiai," 110–153.
21 Minutes of the meeting of the Hungarian Communist Party Greater Szeged Commission. 22 May 1946. MNL CSML Szeged XXXIII. 3. 25. f. 7. őe., 6.
22 HCP Szeged branch Department of Organization: Report to the HCP CC Department of Organization. 25 June 1946. MNL CSML Szeged XXXIII. 3. 25. f. 22. őe., 29.
23 HCP Szeged branch Department of Public Administration: Proposal. 23 June 1945. MNL CSML Szeged XXXIII. 3. 25. f. 69. őe., 4.
24 Memorandum. Szeged, 30 June 1945. MNL CSML Szeged XXXIII 3. 25. f. 67. őe., 15.
25 József Pajzicz. Letter. Szeged, 28 February 1945. MNL CSML Szeged XXXIII 3. 25. f. 67. őe.

Property Relations and Social Categories

Whilst the language of Judeo-Bolshevism described the alleged Jewish privileges in an outright political terminology, it was also a shortcut to voice broader social and cultural concerns of alleged Jewish domination. Even if its political vocabulary did not necessarily make sense to everyone, its broader implications that Jews were in some ways protected and privileged by the new political regime meant a reasonable experience for many in their daily lives. Material factors, particularly housing, were almost as important to beget a social division framed as a Jewish-non-Jewish opposition. Holocaust survivors all over Europe often discovered that their homes or business offices had been taken by someone else. Jewish property had been confiscated during the war with the help of the state and its institutions. In Poland, occupied by the Wehrmacht in 1939, confiscation was carried out by the Nazi authorities. In the German puppet state of independent Slovakia, the national government initiated the "Aryanisation" of property in 1939. Nevertheless, the beneficiaries of Aryanisation were often those local residents who occupied the businesses and houses of their former neighbours. Following the deportation of Jewish citizens, these same neighbours often simply looted or moved into these houses. By acquiring former Jewish property, most of the new owners significantly improved their material conditions and social status. Therefore, they were adamant in safeguarding such acquisitions and viewed the return of survivors with anxiety and fear.[26] Recrudescent antisemitism and the scarcity of housing were interlinked in Western Europe, too. In France, returning Holocaust survivors often found themselves competing for their former apartments with other groups in need, such as victims of bombing raids or prisoners of war. In some cases, former Jewish residents were received by a demonstrating crowd shouting antisemitic cries.[27]

Nonetheless, as the Hungarian and Soviet cases evidence, conflicts over property and housing implied more than Jewish-non-Jewish competition and confrontation. In the Soviet Union, the serious damages to housing caused by bombings and artillery fire, which the massive evacuation of populations exacerbated, became conducive to a desperate competition for dwelling among various social groups, including the Soviet authorities, too.[28] In Hungary, due to the severe destruction of the housing stock, one of the most important social conflicts in the years following the war was housing, with people and groups from different backgrounds competing with each other, often using and abusing the authorities to redistribute housing.[29] As the Hungarian case illustrates, despite the complexity of housing conflicts, both the understanding of the authorities and of the local populations quickly relegated them to a Jewish-Christian confrontation.

Property restitution was one of the important issues in which Jewish survivors found themselves confronted with open hostility and often palpable antisemitic

26 Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia 1944–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 63–64.

27 Shannon L. Fogg, *Stealing Home: Looting, Restitution, and Reconstructing Jewish Lives in France, 1942–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 62–71.

28 Tamás Kende, "Anti-Semitism and Inner Fronts in the USSR during World War II," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, no. 6 (2019): 968, 972.

29 Ágnes Nagy, *Harc a lakáshivatalban: politikai átalakulás és mindennapi érdekérvényesítés a fővárosban, 1945–1953* [Struggle in the Residence Office: Political Transformation and Everyday Lobbying in the Capital, 1945–1953] (Budapest: Korall Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület, 2013), 88–131, 142–195.

hatred.[30] In the village of Körösladány, Jewish citizens complained about the illegal and cynical attitude of local residents who auctioned off former Jewish property a few months after the Wehrmacht and the local pro-Nazi administration had left the settlement. Moreover, as they pointed out in their letter of January 1945, the local authorities had systematically refused to provide official assistance in the Jewish citizens' property disputes. The surviving Jewish citizens were bitter about the perceived public mood in the town: "[s]o far, we have been met with little support in this regard, but a lot of coldness, cant, and in many cases outright hostility".[31]

In Békéscsaba, the county seat, Adél Grósz, who was returning home to ask for the return of her brother's furniture, was refused with similar cynicism by the owner of the objects. One of the main organisers of working-class politics in Békéscsaba, Péter Kurunczi, who had originally been a cabinet maker and had become a member of the National Assembly as a member of the Social Democratic Party, claimed that he would only discuss the issue with the actual owner of the furniture, Adél's sister, Borbala Grósz, who had not yet returned home. Kurunczi, however, probably put the furniture up for sale shortly after the owners were deported.[32] Yet, the failure to make reparations was not always due to malice. For Jewish citizens – as reported, for example, by the Szarvas municipal magistrate – there were regular difficulties in withdrawing their savings deposits, due to the lack of documents that had been confiscated from them during the deportations.[33] In other cases, such as in Gyoma in Békés County, refugees from the capital who also needed the support of the authorities were accommodated in the homes of many Jewish citizens.[34]

The various local authorities were not united in their approach to the issue of property reparations for deported Jewish citizens. The success of reparations depended to a large extent on the local social embeddedness of each Jewish community, the lobbying capacity of the returnees, or other locally varying circumstances, such as the availability of housing and the number of needy persons. In many cases, the county authorities and local administrations made considerable efforts to provide justice to deported Jewish citizens and to restore property rights. In early 1945, the prefect of Békés County regularly instructed local administrative authorities to take measures to assist returning Jewish citizens, in particular to help them obtain access to their former properties. Various appeals to the population for the restitution or communal preservation of the property of Jewish citizens, and for the establishment of "Jewish councils" to control and manage restitution, were all part of these measures.[35] The council of Kőrösladány authorised the setting up of a "Jewish council" and assisted the survivors to go to collect their belongings, accompanied by a uniformed policeman and a member of the municipal council.[36] Nonetheless, even if

30 Borbála Klacsmann, "Abandoned, Confiscated, Stolen Properties: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Hungary as Reflected by Restitution Letters," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 23, no. 1–2 (2017): 133–148.

31 The letter of survivor labour servicemen to the Prefect of Békés county. Kőrösladány, 14 January 1945. Archives of Békés County. Records of the Prefect. BéML IV. B. 407. b. 481/1945.

32 Minutes. Békéscsaba, 25 September 1945. Complaints dedicated to the Békés county branch of the Hungarian Communist Party. MNL BéML XXXV 20. f. 13. őe., 90.

33 Returning Jews of Szarvas Have No Access to Their Money. Szarvas, 2 March 1945. K. Cseh, ed., *A Békés megyei zsidóság történetének levéltári forrásai. Dokumentumok a Békés Megyei Levéltárból* [Archival Sources for the History of the Jews of Békés County: Documents from the Archives of Békés County] (Gyula: Békés Megyei Levéltár, 2002), 433–434.

34 Jewish Department Sets Up in Gyoma. Gyoma, 22 January 1945. K. Cseh, A Békés, 432.

35 Letter of the Sub-Prefect of Békés County to the Village Council. Körösladány. N. d. BéML IV. B. 407. b.

36 Letter of the Village Council of Körösladány to the Sub-Prefect of Békés County. Körösladány, 8 February 1945. BéML IV. B. 407. b.

the local authorities hoped to restore rights – and thus order – their actions themselves contributed to the conflicts between "Jews" and "Hungarians", as these legal and police measures portrayed "Jewish claimants" and "Jewish property" on the one hand, and "Christian" owners on the other. In this way, the serious conflicts of interest surrounding furniture, houses, and land could be seen as an essentially "Jewish-Christian" confrontation.

Anti-Jewish Folklore and the Transformation of Blood Libel

In local communities, the Jewish survivors were often relegated to one of the two parties in a much more complicated, but in many ways rational, system of social competition for material property. The antisemitic imagination, however, also feared that in the new sociopolitical circumstances of 1945 and 1946, the "Jew" was able to grow into a more profound irrational source of danger menacing the body and souls of others. The bizarre stories about the Jews that began to emerge in the Hungarian countryside in the spring of 1946 captured the experiences of unequal access to food by often alluding to conventional tropes of antisemitic folklore, such as ritual murder and the cannibal Jew. The urban and rural working classes especially understood social cleavages in terms of such folklore. In April, a man was arrested in the town of Baja in southern Hungary for telling in company that

> in Budapest, an unknown individual had given a letter to a little girl, asking her to take it to the house he had indicated, and had handed her one million pengős. The letter contained the following text: 'Here I send you the veal'. The girl did not take the letter up to the marked house, but took it to her mother, who was suspicious of the letter. She opened it and took it to the police, who advised her to take the letter to the house indicated, whilst police officers would watch the house. When the child did not return after a certain time, the police entered the flat and found the girl in the bathroom with her neck cut. The owners of the apartment where the little girl was found were Jewish.[37]

The strange tale – some versions of which included the child lying upside down in the bathtub – was circulated throughout the town in May.[38] At the beginning of May, the story, which had been heard in stairwells, during soccer games, and in shops, was expanded with new gruesome details: "[f]inally, they found her in a bathroom with her neck cut, her blood spilled, her neck cut with a ritual knife. Only Jews could have done this because they needed the girl's blood for Passover rituals."[39]

The tale of the Jews who were allegedly kidnapping children was not specific to Baja. From the end of May 1946 onwards, the authorities ran into similar stories from time to time. Sometime between 18 and 20 May, an official from the town of Szentes told the municipal tax office what he had heard in the days before: "[t]here is a doctor here in town who came from Budapest, and he told me what happened to his little son". The boy also went home with a letter from a stranger saying "[t]he goods have been bought". According to this official, the police who raided the ad-

37 György Illés's confession. Baja, 25 May 1946. Records of the Szeged People's Court. The Case of Antal Hangya and Five Co. MNL CSML XXV 8. 39. d. Nb. 769/1946, 7.

38 Antal Hangya's confession. Baja, 29 May 1946. Records of the Szeged People's Court. The Case of Antal Hangya and Five Co. MNL CSML XXV 8. 39. d. Nb. 769/1946, 8.

39 Ernő Réti's confession. Public hearing. Baja, 14 September 1946. Records of the Szeged People's Court. The Case of Antal Hangya and Five Co. MNL CSML XXV 8. 39. d. Nb. 769/1946, 17.

dress provided found that "a Jewish company was processing the children who were sent there for salami. They defended themselves by saying that Christians did the same to Jews."[40]

One week earlier, an "old Jew", the fifty-year-old Lajos Molnár, who had entered building 5/B., was beaten up on Illatos Street in Budapest, because the residents of the block considered him to be a child kidnapper.[41] In the weeks before the fight, the residents of the building and the neighbourhood often spoke of Jews kidnapping children and turning them into sausages. After the war, the inhabitants of the three-block workers' housing estate, or "The Mess", as the area was popularly called, were easily mobilised as they were left in a more vulnerable and destitute situation than ever before. The housing estate had been built in the late 1930s on no-man's land, and its residents lived in uncomfortable small flats and in a tight-knit community.[42] "The children living in the house were always wandering around, stealing and there were many misfortunes", testified one of the residents during the post-lynching trial.[43] The antisemitic language that was commonplace among the workers in the capital was also evident on Illatos Street: "[l]ook, they're taking the Jew there, they beat him up because he lures the children and makes sausages out of them," was how one resident was greeted when he returned home on the day of the fight.[44]

Reading the rural press from the early summer of 1946, it would seem that eastern Hungary was flooded either with Jewish child murderers or with a mass of lunatics feeding on fantasies. By the beginning of June, journalists were no longer reporting isolated incidents, but a worrying spread of rumours. In Csanádpalota, there were stories about a Jewish doctor inoculating children with poison, in Debrecen about a child's head being cut off in Jenő Friedländer's cellar, in Tiszaladány about a child's nail found in a sausage, and in Mezőkovácsháza again about Jews luring children into secret cellars and murdering them there.[45] In 1946, the People's Court in Debrecen heard fourteen cases of circulators of rumours about ritual murders, the poisoning of children, and cannibal Jews, which were proliferating in the settlements of eastern Hungary.[46]

The recurring elements – the letter received from a stranger, the processing into meat products, or even the motifs of the figures in the story, like the bearded Jew – suggest that these stories were not so much colourful, fabulous transcriptions of real events that had happened, but rather genuine tales: tales about Jews. These stories – the tales of the kosher butcher, the "butcher" – appeared as early as the second half of the nineteenth century and were about Jews coming out of the ghetto, with strange cloths and strange habits, taking the blood of virgins for matzah on Passover.[47] The

40 Minutes of Wittness Confession. Szentes, Records of the Szeged People's Court. The Criminal Case of Sándor Győri. MNL CSML XXV 8. 40. d. Nb. 817/1946.

41 Andrea Pető, "Népbíróság és vérvád az 1945 utáni Budapesten" [People's Court and Blood Libel in Budapest after 1945], *Múltunk* 51, no. 1 (2006): 46–49.

42 Péter Ambrus, *A Dzsumbuj. Egy telep élete* [The Jumbuj: Life of a Colony] (Budapest: Magvető, 1988), 7–23, 37–47.

43 Mária Kiss's (Mrs. József Szombati) confession. Minutes of the trial at the People's Court. 7 February 1947. The Case of József Hankesz and Co. BFL XXV. 1. a. 1946-4479, 134.

44 Mrs. Vilmos Zsolnai's confession. Minutes of the trial at the People's Court. 21 May 1948. BFL XXV. 1. a. 1946-4479, 150.

45 Magyar Alföld, 4 June 1946, 2.

46 László Csősz, "Tettesek, szemtanúk, áldozatok. A vészkorszak Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok megyében" [Perpetrators, Witnesses, Victims: The Shoah in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County] (PhD diss., University of Szeged, 2010), 159.

47 Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002), 62–64; György Kövér, *A tiszaeszlári dráma. Társadalomtörténeti látószögek* [The Drama of Tiszaeszlár: Perspectives in Social History] (Budapest, Osiris, 2011), 358–360, 378–379.

tales of ritual killings at the end of the nineteenth century articulated the social experience of Jews who lived on the periphery of peasant communities or brought new, uncertain elements into the traditional patriarchal system of hierarchies.[48] Local populations all over post-World War Two central and eastern Europe often accused their Jewish neighbours of kidnapping and murdering Christian children. In many cases, the rumours of the child murderer Jews provided the pretext for violent revolts. For example, in Poland, there were pogroms in Rzeszów, Kielce, and Cracow in the summer of 1946. In Slovakia, atrocities in Topoľčany in the autumn of 1945 were committed by rioters who were infuriated by stories about missing children found dead in Jewish apartments or in synagogues.[49] In some cases, particularly in reoccupied Soviet territories, the accusations of ritual murder were completed with the element of processing children's bodies into sausages or meat pies. In the summer of 1945 in Lvov, which had been captured by the Soviets in July 1944, crowds gathered and insulted a few Jewish passers-by whilst accusing them of murdering Christian children and selling their meat at the market.[50]

In Hungary, the antisemitic imagination and the adjacent crowd violence were dominated by the materialist images of "children's salami", while accusations of ritual murder were barely recorded. In the absence of such direct linkages, the tales of Jews murdering children are difficult to characterise as a simple recrudescence of traditional folk blood libel stories. The post-1945 tales of "children's sausages" were stories woven from the particular circumstances of the post-war world: the severe shortage of food and the grave concerns for survival. The Hungarian case suggests that the extremes of the chances for accessing food in the immediate post-World War Two years were more important in feeding the antisemitic categorisation of Jews. This connection is affirmed further through an understanding of the black market in the immediate post-1945 period.

The Black Market and Unjust Privileges

The fear of being deprived of food and, thus, of the chance for bare survival, which the tales of the cannibal Jew rendered tangible, were reified in the experiences of the black market in 1945 and 1946. The association of the Jews with the black market, which for many made sense of the extreme uneven access to goods, was one of the most powerful components of the antisemitic imagination all over central and eastern Europe in that period. In Slovakia, Jews were seen as the most typical of actors in the black market, and often as the monopolisers of specific areas of illicit commerce, such as textiles.[51] In Romania, police reports regularly noted the common belief that Jews were preponderant among the actors in the black market. The Romanian Communist Party also reiterated similar complaints about the alleged links between Jews and speculation.[52]

48 Eugene M. Avrutin, *The Velizh Affair: Blood Libel in A Russian Town* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 34–56.

49 Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence,* 115–116, 118.

50 Elissa Bemporad, *Legacy of Blood: Jews, Pogroms, and Ritual Murder in the Lands of the Soviets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 130–131, 134.

51 Michala Lônčíková, "Atrocities in the Borderland: Anti-Semitic Violence in Eastern Slovakia (1945–1946)," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, no. 6 (2019): 933.

52 Valentin Săndulescu, "Like Coals under Ashes, Ready to Scorch the Earth Once More: Notes Regarding Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Romania (1944–1947)," *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 26, no. 6 (2019): 984–985.

Similarly in Hungary, the political police associated the antisemitism generally found in political parties with the fact that their membership considered it scandalous that a part of the Jewish population, as they saw it, did not participate in the post-war reconstruction and productive work. Instead, police reports stressed, Jews were speculating and black-marketing and living off of the workers.[53] Many of the workers in the Diósgyőr ironworks saw a close connection between the black market and the "Jews":

> [t]here is a dangerous antisemitic wave spreading among the destitute. Even the workers' parties are unable to quell this dangerous mood. There are few goods in the shops and too many shop assistants are making a living out of it – more than productive workers. This is no secret to the people. Speculation and bargaining have always been the profession of the Jews, and all the condemnation of the outrages in this field falls back upon them.[54]

In the immediate post-World War Two period, prejudices about speculation and Jews obtained a new meaning, too. Antisemitic stories identified "Jews" as a privileged group that received more help from the authorities and politicians. "There is no freedom of the press, the Jews can write everything", a student at a rally in Szeged in October 1945 exclaimed.[55] In May 1946, a guest at a swimming pool in Szeged compared the fate of death camp survivors with that of prisoners of war: "[t]oday's system is very one-sided, because it only looks after the interests of the Jews, because if a Jew comes home from deportation, he has everything, he is helped with money, with everything, so that he immediately opens a shop in the town, and if a Christian soldier comes home, they are not taken into consideration".[56] Many read, in fact, the alleged Jewish involvement in speculation and black-marketing as evidence that Jews were unjustly privileged by the new social and political order.

The notion of an intimate relationship between "Jews" and the black market was affirmed in several places and political fora. As early as May 1945, Sándor Nógrádi, a Central Committee member of the Communist Party and party secretary of the northeastern region, had already alluded to this when he made a speech condemning the black market at a party meeting in Diósgyőr, in which he stated that "no one of any race or creed in this country has the right to speculate on the hunger of the workers". Nógrádi was careful to avoid getting into manifest antisemitic arguments and was quick to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Jews: the Jewish bigwig had no place in the new society, but the Jewish proletarian was supported by the new government, he explained.[57] Yet, the Communist politician indulged in some very strange reasoning. Whilst he did not claim that all Jews were in fact black-marketers, he did claim that the conditions offered by their "racial" or "religious" background allowed "Jews" to become black-marketers, that is, that they could all potentially become black-marketers. Names regularly published in articles in local left-wing newspapers about arrested black-marketers – such as the Miskolc produce merchant Samuel Weilmann, who bought illegally from the oil mill in Mezőnyárád,[58] the

53 Major General Ferenc Diczfalussy, Report. 25 February 1946. ÁBTL 1.1.4. d. folder 3, 7.

54 Police Lieutenant Colonel Ferenc Kiss, Head of the Department of Political Investigations, Mood Report. Miskolc, 14 November 1945. Political Department of the Hungarian State Police Department, ÁBTL 1.1 3. d. folder 19, Csanád, Borsod, Szabolcs. 5.

55 Géza Helmly's confession. Szeged, 13 October 1945. Records of the Szeged People's Court. The Criminal Case of Lajos Katona. MNL CSML XXV 8. 49. d. Nb. 115/1947, 13.

56 Etel Ördögh: Denunciation. Szeged, 20 May 1946. Records of the Szeged People's Court. The Criminal Case of Mihály Sulyok. MNL CSML XXV 8. 45. d. Nb. 1033/1946. 3800/1946, 4.

57 Gábor Vajda, "Az árdrágítók ellen" [Against Sharks], *Szabad Magyarország,* 15 May 1945, 1.

58 *Szabad Magyarország,* 30 October 1945, 3.

trader Glattstein, who illegally acquired and stored public supply flour from the Mezőcsát mill,[59] or Simon Rosner and Izidor Wieder, who sold millions of kilos of poultry without a licence[60] – were tangible characters in the stories about the "black-marketer Jew".

Left-wing politicians wrestling with the issue in the months after the war made very similar claims. On the one hand, they sought categorically to reject that black-marketing was "an issue of denomination" and to affirm to their readers that speculation – contrary to public opinion, which "blames our fellow Jews" for it – was not a Jewish specificity. On the other hand, they nevertheless, considered black market activity to be a specifically "Jewish" crime arising from the specific "Jewish" situation – the experience of the death camps. "[The] returnees should mourn like the others whose relatives were destroyed by fascism, loss will not be an excuse if they do not go to work but go black-marketing", is what the Communist Party's daily newspaper prescribed for the survivors.[61] The Communists did not promise to be lenient in this case: "[h]owever, if there are those who see a greater opportunity in the black market, who want to trade […] or […] join a political party to […] fill their greed […]", their party organisations would take harsh action against such people, they promised in a pamphlet.[62]

The relationship of the Communists towards Jews was extremely intricate. The national leadership and the Budapest organisations, in which persons of Jewish background were prominent and Jews were also among the membership, carefully balanced between cutting short of political antisemitism and eschewing the image of privileging Jewish interests. These leaders routinely and harshly condemned antisemitism as the legacy of the Nazi and the bourgeois past, whilst making the same accusations against richer Jewish businessmen, often replicating pre-World War Two tropes of parasitic Jewish capital, even though inadvertently. The situation was different in the countryside. Whilst the connection between Jews and communists was ubiquitous in Budapest, it was nevertheless much less spectacular in the countryside. In the provinces and particularly in southern Hungary, local Communist cadres were recruited from poorer peasants and wage labourers with no Jewish background. In the provinces, where Jewish citizens had traditionally been shopkeepers and members of the liberal professions, returning Holocaust survivors started to work in commerce and public administration after the war and were reluctant to join political parties. Local Communist leaderships, who encountered Jewish individuals in shops and offices, but not in their political organisations, therefore had little reservation to allude to conventional antisemitic language in their rhetoric.

The Wealth of the Jews

The "Jew" who was wealthier than others and had made his (very rarely her) fortune out of illegal speculation had been a conventional trope of antisemitic folklore and political culture since the nineteenth century. In Hungary, the search for the treasures of the "Jews" began to become a tangible social and political programme at the end of that century. From the increasingly strong identification of successful entrepreneur-

59 *Felvidéki Népszava,* 5 January 1946, 3.
60 *Viharsarok,* 23 February 1946, 3.
61 József Fülöp, "Piros Pünkösd" [Purple Pentecost], *Szabad Magyarország,* 21 May 1945, 1.
62 PIL 283/10/212, 70.

ship and business acumen with the "Jewish character",[63] the assumption soon followed that because of these successes "Jews" must be richer than non-Jews, and that there must be "Jewish wealth" somewhere. In order to find this "Jewish wealth", a serious-looking armoury of expertise was occasionally deployed between the two world wars. Economists and statisticians such as Mátyás Matolcsy or Alajos Kovács – although they did not have, because they could not have, any figures – sought in their journalistic work to act as the expert authorities who could plausibly ascertain the total national wealth that this supposed "Jewish" wealth might represent.[64]

The imaginary world of the hidden treasures of the "Jews" created a particular vision of society. In the search for the treasures of the "Jews", the political elite quickly forgot the inherently multicultural, multiethnic, and multiconfessional nature of social hierarchies and the order of exploitation, and it created an imaginary world that ethnicised the adverse consequences of "capitalism", the severe inequalities, and the fact of social subordination. It became a favourite pastime of the local press to line up evidence of the connection between "Jews" and non-productive activity. In February 1939, the *Szentes Napló* (Szentes Journal) newspaper reported that the Merchants' Association had elected an entirely "Jewish" board, as a result of which non-Jewish members had left the association.[65] A theoretical distinction was also made, as was reflected in the pro-government newspaper of Békés county when it summed up the difference between "Jewish" and "non-Jewish" exploitation in November 1939:

> our industry is the ideal vocation of life, pouring the soul into lifeless matter, theirs is the industry of throwing a poor product on the market; our industry is the patriarchal relationship between worker and employer, theirs is the industry of soul-sucking and exploiting; our trade is the quick delivery of good products, theirs is the trade of making bad articles appear good.[66]

This social imaginary was particularly strong among the rural political public of the 1930s. In the second half of the 1930s, vibrant antisemitic propaganda was already developing in the county town of Békéscsaba. At the end of 1936, the Hungarian pro-Nazi Arrow Cross activists published a local newspaper called *Ököl* (Fist). On 28 February 1937, at a public meeting, they spoke of the enriching, speculating Jews who were not doing productive work, and local National Socialist speakers said that this was a direct consequence of the continuing impoverishment of working Hungarians.[67] In keeping with its mission, their paper exposed the Jewish butcher Antal Farkas of Békéscsaba, who went from baker to capitalist through trading and speculation,[68] or the Talmudic Jew Mihály Weisz, a butcher – the "prince of the butchers" of Békéscsaba – and a large farmer who rented hundreds of acres, owned horses, sheep, and cattle, and who allegedly fleeced the capital-poor farmers.[69]

63 Miklós Szabó, *Az újkonzervativizmus és a jobboldali radikalizmus története (1867–1918)* [A History of New Conservativism and Right-wing Radicalism (1867–1918) (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2003), 270; Paul A Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 30–31.

64 Dániel Bolgár, "Mítoszok a zsidó jólétről. A Horthy-kori statisztikáktól a mai magyar történetírásig" [Myths of Jewish Wealth: From Interwar Statistics to Contemporary Hungarian Historiography], *Múltunk* 60, no. 4 (2015): 132–137.

65 "Teljesen zsidó elnökséget választott a Kereskedők Egylete" [Association of Traders Elect Total Jewish Board], *Szentesi Napló,* 1 February 1939, 3.

66 *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 23 November 1938, 2.

67 Gábor Tóth, *Ellenzéki politikai mozgalmak a Tiszántúlon a harmincas években 1929–1939* [Political Opposition Movements in Eastern Hungary in the 1930s 1929–1939] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1982), 280–281. Report of the Police Captain of Békéscsaba to the Minister of Interior. 28 February 1937. MNL BéML 1937-6-5842.

68 *Békés,* 15 January 1939, 5.

69 *Békés,* 22 January 1939, 4.

This language, which portrayed "Jews" as a threat to others, dominated not only radical right-wing opposition propaganda, but also the pro-government press, from the end of the decade. In May 1939, Sándor Füsti Molnár of Szentes, who considered the poverty of the lower classes to be a major problem, stated in columns in the city newspaper that the reason for this was the "great wealth of the plutocrats".[70] By August, the regional press was already reporting on decisive government measures against currency traders. This sort of speculation appeared in the newspapers as a peculiarly "Jewish" crime. According to the articles, the "currency traders", that is the "Jews", "alien to Hungary", were "taking out the capital", and the main aim of the measures was therefore "to prevent Hungary from falling victim to the greed of Jewish capital" and "to control the nation-killing currency trading".[71]

However visible the occasional prosperity of wealthy Jewish families was in local communities, in reality the "rich Jew" and "Jewish wealth" were the product of an antisemitic imagination and of Nazi practice. Jewish wealth was only to be seen as a consequence of herding Jewish individuals into the ghettos and of their deportation. From April 1944, persons classified as Jews were obliged to declare their wealth. The purpose of this provision was to prevent them from hiding their property, which the Hungarian government intended to use for war purposes, before the deportation of their legal owners. Before the ghettoisation in the countryside, which mostly started in May, the hunt for hidden assets began. The police and the local population often played off against each other to gain an advantage in the race for treasure.[72] The "Jewish fortune" was the result of this particular treasure hunt: the hidden and found property, when collected and stacked, seemed to be a veritable treasure trove.

> In one chest there was only silver. The huge chest was piled high with silverware. They found in the chest about 400 pieces of silverware, silver trays and clasps, monogrammed. The other chest was also opened at the police station and the most expensive items of clothing were found. Persian furs, silver furs, fur capes, tablecloths by the dozen, bed linen, quilts, towels, unused underwear, women's lingerie, handkerchiefs, etc. When the valuables hidden in the trunks were unloaded in one of the police rooms, the whole room was filled.[73]

The main characteristic of "Jewish wealth" derived from speculation was precisely that it was thought to be a secret treasure, and therefore hidden. What "hidden secrets do the depths of the ghetto reveal"? This question captured the imagination of the authorities who raided the Gyula ghetto in May 1944. Seek and ye shall find: soon, the local newspaper was able to report on the "densely packed dugouts". And, if the treasure actually found did not correspond to the antisemitic imagination's vision of "Jewish wealth", they imagined that the rest must have been hidden. According to the local press, the 10,000 pengős in cash found in the ghetto was so little that the author of the article believed that there must have surely been more, and suspected secret stashes.[74] It was as if the town of Békés had the good fortune to have its tales about "Jews" come true. In the town, at the request of the local gendarmerie, the "disappeared" Jews confessed where they had hidden their boxes. "When the boxes were opened, a treasure trove of tales of The Thousand and One Nights [sic!]

70 Sándor Füsti Molnár, "A szociális kérdés és a szociálpolitika" [The Social Question and Welfare Politics], *Szentesi Napló,* 7 May 1939, 7.
71 "Lesújt a kormány a valutásokra" [Government Clamp Down on Speculators], *Szentesi Napló,* 8 August 1939, 1.
72 *Békési Újság,* 1 July 1944, 1; *Békési Újság,* 8 July 1944, 1; *Békési Újság,* 15 July 1944, 1–2.
73 *Szentesi Napló,* 10 May 1944, 3.
74 *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 27 May 1944, 1.

was revealed. Platinum rings studded with brilliant stones, gold rings set with diamonds, magnificent earrings, heavy gold brooches and necklaces, gold watches and similar treasures dazzled the men of the authorities."[75]

Antisemitic agitation tended to associate the "Jew" with (illegal) wealth, and the "Jew" was thought to be found and identified precisely through the discovery of secret wealth. In June 1944, the Miskolc daily *Magyar Élet* (Hungarian Life) reported on its front page that "the Miskolc Jewish property-hiding front has been exposed". The editorial, which took a long time to enumerate the property and exact locations of the "Jewish" citizens, sought to expose the unbreakable link between the wealth of the "Jews" and crime. "One's eyes are almost dazzled by the glitter of dazzling jewels before the treasures collected in the chests. It was this horrific hoarded treasure that gave the Jews their supremacy and power."[76] The gold of the Jews was like the cursed treasure of the Nibelungs, to every piece of which sin clings, devouring all who touch it. The paper condemned those who demanded a share of the confiscated property of the Jews: "[t]rue, the gold and treasures were offered to them, the temptation was great, but did they not feel that it was not theirs to give to any of them? Didn't they feel that all this gold, all this wealth, which could only have been cobbled together in such a short time by a series of criminal manipulations, was not theirs."[77]

It was not only the intensity of antisemitic propaganda in the local political public sphere that was remarkable. Until the end of 1944, the mainstream pro-government press did not necessarily openly incite social action against the "Jews", but it did make strong statements about the social changes that would result from the discovery of "Jewish property". In a speech at the Szentes Law Court in May 1944, János Maros, known as "Dr. Councillor-Priest", called the ghettoisation and subsequent deportation a "moment of liberation from danger", but also considered it a momentous event that "liberated the Hungarian working masses".[78] In this particular social imaginary, the "Jews" were "obstacles", factors that impeded the growth and development of others, and who had to be "eliminated" in order for the others to prosper.[79] The Jewish laws would bring with them a new world, proclaimed the pro-government press in the countryside. In this new world, "the only measure of value is work, the era of the Silberpfessig Judels and Josuas robber barons is over".[80] Indeed, as if the only effective weapon against the flood of dangerous "Jewish" traits – speculation, the lure of easy profits – and the "Jews" who embodied them, was "work". According to the pro-government press, the solution to the growing black market in a country at war was to conscript the intriguing "Jews" into military labour service, and the only antidote to the speculation created by the "Jews roaming the farms" was the labour camp.[81]

75 "1 000 000 pengő értékű zsidóvagyont kutatott fel eddig a békési csendőrség" [Békés County Police Find Jewish Asset of 1 m pengős], *Békési Újság,* 8 July 1944, 1.
76 "Leleplezték a miskolci zsidóvagyon-rejtegetők frontját" [Front of Jewish Asset Concealers Revealed], *Magyar Élet,* 11 June 1944, 1.
77 "A megütközés" [The Clash], *Magyar Élet,* 13 June 1944, 4.
78 *Szentesi Napló,* 5 May 1944, 3–4.
79 *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 8 February 1939, 3.
80 "Vita" [Debate], *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 15 February 1939, 1.
81 "A keresztény politikáról" [On Christian Politics], *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 25 October 1942, 1.

Working Class Politics and the Malleable Jew

The antisemitic social imaginary created a political language in which antisemitic politics became a workers' political issue – or more precisely, political antisemitism became a political issue for the "working class". This political language, by defining "Jews" as non-workers, as the antithesis of and a threat to those who do the work, made "Jews" the enemy of "workers" and turned action against "Jews" into an interest of the "workers". The rural press of the 1930s and 1940s was fond of referring to "Jews dominating the posts of chief executive, engineer, doctor". The "Jews" were therefore "not workers" but were "exploiting the Christian Hungarian worker".[82] In fact, in rural Hungary during the war, hardly any language other than an antisemitic one was used to define a workers' policy. This language dominated the local press, both in its pro-government and radical varieties, and there was practically no other kind of public countercultural language. In Hungary, for years, state policies targeting workers could only be discussed in antisemitic language.

From 1939 onwards, local public debates made a serious effort to create a group of "Jews" that could be distinguished from "Hungarians". The local press also sought to support these claims in theory. At the beginning of January, the *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap* (Upper Hungary Morning News) quoted Prime Minister Béla Imrédy, who said that the Jewish question existed because Jews were unable to become Hungarians.[83] In those years, the legislature and the local administrations did their best to make sure that this was the case. The local press reported regularly and in detail on the succession of "Jewish decrees"[84] that desperately sought to answer the question of who was a Jew. However, these decrees apparently demonstrated that such a distinction was quite possible to make. The removal of "Jewish" lawyers from the bar, the prohibition on "Jews" having "Christian" employees,[85] the compulsory wearing of the yellow star,[86] the restriction on the travel of "Jews",[87] the obligation to register "Jewish" radio receivers,[88] and finally the declaration on and seizure of the property of "Jews",[89] all of this suggested that the distinction between "Jew" and "Hungarian" was important and indeed possible to make.[90]

The "Jews" were mostly created by antisemitic imagination and politics. In Miskolc in 1941, the proportion of those who identified themselves as Jews increased markedly compared to 1930, which was closely linked to the fact that the registration of "Israelite" origin was now compulsory for those of Christian religion.[91] Neither of

82 "Akiknek a hátán a korbács csattog" [Whose Back the Whip Flogs], *Békés,* 12 April 1938, 1.

83 Márton Stern, President of the Szeged Israelite Community, Letter to Dr György Pálfy, Prefect of the City of Szeged. 11 March 1946. MNL CSML Szeged XXI.501. a. 1. d.

84 *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 25 December 1938, 1; *Békésmegyei Hírlap,* 6 January 1939, 1; *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap,* 5, 6, 12, 15, 17, 24 January 1939; *Szentesi Napló,* 5 February 1939, 3. On the press coverage in Szeged, see Judit Molnár, *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőrkerületben* [Jewish Fate in 1944 in the 5th (Szeged) Gendarmerie District] (Budapest: Cserépfalvi, 1995), 46–47, 54–56.

85 *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap,* 21 March 1944, 1.

86 *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap,* 5 April 1944, 2.

87 *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap,* 6 April 1944, 2.

88 *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap,* 7 April 1944, 2.

89 *Felsőmagyarországi Reggeli Hírlap,* 16 April 1944, 2.

90 That the "Hungarian" and the "Jew", notwithstanding if their base was the pseudo-genetical concept of "race" or the pseudo-cultural notion of "spirit" or "civilisation", represent two different, precisely definable qualities that prescribe group and personal identities, seemed obvious for significant groups of interwar Hungarian society. Hanebrink, *In Defense,* 168–189.

91 Tamás Csíki, *Városi zsidóság Északkelet- és Kelet-Magyarországon. A miskolci, a kassai, a nagyváradi, a szatmárnémeti és a sátoraljaújhelyi zsidóság gazdaság- és társadalomtörténetének összehasonlító vizsgálata 1848–1944* [Urban Jews in Northeastern and Eastern Hungary: The Comparative Economic and Social History of Jews in Miskolc, Kassa (Kosice), Nagyvárad (Oradea), Szatmárnémeti Satu Mare) and Sátoraljaújhely] (Budapest: Osiris, 1999), 56.

the two victims of the lynch in Miskolc, Sándor Rejtő and Ernő Jungreisz, were committed members of the Miskolc religious community or of Jewish public and social life. Neither of them, for example, appears in the minutes of the Chevra Kadisha religious aid association in Miskolc in 1945 and 1946.[92] Jungreisz was, according to his death certificate, a member of the Calvinist church.[93] However, the Holocaust irrevocably made Rejtő, Jungreisz, and their families "Jewish". Rejtő's father, Mór Rothmann, spent eight months in forced labour on the Eastern front.[94] Ernő Jungreisz's parents and his first wife's daughter Anna, born in 1934, were deported and murdered.[95] Rejtő was a labour serviceman in Ukraine for four years. He knew that his nephew returned from Auschwitz.[96]

Two days after lynching the two mill owners, the workers of the Miskolc-Diósgyőr machine factory marched on the city police headquarters with the intention of releasing fellow workers whom the police had arrested after the atrocities. One of the victims of the attack, Artúr Fogarasi, who was beaten to death with a pickaxe, was of Jewish origin: he was born in 1912 in Kassa (Košice), with the surname Fränkel. Many of the attackers saw him as "the Jewish police officer" and the attack on the police as a way of freeing the workers "from the clutches of the Jews who tortured them".[97] "Jew" in these stories did not necessarily allude to an ethnic group. Fogarasi came from the working class of the Diósgyőr steel factory: he lived in a street called Testvériség (Brotherhood) in the factory workers' colony.[98] He left his community to take a job in the police: he was recommended by the Communist Party to become a detective in the political police in the summer of 1945.[99]

In the eyes of many, the "Jew" Fogarasi was the person who made deals with the "Jewish" black marketers, defended the interests of the "Jews", betrayed his true identity with the workers who were rightfully fighting the "Jews", and turned the workers' police into a "Jewish" police. As one participant noted, the "gendarmerie was chased away and now the 'democratic police' were torturing the workers".[100] Contrary to Nazi racism, being "Jewish" in post-World War Two working class culture was not an immutable trait imposed by descent. In this cultural system, anyone could become a "Jew": a "Jew" became a "Jew" by virtue of his or her actions. For the protesters, "Jews" embodied those on the other side of the social fault line, the enemies of the workers, those who lived off the labour of others rather than their own work, the police, and the rich who tortured them.

92 Minutes of the Miskolc Chevra Kadisa Holy Society from February 1945. MILEV L1 E1 23 X-62 Miskolc.
93 The inheritance case of widow Mrs. Ernő Jungreisz. Records of the District Court of Miskolc. Cases. MNL BAZML VII. 6 b. PK 25576/1946: Autopsy Report, 622/1946.
94 Request for Licence of Mór Rothmann. Miskolc, 24 June 1945. Records of the Chamber of Trade and Industry of Miskolc. MNL BAZML IX 701. 663. d. 1945/50484.
95 The inheritance case of widow Mrs. Ernő Jungreisz. Records of the District Court of Miskolc. Cases. MNL BAZML VII. 6 b. PK 25576/1946: Autopsy Report, 622/1946. Registry of Inheritance. Miskolc, 6 September 1946. 157/1946. Letter of Mrs. Ernő Jungreisz to the Chancery Office. 24576/1946.
96 "A miskolci Rejtő elmondja, hogyan menekült meg a lincseléstől" [Rejtő from Miskolc Tells How He Sawed from Lynching], *Haladás,* 8 August 1946, 3.
97 Henrik Klein's confession. Miskolc, 21 August 1946. Mrs Bertalan Szűcs Ilona Kővári's confession. Miskolc, 24 August 1946. BFL 4260/1946, 482 and 547. People's Prosecutors Imre Noszkó and Ervin Zaboretzky, Indictment. 28 September 1946. People's Prosecution 10801/1946. BFL 4260/1946, 26, 33 and 40.
98 Certification of the National Committee of Miskolc. Miskolc, 24 July 1945. MNL BAZML XVII 2. 5967/1945.
99 Certification issued by the Hungarian Communist Party to the National Committee of Miskolc. Miskolc, 8 August 1945. MNL BAZML XVII 2. 4730/1945.
100 Ferenc Reményi' confession. Miskolc, 16 August 1946. BFL 4260/1946, 403.

Conclusions

Antisemitism did not disappear after the horrors of the Holocaust because the circumstances of the immediate post-World War Two years produced sufficient ammunition to sustain many of the conventional themes and tropes of the anti-Jewish imagination. The spectacular rise of the political left reinvigorated elements of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth. Issues of property restitution helped to create an understanding of local social divisions in terms of an alleged Jewish-Christian confrontation. The food crisis and the adjacent fears of hunger reproduced the horrific figure of folk tales, the cannibal Jew. The experiences of the anomalies of the black market were conducive to sustaining the Nazi myth of the criminal treasure-hiding Jew.

These continuities notwithstanding, the distinct feature of antisemitism in 1945 and 1946 was the massive politicisation of the figure of the Jew. The new political elite of the period, particularly the Communist and Social Democratic leaderships, effectively instrumentalised the antisemitic language of working-class politics that had started to emerge in the second half of the 1930s. Unlike the right-wing elite of the 1930s, left-wing politics of the post-war years broached the category of the Jews to allude to a set of political behaviours instead of to define an ethnic or cultural-religious group. In the antisemitic languages of the interwar period, a Jewish ethnic or cultural-religious background made someone by implication a conundrum of the "Jewish" qualities of scrounging, impurity, parasitism, and the greed for domination.

The political languages of the immediate post-World War Two years, in contrast, opened up ways for individuals of Jewish origin to dispose of these stigmatic qualities if they demonstrated conformity to the politically declared values of work and workers. In some ways, Jews were able to jettison the burden of ethnic or cultural-religious origin, whilst, if they still behaved like "Jews" normally did, their deeds inferred and prescribed a specific political identity for them. In many ways, the politicised definition of "Jewishness" affirmed the expectations of agricultural and industrial workers in local communities. The antisemitic imagination of poor peasants, day labourers, and factory workers reckoned Jews as persons threatening the community of workers and often included individuals with no Jewish ethnic or cultural-religious background among the targets of their "anti-Jewish" revolts. "Jews", in this respect, represented a political category allusive of the counterpart of work and workers, and were identified as a threat to and the enemy of these. The notion of the "Jew" effectively linked ideas about economic deficits, social fault lines, and the meaning of political action, and talking about "Jews" became inseparable from statements about the state of society.

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Petre Matei

Roma Deportations to Transnistria during World War Two

Between Centralised Decision-Making and Local Initiatives

Abstract

This article deals with the complicated issue of the Roma deportations to Transnistria by the Romanian authorities during World War Two. There are two major questions that this article aims to answer. First, it seeks to explain how a sovereign state like Romania, which was not occupied by Germany, deported approximately 25,000 Roma. Second, it focuses on understanding and explaining the great differences in the treatment suffered by various categories of Roma or by Roma from different regions, cities, and localities. After briefly presenting the main flaws of previous explanations given so far (such as the excessive interest in elites and Antonescu, or the focus on anti-Gypsy nationalism), the analysis focuses on the local contexts. The main conclusion of the article is that these deportations were neither the result of German pressure nor of contemporary trends such as the influence of eugenics on the Romanian government, but rather the consequence of the Roma's long-term exclusion by local actors. The criminalisation of Roma by the Romanian police was aggravated by recent developments such as the disappearance of traditional Roma crafts and services, increased pauperism, and the accelerated sedentarisation of formerly nomadic Roma. These developments frustrated the local authorities, which then had a considerable influence on Antonescu's decision to deport the Roma to Transnistria. Once Antonescu gave the deportation order, this was interpreted and implemented by local authorities according to their own views and interests.

I. Introduction

Between 1942 and 1944, the Romanian authorities deported approximately 25,000 Roma to Transnistria, a territory in the occupied Soviet Union that was administered by Romania between 1941 and 1944. These Roma were deported from hundreds of villages and towns, and from case to case they experienced dramatically different treatment. In some localities, almost all the Roma were deported; in others, none were. This article aims to answer two major questions: how did it happen that a sovereign state like Romania, which was not occupied by Germany, took action against the Roma, culminating in their deportation to Transnistria, and how are the great differences in the treatment that Roma suffered during the war to be understood?

While the second question has not yet received due historiographical attention (unlike in Germany or Austria, where there are monographs on local or regional cases, in Romania such local approaches are still in their infancy[1]), several answers

1 Tatiana Sîrbu, "Gospodar ou déporté: la catégorisation comme instrument de la déportation des Tsiganes en Transnistrie," *Etudes Tsiganes* 56–57, no. 1–2 (2016): 90–103; Grégoire Cousin and Petre Petcut, "Deporting the Gypsy Peasantry : Shattered Fates of the Ursari of Segarcea and Sadova," *Etudes Tsiganes* 56–57, no. 1–2 (2016): 104–23; Petre Matei, "Deportările romilor din Pitești în Transnistria (1942)," *Holocaust: Studii și*

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have already been offered to the first question. These can be summarised into four general approaches, according to which the deportation of Roma could be explained by: German influence or pressure (a narrative encouraged by the Romanian authorities in the 1970s to obtain German compensation);[2] Antonescu as the main (or only) person responsible for the deportation of Roma; a Romanian nationalism that was allegedly and similarly anti-Roma as it was anti-Semitic; and the supposedly great influence of the Romanian eugenicists on state decision-making, especially during the war. To simplify, the Roma deportations are approached either from a teleological perspective promoted mainly by (Roma) activists (always emphasising persecution and discrimination, with a focus on slavery and the Holocaust), or from a narrow perspective focusing on the Antonescu regime, emphasising only the elites (Antonescu, eugenicists, and the central authorities) and only for a short period of time (1940–1944, and more often 1942–1944). This second perspective has focused on an Antonescu who has been described as having been influenced to varying degrees by the German model (through Romanian eugenicists educated in Germany or through population exchange plans), and it risks having the effect of externalising guilt (either attributed to Germans or only to an individual whose policies against Roma are declared to be extremely new and to have nothing to do with old local realities).

In my view, these theories are oversimplifying and misleading, and they are influenced more generally by the limits of the concept of "genocide"[3] and, more specifically, by an explanatory model created in the last three to four decades to explain the situation of the Sinti and Roma primarily in Nazi Germany and the occupied territories. This model has been favoured for several reasons. First, the interwar German racial legislation targeted, and affected, also the Roma population. Moreover, the collaboration between the *Rassenhygieniker* (racial hygienists) and the German authorities in this respect was well documented. Second, the Germans occupied a vast territory during World War Two, creating the premises for a relatively homogeneous persecution of the Roma that culminated in internments, deportations, and mass executions. Third, as German legislation offered better chances for obtaining compensation to those who had suffered from racially motivated persecution, the Roma claimants needed to argue accordingly and to be recognised as such. Fourth, in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, a transnational Roma movement – the International Romani Union – emerged and became increasingly interested in invoking the Holocaust, not only for compensation claims, but also for identity purposes, raising awareness, and redressing hostility towards Roma. In order to do so, it is more tempting and effective to refer to established symbols, such as German racial policies, Robert Ritter, *Einsatzgruppen,* and 2 August 1944 (when the *Zigeunerlager* at Auschwitz-Birkenau was liquidated).

While being adequate to explain the situation of most Roma victims (at German hands) during the war, this model lacks nuance, oversimplifies, and risks creating

cercetări 9, no. 1(10) (2017): 30–55; Cătălina Tesăr and Petre Matei, "Work and Mobility among Roma from Southeast Romania from the 1920s to 1980 through a Historical-Anthropological Lens: The Case of Ursari (Bear-Tamers)/Pieptănari (Comb-Makers)," *La ricerca folklorica* 74 (2019): 29–42.

2 Petre Matei, "Roma in 1980s Communist Romania and Their Discourse on the Holocaust; between Compensations and Identity," in *The Legacies of the Roma Genocide in Europe since 1945,* eds. Celia Donert and Eve Rosenhaft (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 214–241.

3 The simplifying focus on a state and its leadership gives the result that "genocide studies tend to focus on ethnic or racial issues instead of multi-causality, on the state instead of society, on long-term 'intent', planning and centralisation instead of a process and autonomous groups, on one victim group instead of many. Structural mechanisms of the genocide model work toward simplification and against contextualisation." Christian Gerlach, "Extremely Violent Societies: An Alternative to the Concept of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 466.

confusion when applied to a country like Romania. Complex but interesting local contexts, which require a deeper approach over a longer period of time, are usually ignored. In the following, I try to briefly present the main flaws of this simplistic discourse that is focused on anti-Gypsy nationalism, allegedly influential eugenics, and population exchanges. I then discuss local developments and actors which are generally neglected, but which, in my view, played a much more important role in articulating hostility towards Roma both before and during the deportations.

1.1. Romanian Nationalism and the Roma

There was no Gypsy obsession in interwar Romania or even during the war, hence one cannot talk about the war measures against Roma as being inspired by an agenda promoted by nationalist parties. Interwar nationalism was more hostile towards the stronger minorities that were economically, culturally, and socially better organised and perceived as revisionist. The Roma did not fit into this paradigm: as only the eighth largest ethnic group, many of its members were assimilated, and they had no state of their own so they could not become revisionist. The traditional parties, even the far-right nationalist parties, although anti-Semitic, were disinterested in the Roma and even exhibited some goodwill towards the interwar Roma movement. For example, on the occasion of the organisation of the first Roma congress on 8 October 1933, G.A. Lăzurică, an important Romani interwar leader, appealed to the support of students from the fascist Legionary Movement. As a sign of gratitude, this congress declared Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Legionary Movement, and Ilie Rădulescu, the editor-in-chief of the nationalist newspaper *Porunca Vremii,* as honorary members of the General Union of Roma in Romania.[4]

An even better example is provided by the 1937 electoral collaboration between the anti-Semitic National Christian Party led by Octavian Goga and A.C. Cuza, who in December 1937 formed the government that introduced the first anti-Semitic laws, and G.A. Lăzurică and Calinic I. Popp Șerboianu, the initiators of the interwar Roma movement. The collaboration between the Roma and a far-right party is more surprising now than it was then. It proves that there were huge differences at the time between how the Romanian nationalists perceived Jews (as, for example, "the absolute enemy", "invaders", "plunderers", "competitors", "an impediment to the socio-economic primacy of the Romanians", "capitalists", or "communists") and Roma, who were smaller in number, did not form urban majorities or regional enclaves, were not irredentists, but were a rural population, largely illiterate, and Romanian-speaking. For example, on 19 August 1937, *Țara Noastră,* the official newspaper of the National Christian Party, took a clear stand in favour of the Roma and the electoral agreement that the Roma had reached with this party. The newspaper's response considered criticism of the Roma to be deeply unjust, since the Roma were good Romanians, "brought up together" with the Romanian people, unlike the Jews who were threatened with elimination:

> [t]he campaign against the Roma no longer has limits. […] The Jews laugh with their rotten mouths. What are these political goiters laughing at? For the simple reason that the Roma decided to do Romanian politics and joined the National Christian Party. The Roma did not commit any other sin. […] By coming and joining the National Christian Party they did the

4 Direcția Arhivelor Naționale Istorice Centrale [Central National Archives of Romania], fonds Direcția Generală a Poliției [Directorate General of Police], file no. 34/1922, 46; "Mizerii și indiscrații," *Cuvântul,* 19 October 1933, 2; N. G. Nicolaescu, "Pe marginea unui … Congres," *Timpul,* 21 October 1933, 1–2.

> most natural action, as they feel connected to the life and fate of our people. In the National Christian Party, the Roma feel sheltered by the Romanian nation, with which they are brought up together by what we call a common destiny.[5]

Although there was an anti-Semitic radicalisation on the part of these Roma leaders, which became visible in the Roma press,[6] the arrangement with the National Christian Party is rather interesting because it captures a particular evolution of the Romanian nationalists and the way in which they related to minorities which the nationalists considered dangerous, among which the Roma were not yet counted.[7]

1.2. Eugenics and the Roma

Regarding the theory of eugenics, some researchers build their argument in the following way: in both Germany and Romania there were eugenicists who demanded the sterilisation and deportation of Roma;[8] so, as both Romania and Germany were allies during World War Two and deported Roma, it appears that the Romanian measures must have been inspired by eugenicists. This formula is seductively simple: eugenics (a theory strong enough to influence interwar nationalist parties and/or state leadership during the war) plus anti-Gypsyism equals genocide. However, the Romanian eugenicists' interest for Roma was relatively low. Their judgements regarding the Roma were hostile but superficial. There was no specific research on the Roma that was financed and conducted and which is quantifiable in the form of a consistent series of articles or books, nor were there Romanian eugenicists who specialised in Roma. The few, disparate attacks against Roma did not represent a coherent programme. There was no visible and direct cooperation between the authorities and eugenicists. In fact, unlike Nazi Germany, the Romanian eugenicists could not even determine the legislation on sterilisation, which could not be practiced in Romania as it continued to be a criminal offense. Similarly, during World War Two, there was no racial legislation against Roma: sexual relations or marriages between Roma and Romanians, for example, were not forbidden. The impact of eugenics on the state's measures against Roma was minor, limited rather to legitimising post-factum measures that had already been taken.[9] Neither central nor local authorities invoked racial arguments to motivate deportations. If we compare the categories of "dangerous Gypsies" – as constructed by eugenicists (especially with regards to the sedentary, partly assimilated Roma who were disposed to marrying Romanians)

5 Gheorghe Dragoş, "Atacurile iudeo-țărăniștilor: Campanie împotriva romilor," *Ţara Noastră*, 19 August 1937, 1.

6 For example, on 20 October 1937, the frontpage of *Timpul,* the official newspaper of the Roma in Romania, included a large swastika, as well as electoral exhortations such as: "the Roma are assimilated into the Romanian element, they are Christians, dynastic, patriots, enemies of communism and religious sects. FAITH–COUNTRY–KING–ROMANIA FOR THE ROMANIANS. The Roma only demand full equality of rights as citizens. Long live the Great 'National Christian' party that fights for the salvation of the Romanian people and a higher level of human dignity for our Roma." "Izbândă!," *Timpul: oficiosul romilor din România,* 20 October 1937, 1.

7 For more details on this collaboration, see Petre Matei, "The Roma Minority and Romanian Fascism: The 1937 Alliance between the Roma and the National Christian Party," *Holocaust: Studii și cercetări* 13, no. 1 (14) (2021): 259–290.

8 Benjamin Thorne, "Assimilation, Invisibility, and the Eugenic Turn in the 'Gypsy Question' in Romanian Society, 1938–1942," *Romani Studies 5* 21, no. 2 (February 2011): 181–187; Vladimir Solonari, "Ethnic Cleansing or 'Crime Prevention'? Deportation of Romanian Roma," in *The Nazi Genocide of the Roma: Reassessment and Commemoration*, ed. Anton Weiss-Wendt (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 99–104.

9 Viorel Achim, *Ţiganii în istoria României* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1998), 133–137; Viorel Achim, "Gypsy Research and Gypsy Policy in Romania, 1920–1950," in *Zwischen Erziehung und Vernichtung: Zigeunerpolitik und Zigeunerforschung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 170–172.

with those who were actually deported to Transnistria, we notice that the actual deportations did not respond to the eugenicists' specific concerns. The nomadic Roma (mostly endogamous and, as such, not endangering the "Romanian blood") were actually the first to be deported.[10]

1.3. Ion Antonescu and the Plans for Population Exchanges and Ethnic Homogenisation

Just like the theories mentioned before, neither the research directions focusing on Antonescu nor the plans for population exchanges suffice to explain the Roma deportations. According to the project sent by Sabin Manuilă, head of the Central Statistical Institute, to Ion Antonescu, on 15 October 1941, the homogenisation of Romania could have occurred by bringing in ethnic Romanians from other states while transferring minorities to the countries that claimed them. As there were two ethnic groups – the Jews and the Roma – that did not have a state of their own, the solution for them would have been a unilateral transfer across the border, that is, deportation to Transnistria.[11]

Obviously, ethnic homogenisation was then popular among Romanian politicians, and there were government plans that led in that direction, but this alone cannot explain why only 25,000 Roma were deported. The share of deportees in the Roma population as a whole is difficult to establish precisely, given the tendency of underrepresentation among Roma. If we accept the data of the official census from 1930, based on self-identification, only 262,000 Roma would have lived in Romania and, of these, after the territorial losses suffered by Romania in 1940, there would have been about 208,000 left. The percentage of those deported would therefore represent about 10 to 12 per cent of the total number of Roma. However, the authorities' identification of Roma for the purposes of the deportations was not based on self-identification during official censuses, and in reality the number of Roma who could be heteroidentified as Roma in unofficial contexts was much higher. For example, according to the 1930 census, there were only 422 Roma in the city of Pitești, but in September 1942 the local police deported 1,006 Roma out of the approximately 2,000 Roma identified as such. Similarly, there were localities that had an absolute majority of Roma at the end of the nineteenth century, but where none or only few declared themselves as such in the 1930 census. Likewise, there were some sociological studies in the late 1930s, in areas such as Țara Făgărașului, where the number of self-declared Roma in the 1930 census was much lower compared to the numbers heterodidentified a few years later: the number of heteroidentified Roma turned out to be at least double. If such findings were extrapolated to the whole country, the real number of Roma was also estimated to be at least double, that is, around 400,000 to 500,000 people.[12] At the time, the General Union of Roma in Romania, the most important Roma organisation, claimed to have almost 800,000 members.[13] Compared to the probably higher real number of Roma, the deported Roma represented about 4 to 5 per cent of the total Roma population.[14]

10 Petre Matei, "The Romanian Police and Its Role in the Roma Deportations," *Holocaust: Studii și cercetări* 10, no. 1(11) (2018): 12–13.

11 Viorel Achim, "The Romanian Population Exchange Project Elaborated by Sabin Manuila in October 1941," *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento* 27 (2001): 593–617.

12 Ion Chelcea, *Țiganii din România: Monografie etnografică* (Bucharest: Ed. Institutului Central de Statistică, 1944), 75–88.

13 George Potra, *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România* (Bucharest: Fundația "Regele Carol I", 1939), 121–126.

14 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 13–14.

As a tentative conclusion, it is difficult to understand the specificities of deporting Roma from Romania using borrowed narratives, focused on the anti-Gypsyism of Romanian nationalism, the alleged influence of eugenics, unilateral population exchanges, or the exceptional role of dictator Ion Antonescu.

II. Interwar Preconditions for Radicalisation

These theories and their excessive interest in elites and Antonescu obstruct the understanding of a more complex interplay between different actors who contributed to the deportation of the Roma. My working hypothesis is that these deportations were neither the result of German pressure nor of some recent developments, such as the influence of eugenics on the Romanian government, and that they cannot simply be attributed to Antonescu. On the contrary, the deportations were the consequence of the Roma's long-term exclusion by local actors. Antonescu played an important role, but he was not the only one who mattered. Along with him, there were the central authorities, such as the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie and the Directorate General of the Police, local civil authorities (mayors and prefects) and police (including legions, gendarmes, and police stations), and also the civilian population. Each protagonist came with their own sensibilities and criteria that defined what the "dangerous Gypsy" meant. The orders inspired by Antonescu were not accepted without interpretation by the subordinate institutions. There was an overlap between the agendas of various entities that, in certain contexts, would collaborate or compete, radicalising themselves in the process.

I intend to capture a broader context in order to determine if there were other causes contributing to the radicalisation of attitudes towards Roma than those generally mentioned by top-down approaches. Knowing which categories of Roma were deported during the war (like the criminalised Roma) and the institutions that defined them as a "problem", I will seek to understand whether there was a prehistory of the problem. I will therefore briefly outline the socioeconomic and demographic evolution of the Roma in Romania in the period preceding the deportations. Following that, I will address the way (nomadic) Roma were perceived by the gendarmerie in the countryside and how the (settled) Roma were perceived in cities by the urban police. It is important to bring into the discussion the bottom-up perspective of law enforcement agencies because they criminalised Roma over a long period of time, and it was the gendarmerie and police that were charged in 1942 with identifying and deporting the "dangerous Gypsies", as well as with advising on the return of these deportees from Transnistria.

My hypothesis is that the criminalisation of Roma by the Romanian police was aggravated by recent developments, such as the disappearance of traditional Roma crafts and services, increased poverty, and the accelerated sedentarisation of formerly nomadic Roma. These developments frustrated the local authorities, which then had a considerable influence on Antonescu's decision to deport the Roma to Transnistria.

2.1. The Socioeconomic Evolution of the Roma

The exact number of Roma was and remains difficult to determine. According to the 1930 census, based on self-identification, 262,501 Roma lived in Romania. However, the actual number must have been considerably higher. This can also be explained as a possible consequence of slavery (when a large number of slaves repre-

sented an asset), but also of the socioeconomic specificity of Romanian society as a whole. Even after their manumission, Roma continued to be useful to a still predominantly rural society through the trades, products, and services that they traditionally offered. Gradually, however, a significant economic change occured. Roma trades slowly became less competitive, even in the countryside. Objects traditionally made by endogamous Roma groups – to the extent that they were even named after them, such as *căldărari* (cauldron-makers), *lingurari* (spoonmakers), *cărămidari* (brickmakers), and *pieptănari* (combmakers) – ended up being replaced by cheaper and better factory products. Roma *ursarii* (bear tamers) started to be increasingly criticised by animal protection societies, public opinion, and the authorities for animal cruelty, and work permits for them were no longer issued. Even Roma musicians in cities suffered due to the emergence of new musical genres and the spread of radios and gramophones. This gradually increasing inadequacy of traditional Roma trades had different results. The most visible one was the need for Roma to find solutions to these new issues by organising themselves in various forms of mutual aid groups, which grew to become one of the largest Roma emancipation movements in the 1930s.[15] Another result was the higher levels of poverty, given the Roma's pronounced socioeconomic failure to adapt. Roma newspapers and associations' programmes contained numerous references to the disappearance of Roma occupations resulting in Roma impoverishment.[16] From another perspective, this impoverishment risked turning the Roma into an increasingly acute problem for the local authorities.

Another interesting effect was the sharp reduction in the number of Roma nomads in the 1920s and 1930s. Sources from the gendarmerie estimated in 1925 that the number of nomadic Roma in the whole country was about 60,000 people.[17] Not even twenty years later, the number of Roma identified as nomads had dropped significantly. On 25 May 1942, the police identified 8,905 nomads nationwide. A few months later, when the deportation was concluded, the total number was only slightly larger: 11,441. Even if we reject this number advanced by the gendarmerie as being exaggerated in order to express the magnitude of the problem that they had to deal with, various other archival and press sources converge to prove the existence of an accelerated process of sedentarisation in the 1920s and 1930s.

Sedentarisation could occur with the help of the (central) authorities which sometimes imposed it, despite the opposition of the communal authorities from mostly non-Romanian localities, especially in disputed territories such as Transylvania. Most likely, they wanted to solve not only a policing problem, but also an ethnic one, by weakening some ethnic group, for the Roma, even if they were nomads, were considered Romanophiles.[18] In some cases, the local authorities agreed, without pressure from the central authorities (although with some concern for the possible damage to the image of a local community) to let the nomads settle down,[19] while in other

15 Petre Matei, Viorel Achim, Ion Duminică, Raluca Bianca Roman, and Iemima Ploscariu, "Romania," in *Roma Voices in History: A Sourcebook. Roma Civic Emancipation in Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe from the 19th Century until World War II,* eds. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 306–466; Petre Matei, Raluca Bianca Roman, and Ion Duminică, "Romania," in *Roma Portraits in History,* eds. Elena Marushiakova and Vesselin Popov (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 167–252.

16 Gh. Romcescu, "Dispar și lăutarii," *Țara Noastră: Ediție specială săptămânală pentru Romii din România,* July 25, 1937, 2; T. Pantazescu, "Meserii cari dispar," *Glasul Romilor,* 8 June 1938, 3.

17 Iovan Romulus, "Despre ţiganii nomazi," *Revista Jandarmeriei* III, no. 10–11 (October–November 1925): 421–429.

18 Lucian Nastasă and Andrea Varga, *Minorități etnoculturale. Mărturii documentare: Ţiganii din România (1919–1944)* (Cluj: Fundatia CRDE, 2001), 192–193.

19 Al. Marinescu, "Printre nomazi: Corturari care-și creiază un stat independent," *Neamul Ţigănesc*, 8 September 1934, 4.

localities the authorities even offered plots of land to nomadic Roma.[20] The main Roma organisations also had in their programmes the idea of sedentarising nomadic Roma, seen as harming the image of Roma in general. In the late 1930s, *Glasul Romilor,* the newspaper of the General Union of Roma in Romania, noted this process and suggested that the authorities encourage it by facilitating settlement on the outskirts of rural and urban areas, where former nomads could practice their jobs.[21]

2.2. (Nomadic) Roma in the Countryside and the Rural Gendarmerie

Despite appearances, Roma sedentarisation was not considered by all as a solution. In some cases, it contributed to the radicalisation of attitudes towards Roma. At first sight, for the rural gendarmerie, it was not the Roma, as a whole, who were perceived as a problem, but rather the nomadic Roma in particular. In the interwar period, most articles dealing with Roma in the police press were, in fact, devoted to nomads. In the gendarmerie's view, the problem of nomadic Roma was due to the difficulty of exercising control over them and to the large number of crimes attributed to them. The criminalisation of those whose identity was difficult to establish was common among the police in general. A nomadic lifestyle was enough to make one be suspected as a potential offender.[22] And yet, in their approach to nomad criminality, the police discussed social causes and even envisioned some plans to adopt (mostly social) preventive measures. The itinerant lifestyle was deemed guilty for causing social inadequacy and poverty and therefore, indirectly, crime. Some high-ranking officers even argued that this problem could be solved if, in addition to the stricter control of them, nomads were offered plots of land: "[t]he greatest interest lies in the prevention of crimes. […] The most practical and salutary measure would be the forced land appropriation of these people […]. For these destitute people one could find plots of land for them, enriching with them the regions that need work force."[23] Practically, according to this view, the only way to make police control effective was by sedentarising the nomads; other forms of control were seen only as a palliative.[24]

Despite the different approaches ranging from the stricter policing of nomads to land allotment, those plans did not materialise. Unlike in Germany or Czechoslovakia, in Romania there was neither coordination of the measures against nomads in the form of a law concerning the Gypsies or nomads, nor were there working groups or commissions dealing with this issue. Consequently, practices varied further, with measures generally left to the discretion of the local authorities. For example, regardless of the suggestions for the nomads' sedentarisation, the opposite happened. On the ground, the indefinite stays of poor people who were seen as offenders – or, worse, their sedentarisation – were not easily tolerated. The lower-ranking gendarmes allowed the nomads to remain only for short periods and then removed them from their precincts, sending them to other communes, which in turn did the same. Tensions arose between the different authorities as each tried to get rid of the nomads. An example is that of the thirty-six nomadic Roma families who, in 1931, received identity papers from the Transylvanian city of Huedin. Later, in 1932, these families

20 Red[acția], "Darul orașului Ploești celor 100 de romi," *Glasul Romilor*, 1–15 November 1934, 3.
21 Tache, "Colonizarea nomazilor," *Glasul Romilor*, April 1940, 2.
22 Leo Lucassen, "'Harmful Tramps': Police Professionalization and Gypsies in Germany, 1700–1945," in *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach*, eds. Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, and Annemarie Cottaar (London: MacMillan, 1998), 76–80.
23 Nicolae Pastia, "Despre sălașurile de țigani nomazi," *Revista Jandarmeriei* (September 1925): 319–326.
24 Dumitru Birt, "Chestiunea țiganilor nomazi în Cehoslovacia," *Revista Jandarmeriei* 13, no. 11–12 (November–December): 1049.

left the city as nomads until the spring of 1934 when, following the orders of the Ministry of the Interior, the gendarmes escorted them back to Huedin, which was considered their locality of origin due to their identification documents. This strained the relations between various authorities, which made it necessary for the county prefect to intervene. In May 1934, the city government of Huedin contacted that of the prefecture of Cluj, complaining about the large number of nomads and asking for their redistribution to the rural communes of the county. The prefecture agreed, but the subordinate communes refused to accept them. In the spring of 1935, they again tried to redistribute the nomads, but without success. The communes claimed to not have enough land and that they could not be forced to accept nomads without the communes' consent.[25]

The decrease in the number of nomads did not mean the disappearance of suspicions about Roma. On the contrary, it could have exacerbated such suspicions. If the gendarmerie precincts had been content to supervise and, after a while, send the nomads away, the gendarmes had to deal with a growing problem after sedentarisation started. It was not only the gendarmes who were disgruntled, but also everyday locals who were unwilling neighbours of the former nomads. Local tensions and conflicts arose long before the deportations. In some tense contexts, even the Roma who were already settled in a commune for a long time could be perceived as unwanted newcomers, with other residents demanding their expulsion from the locality. Such an example is the village of Mofleni, near Craiova, where about twenty to twenty-five Roma families also lived and owned properties. On 11 March 1929, a conflict took place between the Romanian and Roma villagers, with gunshots from and wounded on both sides. When questioned, the Romanian villagers insisted on the expulsion of the Roma from the locality. Legally, this was impossible because the respective Roma already had properties in the commune.[26] Another example is from 1939, when several inhabitants of the village of Stolnici-Argeș complained about the sedentarisation of nomads within the commune. A plot of land had been subleased to some nomads, which annoyed the neighbouring villagers who complained to the authorities and claimed that the way of life of the nomads "is an outbreak of infection for the inhabitants of the commune".[27]

The authorities wanted the nomads to settle down, but somewhere else, preferably as far away as possible. As a result, the tendency was – on behalf of the local authorities like the town councils and the gendarmerie – to tolerate the presence of nomads for short periods only. Paradoxically, both nomadism and sedentarisation were likely to trigger tensions. Those who continued to be nomadic were suspected of criminality under fraudulent identities, while those settling down risked being further suspected both by the local authorities and villagers.[28] It was a tense and potentially explosive situation, as would become more clear during World War Two, when some local authorities and communities felt encouraged to call for even tougher measures, including the relocation or deportation of Roma to Transnistria.

25 Nastasă and Varga, *Țiganii din România (1919–1944),* 195–196.
26 "Încăerare între săteni," *Universul,* 14 March 1929, 7.
27 Direcția Județeană a Arhivelor Naționale Argeș [Argeș County Department of National Archives] (DJAN), fonds Prefectura județului Argeș [Argeș County Prefecture], file no 47/1939, 8.
28 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 17–25.

2.3. (Sedentary) Roma, the City and the Urban Police

In the urban areas, the police were even more hostile towards the sedentary Roma who were increasingly criminalised. In addition to policing, there were also other pressures and interests coming from other actors. There was a normative (urban, civilising, hygienic) discourse, as locals were annoyed by the presence of Roma and complained about the shame that the Roma allegedly brought to the city, wondering what outsiders would say about the city's image being spoiled by Gypsies. Quite often, petitions were sent that criticised the Roma for squalor and laziness, and their houses were described as pest holes. This development was partly caused by the interwar expansion of cities that incorporated the peripheries where many Roma had come to live more or less segregated, especially after the abolition of slavery around the 1850s. What could be tolerated in the countryside or on the periphery started to be harshly criticised when it was perceived as being dangerously close to a city and, especially, a city centre.

The settling process on the outskirts of cities started to be perceived as an invasion and was criticised with various arguments. Among the aggravating issues was the settling of Roma along roads or railways because it made them too visible and was thus a cause of civic "shame"; this was also presented as further "evidence" of the municipal and police authorities' inability to properly handle the situation. The situation was perceived as even more alarming if such settlements were in the capital:

> [c]aravans of nomads go wherever they want to and settle down especially along the busiest roads. Sometimes they gather in huts, and stretch along the roads that enter the capital. Slowly, these unclean settlements, from where the dirt cannot be expelled, become villages. But they keep the same Gypsy habits, continuing their tent life with all its repulsive and vulgar aspects.[29]

The periphery and the Roma became increasingly visible in the context of interwar urban development. Numerous cities (and not only larger ones such as Bucharest, Iași, or other university centres) expanded, incorporating poor peripheries. It is important to emphasise that the harsh discourse on the (Gypsy) periphery was not limited to fascist politicians. On the contrary, it can be found even in left-wing newspapers or in the statements of left-wing politicians such as Dem Dobrescu (1869–1948), the mayor of Bucharest between 1929 and 1934 who was known for introducing extensive reforms and urban works. In an article with the suggestive title "Capital in Danger", Dobrescu initiated a public debate about the dangers that threatened the capital. In addition to the ammunition depots that were located too centrally, and the swampy areas around Bucharest, the Roma received special attention:

> [t]he Gypsies of the capital are a great danger in Bucharest. A dirty population, living from the garbage and dirt harvest, ten [persons] living in low, dirty, wet and infected dumps; consumptives, syphilitic, full of lice and dirt; always ill-fed and all lazy. The Gypsies form the polluting population of the capital. Gypsy centers are centres of plague. […] I was going to deal with the issue of fixing and disciplining them. A mayor of the capital who does not know the difficult problem of the Gypsies is not a good mayor.[30]

The politicians' frustration with the periphery and the Roma was visible regardless of their political affiliations. The difference lay in how developed their solutions were. If someone like Dobrescu seems to have wanted to exercise some form of control over the Gypsies, later others, like Antonescu, acted much more radically. And

29 "Să ascundem mizeria!," *Neamul Românesc*, 22 January 1937, 2.
30 Dem Dobrescu, "Capitala amenințată," *Orașul*, 22 April 1934, 1.

this frustration could only increase as the urban works announced by Dobrescu continued under the following mayors of the capital. For example, in Bucharest in the 1930s, areas such as Floreasca and Herăstrău were sanitised and became parks, promenades, and relaxation areas. Initially swampy, peripheral areas, they had a significant population of Roma who were relocated from zones that had (to) become emblematic of the capital.[31]

From the perspective of the modernising centre, the periphery had to be sanitised and tamed. Although the centre was actually advancing towards the periphery, the discourse supported the opposite. An alarm was sounded to alert about what was presented as the outskirts advancing into the "good" areas of the city that risked being invaded. Vigilance and emergency measures were required, otherwise the emblematic centre would be compromised. Excerpts from an article published in 1939 capture the perceptions and proposals which resemble those under the Antonescu government only three years later:

> [b]eggars roam the streets of the capital […]. Next to Cișmigiu, there are some. Others are on the boulevard. In La Șosea[32] they are installed every hundred metres. Not to mention other centres in Bucharest, which thus get a deplorable appearance? We urge the authorities to put an end to the shameful spectacle of ragged, filthy and professional beggars. It is no longer acceptable for the vagabond to laze without limits. All the Gypsy chaff must be prevented from entering the city in indecent and barbaric attire. I have seen that sometimes the trucks of the Prefecture [police] gather beggars and vagrants and take them to work camps. There they have to be paid for the work, and they must be given clothes from what they earn. Only then could they be allowed to circulate in the capital.[33]

Similar arguments were made for other cities. In general, the authors lamented the fact that cities, instead of leaving a positive impression were, on the contrary, a shame, both in the centre, which was compromised by the presence of people seen as not belonging to the place (such as Gypsies, beggars and vagrants), as well as on the periphery. A common topos in newspapers and petitions was that of the "civilised foreigners" and of the opinion that they might have about "us" Romanians. The impression could only be lamentable, which was a reason to try to fix this state of affairs. This is reflected by another example from Iași:

> [p]alaces and bell towers shine in the distance, but if your eyes follow the railway, your indignation merges with sadness. Long lines of shameful little hovels, a chaos of buildings, where you feel the gurgling of disease and the most repulsive squalor, lie at the entrance to a great cultural city from where so many illustrious men have risen to bring their immortal contribution. I fully felt the horror of this sight when I was in Iași accompanying two foreign professors, my guests, eager to see the city they had heard so much about. Nobody thought of defending Iași against the Gypsy huts and hence it became quite normal to build some troglodyte neighborhoods.[34]

Much to his frustration, the city consisted not only of cultural emblems which he could easily relate to and be proud of, but also of the poor and far too visible peri-

31 "Asanarea lacului Floreasca," *Neamul Românesc*, 9 May 1937, 2.

32 This name refers to Kiseleff Boulevard, a major road in Bucharest that runs northward from Calea Victoriei and Piața Victoriei, with landmarks ranging from museums and parks to embassies and the Romanian Arch of Triumph.

33 "Cerșetorii," *Neamul Românesc,* 14 February 1939, 4.

34 A.G. Stino, "N. Iorga și Iașul," *Neamul Românesc,* 14 July 1937, 1.

phery. As was the case most of the time, the suburb was quickly attacked as being "Gypsy".

Against this background, the radicalisation of the urban police occurred. Unlike the gendarmes who saw the problem as being provoked by nomads, the urban police were comparatively less concerned about nomads (who rarely appeared in the city as their services and crafts were in less demand there). The police first of all criminalised the sedentary Roma. These differences could be explained by the different approaches on how to best solve their own "Gypsy problem". To simplify, the gendarmerie suggested that policing would become more efficient with sedentarisation, and that the problem of the nomads' criminality in rural areas would thus decrease. In practice, however, numerous gendarmerie precincts where the nomads settled down were dissatisfied with this. The same radicalisation was actually occurring, on an even larger scale, in cities where most Roma had been sedentary already for a long time.

As a result, the urban police recommended harsher solutions, such as tightening control over the settled Roma, above all in Bucharest. They also suggested evicting certain Roma from the city who were then supposed to be sent either to their villages of origin or to a certain region of the country. I present *in extenso* the ideas of an article published in 1927 and authored by Willy Georgescu, a former inspector in the central bureaus of the *Siguranța,* who played an important role in setting up this intelligence service. Many of his ideas resemble closely the way in which Antonescu would, fifteen years later, think about solving the Roma problem. The article proves that such radical ideas were not limited to the eugenic discourse but could also occur among the police. According to Georgescu, because of the authorities' idleness, Bucharest would get overwhelmed by Gypsies. More specifically, he presented a set of proposals in several steps. First of all, the Prefecture of the Capital Police had to order police precincts to draw up detailed tables on the situation of the Roma. These lists were to include details such as the name, place of birth, and commune of origin of an individual, if the allegations could be documented, and if the person had served in the army and paid taxes, had a criminal record, or had suffered any punishment. Likewise, other information of interest included the time and reasons for a person leaving their village of origin and preferring to move to Bucharest, their occupation, and what kind of reputation they enjoyed in their neighbourhood. Second, after all these tables would be sent by the police precincts to the Prefecture of Bucharest, where they would be centralised, the Prefecture would check very carefully whether the statements in the tables were correct or not. Third, Roma would be selected. Some would be allowed to live further in Bucharest, but others would have to be evicted. Moreover, the author did not exclude the possibility of having Roma settled in a certain part of the country where they would be forced to work:

> [a]fter obtaining this result, the true control of the Gypsies would be made by selecting those who are allowed and entitled to live here and those to be forcibly dispatched, each to his place of origin. This selection would remove from Bucharest everybody that is unnecessary and dangerous for the public order and the safety of people. […] it would also be possible for the government to determine a certain region in the country where the Gypsies would have their domicile forever, in order to force them to work honestly.[35]

According to that plan, the capital would be cleansed of Roma.

35 Willy Georgescu, "Plaga țiganilor în Capitală," *Paza*, no. 7 (1927): 7–9.

Despite differences between the gendarmerie and the police, in the end both institutions wanted the same thing: to get rid of their own Gypsies by sending them away somewhere. During the interwar period, neither the proposals of the urban police nor of the rural gendarmerie were put into practice, although they are illustrative of the gendarmerie's and police's growing frustration. However, these proposals are very similar to what actually happened during the Antonescu regime.[36]

III. The Persecution of Roma during World War Two

In what follows, after briefly presenting the way Antonescu imagined the "Gypsy-problem", I will discuss how different authorities interpreted the orders coming from the centre and became radicalised.

3.1. Antonescu's "Gypsy-problem"

Ion Antonescu served as a resonance box. He absorbed, from different milieus, several types of arguments against Roma: 1) the alleged criminality and difficulty in exercising control over Roma (the police discourse); 2) the oriental, lamentable image offered both by nomads and sedentary Roma, especially in the cities where the Gypsy slums served as a counter-example of what a proper Romanian city should look like (a discourse promoted especially by mayors, the press, and the various locals who sent hostile petitions asking for measures against Roma); 3) the feeling of shame, provoked by Roma, in front of foreigners (pre-existent, it was aggravated during World War Two by the presence of German soldiers on Romanian territory).

For Antonescu, Roma were different from Jews. If the latter were seen as a strong and influential enemy, depriving the Romanians of their elite position, as traitors, requiring the application of a comprehensive anti-Semitic legislation and their immediate elimination (and in large numbers, primarily from disputed regions such as Bessarabia and Bukovina),[37] Roma seemed to be a relatively minor issue. It was not a question of fear, as Roma were not perceived as a threat, but rather of embarrassment: they were too visible, especially in emblematic areas, and they risked compromising the image of Romanians both in their own eyes and in the view of foreigners. Their location was an aggravating circumstance. Antonescu was particularly interested in the urban Roma. The clean and modern city risked being contaminated and compromised by slums, dirt, orientalism, and Roma.[38] A few other statements Antonescu made offer an insight into his belief that the city, squalor, and Roma were interrelated with a lack of civilisation.[39] Antonescu repeatedly expressed his intention to cleanse the cities of Roma and he even prioritised some of the cities that should undergo this.

On 7 February 1941, a few days after the Legionary's rebellion, Antonescu addressed the issue of urban peripheries and, implicitly, that of the Roma. Bucharest was used as an example, but Antonescu spoke generally about cities and slums. He regarded the problem as more complex, including not only the issue of criminality, but

36 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 24–27.

37 However, Antonescu tended to distinguish between the Jews from disputed regions such as Transnistria, Bessarabia, and Bukovina, which suffered greater casualties during the Holocaust, and those from the Old Kingdom. See Armin Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 69.

38 Thorne, "Assimilation, Invisibility, and the Eugenic Turn," 189–197.

39 Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă, Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1998), 290–291, 484–485.

also those of public order and urban development. Therefore, Antonescu claimed that the urban peripheries should concern not only the police but also the city council. Although he placed great weight on the Roma, he did not see them as being alone in ruining the peripheries. Antonescu accused the Roma of "invading" the cities after the abolition of slavery in the mid-nineteenth century, and especially after 1918, but he also criticised the "lazy" peasants who moved from villages to settle in cities. Insufficiently controlled, the riffraff lived a dubious life without working, populating slums and waiting for the first opportunity to rob and vandalise. The solutions proposed by Antonescu consisted of stricter control of both Roma and peasants. However, in the case of the Roma, Antonescu went a step further and wanted them out of the city. The vacated places, Antonescu continued, had to be sanitised and room made for schools and other useful constructions to be built. Antonescu wanted to set up some Gypsy villages close to the Danube or in Bărăgan, where he planned to concentrate several thousand Roma families. The working Roma would not be evicted but, according to Antonescu, they were anyway just a minority. Most Roma were problematic and had to be removed, but, interestingly enough, not because they had a criminal record, but simply because "one does not know what they do to make a living".[40] A few months later, on 4 April 1941, during a new meeting of the Council of Ministers, Antonescu again brought up the idea of removing the Roma from Bucharest and other cities:

> [a]nother serious scourge are the Gypsies. […] One must act against them. We have to see where they came from and when to send them back. […] Today I was again concerned about the problem of Gypsy villages. First, let us make some huts in Ialomița (County). […] My tendency is to take the Gypsies out of all the cities, to make Gypsy villages.[41]

These ideas were not put into practice, but they show a certain similarity between how Antonescu and others (be they mayors, journalists, or police officers) before him imagined a Gypsy problem and the solutions for it. The emphasis was not on exterminating the Roma, but rather on removing them from important locations, on making them invisible. The Antonescu regime's concern with the negative image of the cities that was allegedly created by the Roma is obvious also from the efforts to blur the presence of the Roma who escaped the deportations. On 22 September 1942, a few days after the deportation of 13,000 sedentary Roma, the Ministry of the Interior ordered the councils of the cities with many Roma inhabitants to take measures to concentrate them in certain areas called "neighbourhoods". These would be isolated and made invisible, with the planting of poplars around them being planned.[42] The short life of Antonescu's regime did not allow this plan to materialise, but the plan is nevertheless illustrative for the attitude towards the presence of the Roma in the cities. However, there are cases documented in the archives when other local authorities – such as in Mizil – decided to remove the Roma from the central areas in order to relocate them to less visible areas. The local authorities justified their actions as follows:

> it is necessary both because [their workshops] are a permanent source of infection, right in the centre of the city, but also because everyone who passes through the city of Mizil is left with the impression of a Gypsy city, not Romanian.[43]

40 Dumitru-Ciucă, Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu, vol. 2, 181.
41 Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri: Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 3 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 1999), 94–95.
42 DJAN Argeș, fonds Primăria orașului Pitești [Pitești City Hall], file no. 22/1942, 68.
43 Viorel Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 145–146.

Even for Antonescu, the category of "problem Gypsies" was fluid and difficult to grasp. In 1941, he seemed preoccupied exclusively with the urban (sedentary) Roma, whom he wanted out of the cities and relocated to some villages set up in the Bărăgan area (largely similar to Willy Georgescu's project from 1927). The idea was not put into practice. Later, after obtaining Transnistria, which he had already used in 1941 as a destination for the deportation of Jews, Antonescu abandoned the idea of Gypsy villages on the territory of Romania proper and instead opted for deporting them to Transnistria. In May 1942, on the order of Antonescu, the Ministry of the Interior drafted deportation plans. On 17 May 1942, it ordered subordinated authorities (the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie, the Directorate General of the Police, and the Prefecture of the Capital Police) to organise a special census of the "problem Gypsies". The criteria were vague as this category included both nomadic Roma and also those sedentary Roma "who, although non-nomadic, are convicted, recidivists, or have no clear means of livelihood or precise occupation on which to live honestly through work, and thus represent a burden and a danger to public order. All of them will be registered with their families, that is, husband, wife, and underage or over 18-year old children if they live under the same roof."[44] It was not only convicts who were targeted, but also those who were suspected of becoming a problem. The criminal criterion was just a pretext, since those who were incriminated, and thus considered to be deportable, would have been all the Roma who were not considered to be economically useful.

3.2. Deporting Roma: Radicalised Authorities and the Negotiation of Criteria

Once Antonescu gave the deportation order, this was interpreted and implemented by local authorities according to their own views and interests. There is an interesting overlap between the criteria used by Antonescu for labelling the undesirable Roma: ethnic, criminal, socioeconomic, and urban. In the next period, these projections intertwined and influenced each other. Matters became even more complicated when other actors emerged with their own grids of interpretation of the so-called "problem Gypsies".

On 25 May 1942, the police in urban areas and the gendarmerie in the countryside carried out a special census of the "problem Gypsies". The vague criteria inspired by Antonescu were interpreted differently by numerous central and local authorities. In Romania, there had been neither police professionalisation with regard to the Roma, nor laws, working groups, or Gypsy databases. Consequently, when charged to identify these people, the Romanian police had no precise data about who was a Roma or who belonged to the "problem Gypsies" category. The imprecise wording of the order of 17 May 1942 meant basically that mostly lower-ranking officers of the police and the gendarmerie were called upon to establish not only who was a criminal (based on police records), but also who was prone to becoming one (based on unclear criteria, such as a suspect lifestyle). What did it mean to have a "precise occupation on which to live honestly through work"? How could they judge economic utility, how clearly defined were the occupations of the Roma, and how satisfactory did their social conditions need to be to be ensure that they would live honestly? In fact, the unclear criteria left it tacitly to the discretion of the local authorities to decide by themselves whom they considered undesirable.

44 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea ţiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 5–6.

Shortly after the census, the results were centralised: there were 8,905 nomadic Roma and 31,438 settled Roma.[45] On 1 June 1942, the nomads started to be deported. Their deportation occurred from precinct to precinct, with nomads being gradually pushed eastward in a relatively short period. By the autumn of 1942, 11,441 nomads had been deported, although the census had recorded only 8,905 of them. The increased number can be explained by the gendarmerie's practice of including in the convoys also those subsequently identified as nomads. Already on the occasion of the nomads' deportation, the lack of expertise on the Roma became evident. There were numerous errors and abuses. In some cases, the gendarmes could not distinguish nomads from sedentary Roma who, in the summer of 1942, had the misfortune of passing through a commune where they were unknown to the local gendarmes.

As to the deportation of settled Roma, there was no plan that was strictly followed from the very beginning. For example, during the deportation of the nomads, the authorities did not yet know how to deal with the sedentary "problem Gypsies". Initially they planned to deport all of them to Transnistria, without any distinction.[46] Things changed on 22 July 1942, when the Ministry of the Interior ordered the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie and the Directorate General of the Police to urgently sort the nominal tables according to the criterion of military utility, distinguishing between mobilised and mobilisable Roma on the one hand and not mobilised and non-mobilisable ones on the other. On 25 July, the commanders of the gendarmerie and the police retransmitted the order to all police units in the country, informing them that "the evacuation of the Gypsies of category II […], that is to say non-nomads, is about to begin with those convicted of crimes and all sorts of crimes, recidivists, pickpockets, tramps, as well as all those for whom you have indications that they live by theft".[47] Realising that they could get rid of the "problem Gypsies" from their own regions, many local police officers acted radically. Instead of taking into account the order that they should only go through the lists from the census of 25 May 1942 and select for deportation merely a part of those listed, twenty-eight gendarmerie legions (that is, from twenty-eight counties) came up with new lists that by far exceeded the initial numbers proposed for deportation. Thus, the Dolj Gendarmerie Legion submitted lists with an additional 1,516 Roma, while the corresponding figure in Vâlcea was 534 and in Muscel it was 414. These increases were also influenced by the fact that the gendarmerie did not have to take into account real criminality proven by verifiable criminal records, but could freely decide which Roma to deport based merely on simple clues and suspicions. Surprised by these numbers, on 4 August 1942 the Ministry of the Interior asked for explanations.[48] In doing so, it moderated what risked becoming a series of radical and out-of-control local initiatives. In the end, only seven gendarmerie legions maintained their new lists.

A few days later, a visit by Antonescu in Bucharest hastened the deportation of Roma. More precisely, according to a notice from the Ministry of the Interior from 19 August, Antonescu was dissatisfied with the appearance of the capital and with the presence of the Roma:

> 1) dirty squares; 2) dirty streets and courtyards; broken or fallen fences; 3) houses with props left like this since the earthquake of 1940; 4) many Gyp-

45 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 33-34.
46 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 45–52.
47 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 75.
48 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 92–93.

> sies and Gypsy women, some doing nothing, others selling flowers and boiled corn, women with brushes on their shoulders, beggars, dirty and barefoot children shoeblacks […] Marshall Ion Antonescu ordered that, as soon as possible, the following measures be taken: […] All nomadic Gypsies, those who cannot justify their existence, and those with convictions will be gathered by the Gendarmerie units and sent by 1 November current year to Transnistria.[49]

The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was prepared and, on the very next day, on 20 August 1942, it replied by sending to the Ministry of the Interior a plan for the deportation of 12,497 sedentary Roma, and it asked for the necessary deportation trains. However, local authorities did not respect the criterion of military utility and more Roma were deported than planned – 13,176 persons. There were cases when not only families with members on the frontline but also Roma soldiers on leave were rounded up, put on trains, and deported to Transnistria.

Between September and December 1942, numerous Roma complained of being abusively deported. In the first stage, between September and October 1942, the central police authorities denied any responsibility for abusively deporting the Roma. They kept saying this even after military units addressed the Ministry of the Interior, indicating their dissatisfaction with the fact that families of Roma soldiers had been deported. In this period, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie could still count on support from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. On 29 September 1942, almost immediately after the arrival in Transnistria of 13,176 Roma deportees, a meeting of the Council of Ministers took place. There, Gh. Alexianu, the governor of Transnistria, took the opportunity to state that among those already deported there were also mobilised Roma, orphans, and war invalids, suggesting that they should be repatriated. C.Z. Vasiliu, the gendarmerie commander, took this personally: he justified the deportations by criminalising the Roma (claiming that all deportees allegedly had criminal records) and asked rhetorically: "[a]re you sending me back the thieves?" This is illustrative of the extent to which the Roma were criminalised, both by the local and national authorities, and how the formal criteria for this were actually negotiated by different actors. Although it should have saved them, the criterion of military utility (as with the mobilised soldiers) mattered little to the suspicious authorities that shared the view of Roma as offenders. All this was aggravated by the reaction of Mihai Antonescu, the vice-president of the government, who waived any responsibility for the fate of the abusively deported Roma: "[t]hose [whom] you evacuated, God be with them! – we will not bring them back. When there are rare cases …"[50] Antonescu's intervention demonstrates that the Council of Ministers tolerated the violation of its own criteria for defining undesirable Roma. He did not demand the observance of the initial orders and the return of the soldiers' families, and admitted only to the repatriation of a very small number of Roma, namely the war invalids. Even in this case, there were local authorities, such as the Gendarmerie Ialomița, that flatly refused all repatriation requests, including those coming from the war invalids. As long as there was not enough pressure exerted from above, that is, from Antonescu and the government, the police could defend themselves and ignore the subject.[51] On 9 October 1942, in a report to the Ministry of the Interior on the deportation of Roma, the General Inspectorate of the Gendar-

49 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 106–107.

50 Marcel Dumitru-Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, vol. 8 (Bucharest: Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2004), 228–229.

51 Matei, "The Romanian Police," 43–44.

merie continued to deny the evidence, claiming that among the 13,176 deported sedentary Roma there were no mobilised or mobilisable Roma or their families.[52]

Things changed slowly starting in mid-October 1942. It was no longer just about Alexianu's remarks of 29 September 1942 or some disparate complaints, but a flood of petitions were now addressed to authorities at all levels and coming from different senders. These senders included Roma deportees, family members who had escaped deportations, different firms, citizens, lawyers, and military units in which Roma soldiers served. They all described the injustice done to Roma soldiers fighting on the front while their families were deported, and with all of this being in violation of the formal criteria decided by the government itself. These were arguments that one could reason with. On 23 October 1942, the Ministry of the Interior informed the gendarmerie and the police that, based on the numerous complaints from the Roma soldiers, certain cases were verified which proved that families of mobilised and mobilisable Roma had been deported contrary to the orders. Therefore, the police and the gendarmerie were urged to promptly check the lists of the Roma deportees in order to identify the mobilised and mobilisable Roma.[53]

Even if the government was, reluctantly, forced to get involved and take action to correct the most flagrant abuses of its orders, this does not necessarily mean that these were corrected. Contradictory and lacking consistence, the orders from above could prove to be hardly effective in the face of local authorities which were unwilling to reconsider their initial decisions by accepting the repatriation of a large number of Roma deportees. In response, on 25 October 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie presented a first report in which it minimised the magnitude of these abuses. The conclusion of this report is not surprising because this institution, as the coordinator nationwide of the deportation of Roma, was responsible for any failures. Hence, the abuses were presented merely as accidents, and the Roma were accused of contributing to this situation because they lacked identity papers and allegedly volunteered to leave for Transnistria.[54] Obviously, there were no rigorous controls during the deportations or later, when these controls were required. So far, no information has emerged of any cases of disciplinary action being taken against those responsible for the abusive deportations.

On 28 October 1942, like the governor of Transnistria a month earlier, but with greater success, another senior Transnistrian official drew attention to the abusive deportations. He was Col. Vasile Gorsky, the prefect of Ochakov, the most southeastern county in Transnistria, to which sedentary Roma had been deported. Gorsky sent a telegram directly to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers headed by Ion Antonescu, in which he bluntly mentioned the abuses during the deportations and asked for a commission on the ground to check on these:

> [a]mong the nearly 14,000 Gypsies evacuated to this county, there are quite many who did not meet the evacuation provisions, as they are not nomadic and do not have criminal records. Among them, there are war invalids and widows, soldiers serving in the current war, decorated with the Military Virtue, women and children with husbands and parents on the frontline, parents with children and sons-in-law on the frontline, property owners, trained craftsmen, merchants with a good financial situation in their cities […] Because of the [local] poor crop, we can ensure the feeding of the Gyp-

52 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 269.
53 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 303.
54 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 312.

> sies only for a short period […] Due to the cold and to the absence of heating possibilities, 10–20 Gypsies die every day. […] Please send a commission for the immediate sorting of Gypsies."[55]

After being informed of this, Ion Antonescu issued the following resolution: "all abuses to be repaired. General Popescu[56] must take the matters into his hands and report. It is the evil work of the gendarmerie that did not execute my orders properly."[57]

Antonescu was not concerned that most Roma had been deported without being found guilty of any crime. After all, he had ordered the very vague criteria that allowed the local authorities to deport a large number of Roma. He was, however, sensitive to the fact that families of Roma who were fit for service had been deported. Even so, despite appearances, Antonescu's interest in redressing these abuses was superficial, and his pressure on subordinate authorities was not constant. As before, the provisions of the now "moderate" center could be applied with a certain freedom of interpretation by a vast police apparatus (which was now more radical than the centre). The control system was slow and deeply subjective, and interested in not accepting the return of the already deported Roma. Practically, the same authorities responsible for abusively deporting the Roma were asked to check on themselves.

This control occurred in several steps. First of all, on 16 November 1942, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was ordered to investigate the Roma deportees' complaints. Reluctantly, it complied, and on 20 November 1942 it retransmitted the order to its subordinate Ochakov Gendarmerie Legion, but expressed doubts about the sincerity of the deportees' allegations.[58] On 8 December 1942, the Ochakov Legion responded to its superiors, in the spirit suggested by the order of 20 November, confirming everything that the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie wanted to hear. Thus, the deportees had allegedly misled Gorsky as they had

> presented to the Prefecture unreliable documents that they were war invalids, widows from the past war and women who verbally declared that their husbands served on the frontline now. […] The harvest from Ochakov County was satisfying and the Gypsies can be provided with food in [good] conditions. […] One cannot rely on Gypsies' allegations unless they are verified by the Gendarmerie Legions and the Police stations of origin.[59]

Probably reassured by this report, the next day, on 9 December 1942, the gendarmerie commander sent three commissions to investigate on the ground, in Ochakov, the complaints of the sedentary deportees.[60] In fact, the situation of the Roma deportees, already critical at the end of October, when reported by Gorsky, had meanwhile worsened dramatically. An independent report by a Romanian secret agent dated 5 December 1942 stated:

> [t]hey [Gypsies] were under-fed. They were given 400 g[rams] of bread for those able to work and 200 g[rams] for the elderly and children. They were given a few potatoes, and very rarely salty fish, and these in very small quantities. Because of the poor food, some Gypsies – that is, the majority – lost so much weight that they turned into skeletons. Daily – especially lately – 10–15 Gypsies have died. They were full of parasites. […] They are naked, without clothes, and the laundry and the clothing are also missing com-

55 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 321.
56 Gen. Dumitru Popescu, Minister of the Interior (January 1941–August 1944).
57 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 322.
58 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 1, 343.
59 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 31–32.
60 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 33–35.

> pletely. […] In general, the situation of the Gypsies is terrible and almost unimaginable. Because of the squalor, many of them became shadows and almost wild. This state of affairs is due to ill-fated accommodation and food as well as due to the cold.[61]

Similarly, the reports of those three commissions revealed numerous abuses, including with regards to the deportation of mobilised and mobilisable Roma, of people without criminal records, or even of Romanians wrongly labelled as Gypsies. One such report stated that

> some of the gendarmerie and urban police stations did not sort out the Gypsies, […] they rounded-up and evacuated those they came across on their way because all they wanted was to have the number of Gypsies they had previously reported […] without controlling if they were the ones to be evacuated. This is the only explanation for such a large number of those evacuated by abuse or negligence and it is necessary to take severe measures against those responsible. […] They should be investigated and sent to prison because it is not acceptable to evacuate invalids, soldiers who were on leave, people who served in the army in this war and had awards of gratitude, Romanian children etc., and I wonder why these categories were not reported by the Ochakov Legion to the Odessa Inspectorate and why proposals were not made to immediately repatriate them.[62]

Notwithstanding these reports, and just as before, there was no investigation leading to those responsible for the absues. On the contrary, the nominal tables with 7,000 sedentary Roma were sent back to Romania so that the local police authorities (the same that had deported them) could verify if the Roma claims were true and respectively advise on their repatriation. Naturally, more often than not, the local police authorities refused their repatriation. Although the control mechanism was flawed, there were, however, differences as some local police authorities accepted certain repatriations requests while others refused them all together. On the whole, nationwide, there were 1,261 cases of Roma deportees who obtained favourable decisions. However, this still did not necessarily result in their repatriation. This time, it was again the central decision-making bodies that proved radical and imposed harsh measures against the Roma deportees. More precisely, after the Ministry of Health identified forty-eight cases of typhus among the Roma returning from Transnistria, Ion Antonescu intervened and decided that no Roma could return to Romania until May 1943, when the end of the epidemic was expected. On 20 January 1943, the General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was informed of this decision and measures were taken to ensure that Roma with repatriation permits would be stopped in Transnistria.[63] Antonescu's decision meant for many of these people the drastic reduction of their chances for survival.

61 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 27–28.
62 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 61–62.
63 Achim, *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria*, vol. 2, 91.

IV. Conclusion

The persecution of the Roma in Romania during World War Two cannot be explained only by invoking German influence and fascism. Focusing just on these factors risks obstructing a more interesting, in-depth local evolution, which is nevertheless more difficult to observe and follow in a brief analysis.

In the conditions of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, several important evolutions took place during the interwar period. These included the decrease in the economic utility of traditional Roma trades, which were until then still useful to a rather traditional economy. Then there was the increasing number of formerly itinerant Roma who started to settle down. The impoverishment of a large number of Roma also occurred, which was a fact that was frequently deplored in the press of the Roma movement. At the same time, urban development also meant the incorporation into cities of poor peripheries, including those with a significant number of Roma, so that the Roma became increasingly visible. The more recent sedentarisation of former Roma nomads had the same effect. A vicious circle was created. Traditionally, law enforcement agencies criminalised nomads in particular, but now, with their growing visibility, sedentary Roma also started to be increasingly criminalised, and not only by the law enforcement agencies, but also by mayors, the mass media, public opinion, and neighbours.

There were many localities where, prior to the rule of Ion Antonescu, there were interethnic tensions that involved the Roma, with locals making petitions or authorities devising plans for resettling the Roma. Such plans were often justified using a rhetoric that characterised Roma as dirty and uncivilised, and their homes and habits as pest holes. Sometimes these tensions exploded and became visible at the national level, when petitions vehemently demanding actions against Roma, or even against the local authorities that were accused of doing nothing, were sent to various ministers and even, during World War Two, to Antonescu. Antonescu did not create this hostile discourse against Roma, but he took it over from law enforcement agencies and municipalities and imposed it upon the entire country.

The centre of the state does not seem to have been inspired by recent, foreign, excessively theoretical, or elitist factors, but rather by old, deep, local, and pretty rudimentary causes. If there has to be a German factor contributing to Antonescu's radicalisation, this did not necessarily imply the adaptation of ideas of eugenicist inspiration. On the contrary, it was empirical. There was already a widespread sense of shame caused by the inability of urban authorities to manage the problem of the (Gypsy) periphery. The already existing shame in front of the few foreigners coming to interwar Romania became very strong after 1940, when numerous German troops were stationed or passed through Romania. Other factors include the dictatorial power used by Antonescu to "solve" what was perceived as pending problems left unsolved by the previous authorities,[64] either out of neglect or for legal reasons (such as respecting Roma properties in areas that were becoming sensitive). And there was, of course, the occupation of Transnistria, which could be used as a place to which undesirables could be deported, as had already been happening with Jews since 1941.

As for the Roma, Antonescu became radicalised along the way. In a first phase, in 1941, he did not think of deportation, but rather of exercising stricter control and removing the Roma from Bucharest only. These people were then supposed to be relocated to special villages. This was not a new idea. The local authorities were not

64 Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust und die Logik der Gewalt,* 43–45.

fond of the Roma presence in cities or of the former nomads' sedentarisation process. As such, plans and the practice of sending them back to their places of origin, or even creating some special places for them, existed long before the war. Later, after ocupying Transnistria, the idea of creating special villages for Roma on Romanian territory was abandoned in favour of a Transnistrian alternative.

In 1942, Antonescu decided to deport some categories of Roma. Differentiation among Roma was not made by using a relatively objective criterion, such as having a criminal record, but by using a very subjective criterion, namely an unclear means of livelihood. This tendency to criminalise the Roma without proving their individual guilt continued and had serious consequences during the deportations. All of the 11,441 nomadic Roma, and more than 13,000 sedentary Roma, were deported. These Roma, although not real criminals, were seen and treated as criminals, which was a consequence of a long-term criminalisation process. With the exception of the Roma, no other Romanian citizens with criminal records were deported to Transnistria. The criminalisation of the Roma by the police was aggravated by local specificities. Once Antonescu gave the order, his vague criteria were interpreted by the local authorities according to their own interests. Some local authorities radicalised and acted very harshly, trying to take full advantage of the orders. Others, on the contrary, acted in moderation.

The treatment of the Roma was a contradictory process. In a first stage, the central authorities tended to tolerate the local authorities' non-observance of the formal criteria for identifying the "problem Gypsies". Later, although rather reluctantly, they intervened when the local initiatives became too radical and risked getting out of control. Faced with numerous grievances, complaints, and interventions, the central authorities showed a (limited) readiness to repair the most egregious abuses, particularly the deportation of the families of Roma soldiers. The control mechanism was deeply corrupt, inefficient, and dependent on the local authorities. Basically, the same local authorities which were guilty of abusive deportations were required to investigate themselves and advise on the return of the Roma deportees. As a result, the readiness to admit errors was reduced, with dramatic consequences for the deportees. Later, in January 1943, in the conditions of the outbreak of the typhus epidemic, Antonescu decided to stop all Roma repatriations without exception, which again radicalised the local authorities.

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Kateřina Králová

Silenced Memories and Network Dynamics in Holocaust Testimonies

The Matalon Family and the Case of Greece

Abstract

During World War Two, many Jewish survivors witnessed how their parents, spouses and children were being taken away to Nazi camps, and some even saw them suffering until the end. Those who came back were hoping to find a tranquil haven and to finally live peacefully with at least some of their family members. Their ties, however, were irrevocably disturbed. This article focuses on one Jewish family from Thessaloniki, within which many members from three generations survived by hiding in Greece, while others were deported to Auschwitz. This created traumatic layers in the family memory, each of them for different reasons, and which were often suppressed for decades to come. Dwelling on a rich archive of personal testimonies, I will shed light on these silenced memories within the traumatised family network, memories that stem not only from the tragedy of the Holocaust, but also interplay with family dynamics.

Just after the liberation of Athens in October 1944, the fate and whereabouts of two of the Matalon daughters were as yet uncertain, as the sisters had been deported with their husbands to Auschwitz only several months before the liberation. The future development of Greece was also precarious as the state was heading into a bloody civil war that would last from 1946 to 1949. When both women returned to Greece, nothing was the same anymore. In this article, I focus, first, on the network of the Moise Matalon family and the agencies within it, and, second, on multi-directionally silenced memories. Following seminal psychological research in trauma studies, I see silence as a negotiated social norm and as social (and even attachment) trauma, regardless of whether this trauma is consciously or unconsciously narrated, twisted or even silenced in life stories.[1]

The two generations of a single family – Holocaust survivors and narrators in one – whose voices are presented in my study, delivered nine semi-structured biographical accounts to well-established audiovisual collections in Holocaust archives in and beyond Greece. More interviews appeared in the media and private collections of Holocaust scholars from Greece and abroad. Being fluent in several languages (including Greek, French, English, Judeo-Spanish and/or Hebrew, a multilingualism which stemmed from the specific cultural history of the Jewish middle class in

1 Dan Bar-On, *Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1995); Sharon Kangisser Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel: Finding Their Voice: Social Dynamics and Post-War Experiences* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992); Yael Danieli, "Families of Survivors of the Nazi Holocaust: Some Short- and Long-Term Effects," *Series in Clinical & Community Psychology: Stress & Anxiety* 8 (1982): 405–421. For a recently published volume on silence, see Aleksandar Dimitrijevic and Michael B. Buchholz, eds., *Silence and Silencing in Psychoanalysis: Cultural, Clinical, and Research Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), and in this especially Aleksandar Dimitrijevic, "Silence and Silencing of the Traumatized," 198–215.

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Thessaloniki),[2] the narrators were not only able to think in diverse contexts but to also consider the possible audience in one or another language more broadly in their public and private voice.

Interviews in Greek, French and English that were recorded from 1994 to 2019 have been stored in the Fortunoff Archive (HVT),[3] the Visual History Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation (VHA),[4] the oral history collection of the Jewish Museum of Greece (JMG/OHA),[5] and at the Jewish Community in Athens.[6] Between 2020 and 2022, I was able to enrich this existing opus with interviews in Greek and English that I conducted with the third generation of the Matalon family. My intention has not been to create a new family narrative, but rather to put the existing sources into conversation with each other and to place them in the family structure by making use of comparative oral history methodology. To specify localities and dates related to deportations, I made use of documents from the Joint Distribution Committee Archives (AJDC) and the Arolsen Archives, also known as the International Tracing Service.[7]

Out of eight survivors of the Matalon family, adults at the time of liberation, only two Matalon daughters, deportees who returned from the camps, delivered their accounts of Holocaust-related hardship. Symptomatically, none of the other adults ever publically narrated their story of surviving in hiding. Herewith, they in fact followed the post-war hierarchy and hierarchisation of suffering and survivorship, assuming that only ex-deportees have a Holocaust story to tell.[8]

At a time when most ex-deportees had passed away, the child survivors were finally recognised as a distinct victim group, and were thus given a voice as the "last witnesses".[9] In that period, in the 1990s, interviews with the Matalon grandchildren who survived in hiding – Andreas, Ester, Rina, Paulina and Vida – were recorded. Moise Matalon's grandson Maurice Amaraggi, born in 1945 as a post-war child, has been missing from all existing oral history archives on the Holocaust. In a Zoom recording, he discussed with me the Matalon family network dynamics from the perspective of the Amaraggi family, thus supplying the missing piece from the puzzle.[10]

2 See, for example, Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

3 "Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies," Yale University Library, accessed 30 June 2022, https://fortunoff.library.yale.edu.

4 "Visual History Archive Online," USC Shoah Foundation, accessed 30 June 2022, https://vhaonline.usc.edu. Currently, the VHA collection contains interviews, each on average more than two hours long, in forty-one languages, amounting to about 115,000 hours of video material. To facilitate working with such a vast quantity of material, the search engines are equipped with a list of over 65,000 thematic keywords.

5 "The Oral History Archive of the Jewish Museum of Greece," Jewish Museum of Greece, accessed 30 June 2022, https://www.jewishmuseum.gr/en/the-oral-history-archive-of-the-jewish-museum-of-greece-oha-2/.

6 Israilitiki Kinotita Athinon, accessed 30 June 2022, https://athjcom.gr/politismos/εκδήλωση-για-το-μπλόκο-της-συναγωγής-ε/. I am thankful to Philipp Carabott for bringing this website to my attention.

7 On the JDC in general, see Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Linda G. Levi, and Maud S. Mandel, *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019). On the ITS and its uses, see *An Introduction to the International Tracing Service* (Bad Arolsen: The International Tracing Service, 2009), and Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

8 Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust*, 68.

9 Robert Krell and Haim Dasberg, *Messages and Memories: Reflections on Child Survivors of the Holocaust* (Vancouver: Memory Press, 1999); Ira Brenner, "The Last Witnesses: Learning about Life and Death from Aging Survivors," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 101, no. 2 (3 March 2020): 340–354, https://doi.org/10.1080/00207578.2020.1739199.

10 Maurice Amaraggi, Zoom interview by the author, 21 November 2020. Among other things, Maurice Amaraggi is the screenwriter and director of a documentary about Thessaloniki, *Salonika: City of Silence*, (Brussels and Jerusalem: NEMO Films, 2006).

When the first Holocaust interviews for local and transnational collections, including with the Matalon family, were recorded in Greece, the once top-down, silenced experience of institutional injustice – related to imposed injunctions and property return to Jewish survivors – appeared quite openly in their narrations. Socioculturally silenced experiences, both on the vertical and horizontal levels (gender, generations) were also present, since the social models changed extensively over time and thus allowed the narrators to express themselves (more) freely in this regard. Still, in both instances, we can observe an asymmetry in power relations, both within the family network and between the in-group and out-groups in the Greek state. Similarly to the pioneers in research on intergenerational Holocaust trauma transmission, Dori Laub and Danieli,[11] I refer to this attempt as a "conspiracy of silence"[12] used in an effort to reduce uncertainty, in which children become the "bearers of the [social] secret".[13] The most difficult memories for them to overcome became the traumatic and traumatising ones of a deep loss, which were carried within the family and internally.

Rescue Attempts in the Matalon Family

Moise Matalon (1877, Larissa–1966, Athens), a Greek-speaking gynecologist and alumnus of the university in Athens, was a father of four women – Daizy Seficha (1904–1998), Claire Alcheh (1906–2002), Germaine Cohen (1910–2016), and Reneé Amaraggi (1914–2017) – whom he all successfully married to well-positioned Jewish men in Thessaloniki before the war started.[14] Moise escaped from the city under German occupation, where the deportations of Jews became a reality in March 1943, together with his wife and three adult daughters accompanied by their husbands and children. His youngest daughter Reneé, together with her husband and her son Salvador, left earlier and already awaited them in the capital. Soon after Italy surrendered in September 1943, the family members each went their own way and to different hideouts, as the danger of deportations started to loom over Athens, which found itself in the German zone of occupation. The four granddaughters of Moise Matalon survived the war in Athens without their parents. The members of the Amaraggi family survived there hiding all together. Andreas Seficha (1929–2007) and his parents went with the Matalon grandparents to the countryside. But the hiding places of two of Matalon's daughters and their husbands, Bension Alcheh and Sabetai Cohen, were disclosed and all of them were deported to Auschwitz.[15]

Germaine Cohen and Claire Alcheh returned from the camps in 1945. In her oral account, Germaine plainly states that her main motivation to survive the camps was the hope of meeting her three daughters again. The girls were safeguarded as pupils at a Roman Catholic school in Athens and by living with a non-Jewish acquaintance.

11 See the contributions of both scholars in Yael Danieli, eds., *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York: Springer, 1998).

12 Yael Danieli, "Psychotherapists' Participation in the Conspiracy of Silence about the Holocaust," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 1, no. 1 (1984): 23–42, https://doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.1.1.23.

13 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 57–74.

14 Andreas L. Seficha, *Remembering a Life and a World* (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2015), 31. I am using here the surnames that the women adopted after their marriage and which refer to the family of the spouse, as was traditional in the Greece of those days.

15 Andreas Sephiha [*sic*], interview 48935, VHA, USC Shoah Foundation, accessed at the Malach Centre for Visual History, Charles University, Prague, with funding from the LM2015071 LINDAT/CLARIN Research Infrastructure.

When a former neighbour from Thessaloniki, the only collaborator the Cohens ever called by name in their accounts, denounced her husband to the German authorities, Sabetai Cohen revealed under torture his wife's hiding place. Germaine's sister Claire, her husband Bension Alcheh, and their nine-year-old son Solomon were betrayed and caught at about the same time. The Alcheh parents succeeded in finding a safe haven only for their elder daughter; the others were deported to Auschwitz on the same freight train as Germaine and Sabetai, on 21 June 1944.[16]

As other women survivors who arrived with their children in Auschwitz-Birkenau testified, Claire too was encouraged by a fellow Jewish prisoner from Greece to entrust her son upon arrival to what was claimed to be the "Red Cross", since it allegedly provided motorised transportation of the children to the camp.[17] This frantic intervention on the part of the more experienced Auschwitz prisoners, which aimed at rescuing the mothers at the very least, has haunted Claire for the rest of her life. Nevertheless, the knowledge of there being another child back home was a strong stimulus to invest as much as one could into survival. This agonisingly sorrowful predicament takes centre place in Claire's VHA interview which she gave in French, although in Greece and to a Greek interviewer, signalising that she felt more at ease to articulate the trauma in her intimate language than in her language of everyday use. In her written account in Greek, Claire stated:

> [h]e [a Jewish prisoner from Thessaloniki] told us we need to entrust our children to older women because the Red Cross would take care of them. We followed his advice because it sounded reasonable. Parting with our children was cruel, but we had to save the children. [The next day] I sighted a prisoner digging a trench. He was French. When I asked him if he knew where the children were and how we could see them, he turned around imperturbably and cynically said: "Madam, do you see that flame which comes out of the smokestack? He has come out of there already, I am sure." A worse, more cynical man I've never seen in my life. That moment I suffered my first death. […] If I decided to live on, this was because what sustained me was a thought that, in Athens, my other child awaited me.[18]

After the Auschwitz evacuation, Claire and Germaine went through Bergen-Belsen and Raguhn, a subcamp of Buchenwald, and finally Theresienstadt, which was only taken over by the International Red Cross on 4 May 1945. When the Red Army entered the camp five days later, it held about 30,000 prisoners. Because they had to recover from typhus, it took the sisters until autumn 1945 to reach Thessaloniki.[19]

16 VHA-48674, Zermain [*sic*] Koen (née Matalon) interview; VHA-43697, Claire Beza (née Matalon, Altcheh from her first marriage) interview; HVT-3011, Palomba M., Riketta C., and Vida C. (née Koen) Holocaust Testimony, interview by Jaša Almuli, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute (VWI); HVT-3009, Germain C. [*sic*], Holocaust Testimony, interview by Jaša Almuli, VWI; Altzek Klara [*sic*], in *Central Name Index*, 0.1/13282551/ITS Digital Archive; Altcheh Clara [*sic*], in *Central Name Index*, 0.1/13241150/ITS Digital Archive.

17 VHA-43697, Beza interview. For a similar observation, but regarding Jews from Lodz, see Robert Jan van Pelt and Debórah Dwork, *Auschwitz: von 1270 bis heute* (Zurich: Pendo, 1998), 386.

18 In Rozina Asser Pardo, *548 imeres me allo onoma: Thessaloniki, 1943: mnimes polemou* [548 days with Another Name: Salonika 1943: Memories of War] (Athens: Ekdosis Gavrilidis, 1999), 94–95. Many other family survivors mentioned Claire's loss – which caused guilt-inducing tension among family members – only in passing at the most, or did not address it at all. For Claire's oral account, see VHA-43697, Beza interview. Compare this with the story of Ida Angel, who lost one child in Auschwitz but reunited with her other child and husband upon returning to Athens, in Miriam Novitch, *Passage of the Barbarians: Contribution to the History of the Deportation and Resistance of Greek Jews* (Hull: Hyperion Books, 1989), 121–123.

19 While Claire, still weakened by the typhus, returned through Yugoslavia in August 1945, Germaine returned through Italy in a much better condition in October 1945. VHA-48674, Koen interview; Cohen Germaine, in *Central Name Index*, 0.1/27938875, 27938878/ ITS Digital Archive; Ústřední kartotéka – transporty, in *Central Name Index*, 0.1/4966252/ITS Digital Archive.

Other Matalon family members, including the sisters' parents, had survived in hiding. Still, the Cohen girls were taken care of in a Jewish orphanage that had been established in 1945 in the suburbs of post-war Athens. The orphanage had been set up with the assistance of the American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an international Jewish relief organisation that reopened its office in the Greek capital the same year.[20] Meanwhile, Ester Alcheh moved in with her grandparents, from her father's side, in Athens.[21] In 1945, the orphanage officially looked after up to sixty children, boys and girls, and was the only existing Jewish institution of its kind in Greece. Many of these children would soon be among the 175 Jewish child migrants from Greece, accompanied by twenty-five adults, who were sent to Palestine on 4 August 1945.[22] One of the children on board was Ester, Claire's teenage daughter whose transfer took place only a few weeks before Claire returned. They finally reunited in Greece in 1949, when Ester stayed in Athens, although by doing so she broke her promise to do compulsory military service in Israel. Like Claire, Germaine was still in poor health upon her arrival in Greece. She ended up in hospital, and was able to collect her daughters only after her physical recovery. While Claire remarried but never had another child, Germaine remained widowed until the end of her life.[23]

Almost a year before Germaine and Claire returned from the Nazi camps, the internally displaced Matalon family reunited in Athens to set out for Thessaloniki. This occurred soon after the 1944 December events, which unleashed the battle of Athens, a prelude to the civil war. For the rest of his life, Andreas Seficha, the oldest grandson of Matalon who survived the Holocaust, was proud of having made his way to the capital alone in 1943 and of the fact that his family had followed him. Immediately after the German occupation, Andreas and his family found themselves in Athens under British protection. In his narration, Andreas brings out how the fear of continued fighting in the aftermath of the occupation paralysed many survivors in Greece, and he highlights the multi-layered dilemma of returning to his hometown of Thessaloniki: "[w]hen we arrived on a British Army truck from Argos in Athens, it was the time of the December clashes. […] Should we stay in Athens or go back to Thessaloniki, to our home? Home? What home? […] We had hardly settled in when the Battle of Athens broke out at various points in the city. […] What were we to do?"[24]

For years to come, Matalon family survivors would be struggling with the Holocaust trauma, fighting to regain their social status and their stolen property, trying to re-establish the bond between deported mothers and daughters in hiding, forever scarred by irreplaceable loss. Before long, the Amaraggis would leave Greece for good and settle in Belgium. Only on occasional visits to Greece was Reneé able to meet with her three sisters and their children.[25] When Matalon's grandchildren in Greece reached adulthood, they were given the opportunity to study abroad. All of

20 HVT-3009 Germain C.; HVT-3011, Palomba M., Riketta C., and Vida C.; JMG/OHA-051, Mioni (with sisters), The Oral History Archive of the Jewish Museum of Greece (JMG/OHA), Jewish Museum of Greece.

21 JMG/OHA-094, Esther Florentin interview, and Esther Florentin, interview by the author, Athens, 9 May 2022.

22 1945-54/4/33/2/386, Greece, General, VIII.–XII.1945, Letter from Morris Laub to Dr. J. Schwartz, Re: Greece, 23 August 1945, AJDC, New York Archive (NY AR). See also Pothiti Hantzaroula, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Greece: Memory, Testimony and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2020), 100–101.

23 VHA-43697, Beza interview; VHA-48674, Koen interview; VHA-43029, Ester Florentin interview (née Altcheh); Jews who left Greece for Palestine on 8/4/45, 30 August 1945, in Registration of Liberated Former Persecutees at Various Locations, 3.1.1.3. (F 18-56 Griechenland, 045)/0060_78779776_1–0067_78779789_1/ ITS Digital Archive.

24 Seficha, *Remembering a Life and a World*, 83.

25 Amaraggi, interview.

them would return to Greece. While Vida Cohen became a fierce Zionist and at a late stage in her life decided to completely move to be with her son in Israel,[26] Andreas Seficha affirmed his dedication to the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki by serving as the Community's president from 1993 to 2001, which he documented in his memoir.[27] Throughout these years, family dynamics were shifting due to changing socio-cultural norms and the political climate in Greece, as well as the aging of survivors in their own network.

Institutionally Inducted Silence

For all Holocaust survivors, the restitution of lost property, promising a rise back up the social ladder, was among the first things to deal with in their liberated countries.[28] When it came to Jews, the legal settlement of property ownership became the biggest problem also for the new Greek government. Several pieces of legislation had been passed during the occupation and not all were annulled at once after the war, but they were rather superseded individually.[29] In late December 1945, Act 808 did bring at least some order into this legal chaos and enable the restitution of property, not only to the original owners but also to their agents, guardians and relatives. In the former German-controlled part of the province of Macedonia, including Thessaloniki, a vast number of Jewish assets were not returned to Jewish survivors for a long time after.[30]

Within the traditional boundaries of Greece, it was difficult for the Matalon family, especially for the Cohens and Alchehs, the heads of whom had died, leaving their wives to make a claim to retrieve their properties. Once Germaine had come back from the camps and collected her children, she returned to her hometown and reunited with her parents. Getting housing was the utmost priority but, as she recalls, it was not easy: "I went to the Thessaloniki military court [and told them]: 'You have to give me my home back'. They didn't, but one room. And slowly-slowly I took the whole home."[31]

Although it is unclear how long "slowly-slowly" means exactly, her daughters have a strong memory of a family community living all together in one flat in Thessaloniki. Not so much Germaine's sister Claire, the other camp survivor. In her words,

26 Rina and Paulina Cohen, interview by the author, Athens, 9 May 2022.

27 Seficha, *Remembering a Life and a World*. See also Odette Varon-Vassard, *Des Sépharades aux Juifs grecs: histoire, mémoire et identité* (Paris: Éditions le Manuscrit, 2021).

28 On Jewish property in general, see Dan Diner and Gotthart Wunberg, eds., *Restitution and Memory: Material Restoration in Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press and USHMM, 2008); Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther, eds., *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe* (New York: Berghahn; USHMM, 2007).

29 Sam Nahmias, "Die Vermögen der deportieren Israiliten Griechenlands," in *In memoriam: gewidmet dem Andenken an die jüdischen Opfer der Naziherrschaft in Griechenland*, ed. Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama (Essen: Peter Katzung, 1981), 463.

30 A.N. 808/1945 (31 December 1945), Peri sympliroseos ton A.N. 2/1944 kai 337/45, FEK A'324/1945, Nahmias, 460–463; Kateřina Králová, "In the Shadow of the Nazi Past: Post-War Reconstruction and the Claims of the Jewish Community in Salonika," *European History Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2016): 262–290. Concerning Jewish property in Thessaloniki specifically, see the following chapters in *The Holocaust in Greece*, eds. Giorgos Antoniou and A. Dirk Moses (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018): Maria Kavala, "The Scale of Jewish Property Theft in Nazi-Occupied Thessaloniki," 183–207; Stratos N. Dordanas, "The Jewish Community of Thessaloniki and the Christian Collaborators: 'Those That Are Leaving and What They Are Leaving Behind,'" 208–227; Kostis Kornetis, "Expropriating the Space of the Other: Property Spoliations of Thessalonican Jews in the 1940s," 228–251.

31 VHA-48674, Koen interview.

she "never stepped again into that house".[32] At her last wartime address in Athens, after being turned away by the non-Jewish tenants, Claire demanded her stolen property by entering the house accompanied by a Greek police officer. In this way, as her daughter Ester narrates, Claire recovered at least some of her family's belongings.[33] Both Claire and Germaine, never spelling out the word antisemitism, must have been quite proud of their restitution success and claims against the Greek state and administrators. But only the third generation is able to admit, and then just on direct inquiry, that not only the institutional restitution of property, but also claims within the family network after the death of Moise Matalon, have created intractable problems among the survivors.[34]

There was also another issue common to many Holocaust survivors that the Matalon family had to struggle with: the one of national identity. While the Cohen daughters lived in Greece as Yugoslav subjects, with this citizenship from their father's side being ascribed to them up to their adulthood, Ester was struggling for and with her Israeli identity. When I interviewed her in 2022, she was still using specific Hebrew words from her early days in Israel. By returning to Greece in 1949, Ester bypassed her compulsory military service, thus circumventing the state regulations of Israel. In her understanding, she was disloyal to the country that had embraced her. For that action, Ester has been feeling ashamed all her life. By linking her native homeland, Greece, and the new homeland, Israel, with shame and guilt in her narrative, Ester manifested how much she commits to the rules of the state she lives in.[35]

Her cousins, on the other hand, strongly recall the family fears connected to their Yugoslav citizenship once the civil war broke out. At that time, Germaine Cohen became apparently worried that her daughters could be abducted by guerrilla forces and taken to communist countries in Eastern Europe as Yugoslav subjects.[36] Her fear was a blend of general conflict-related insecurity and the trauma of the separation she experienced during the Holocaust. With regard to the civil war, it is striking how the Matalon family narrators avoid the subject. Both Claire and her daughter Ester married Holocaust survivors who escaped the deportations by joining the leftist resistance in Greece. Once the war was over, as former partisans they could end up in the crosshairs of the Greek authorities by being considered disloyal citizens.[37] When touching upon the motivation of her post-war husband Alfred Beza to join the partisans, Claire stated plainly: "He was in the resistance. (…) He was in the mountains, he liked sports, he found there what he liked."[38] Ester does not open the topic of her husband's whereabouts in her public voice, quickly passing over the resistance experience even in our private interview.[39] Her cousin Paulina, who was interviewed

32 VHA-43697, Beza interview.
33 VHA-43029, Florentin interview.
34 Amaraggi, interview; Cohen, interview; Florentin, interview.
35 JMG/OHA-094, Florentin; and Florentin, interview. On shame and children, see Ute Frevert, "Piggy's Shame," in *Learning How to Feel: Children's Literature and Emotional Socialization, 1870–1970*, eds. Ute Frevert, Pascal Eitler, and Stephanie Olsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 134–154.
36 JMG/OHA-051, Mioni (with sisters); HVT-3011, Palomba M., Riketta C., and Vida C.; Cohen interview. For more on child evacuations during the Greek Civil War, see Loring M. Danforth and Riki Van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), and Kateřina Králová and Karin Hofmeisterová, "The Voices of Greek Child Refugees in Czechoslovakia," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 1 (2020): 131–158.
37 For more on this issue, see Kateřina Králová, "'Being Traitors': Post-War Greece in the Experience of Jewish Partisans," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017): 263–280; Eleni Beze, "Being Leftist and Jewish in Greece during the Civil War and Its Aftermath: Constraints and Choices," *Historein* 18, no. 2 (2019), http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/historein.14601.
38 VHA-43697, Beza interview.
39 Florentin, interview.

about her husband's partisan experience by the Greek historian Iasonas Chandrinos,[40] has a similar strategy to Ester. When telling me about her encounter with Chandrinos, we both knew the long-tabooed background story of the Greek leftist resistance, due to Greek political realities for decades after the civil war. Yet, for her it remains unspeakable, even in contemporary Greece.[41]

Socioculturally Conditioned Silence

While Moise Matalon treated his daughters both with a French education and husbands appropriate to their social status, it was the husbands who became the head of the families after marriage. Still, Moise was apparently approached and consulted when his daughters' families were about to make a heavy-hearted decision to escape from Thessaloniki. From the narrations, Moise seems to be neither a devoted Zionist nor a local patriot, but a leader and a man of action. His grandson Andreas even claims in his Fortunoff interview that "grandfather, on [his] mother's side, as head of the family, decided to save the family", thus assigning all agency to Moise Matalon.[42] In contrast, Moise's wife Riketta, who died in 1956, does not at all appear in the post-war accounts in connection with the rescue attempts, signalising that the agency was ascribed solely to the man in the family.

Ester is the only one who mentions in her narration the migration endeavour of her father and Claire's husband, Bension Alcheh, whose brother left for Palestine already before the German occupation, and who himself had planned a family transfer to Palestine. His Zionist leanings do not seem to be in line with the views of the rest of the family or with the public discourse of post-war Greece.[43] Bension was also the only one of the family well-established in the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki prior to the deportations. His position is referred to at least in passing by Ester and in the accounts of other Community representatives, when he is described as the one who actively participated in its welfare committee during the occupation.[44] Once moving to Palestine ceased to be an option, his social capital helped the Matalon family to obtain false identification cards and to move to Athens, at that time still under Italian occupation and therefore seemingly safe for Jews. Surviving the ordeal of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, Bension died of dysentery in the latter concentration camp upon its liberation, as his nephew Andreas Seficha brings to the fore in a VHA interview.[45] All other narrators mention only that Bension died in the concentration camp. This makes us speculate whether it was his death that robbed him of agency in the family memory or rather his Zionist leanings, which the narrators consider to be inappropriate within the Greek public discourse and therefore remain silent about them.

The Alcheh family's story related to Zionism takes a surprising turn once Claire talks about Ester's placement in the Jewish orphanage and her relocation to Palestine in the company of her father's brother, who came back to Greece only for this reason.

40 The interview was part of Chandrinos' research for a book project on Jewish leftist resistance, Iasonas Chandrinos, *Synagonistes: To EAM ke i Evrei tis Elladas* [Comrades-in-Arms: The EAM and the Jews of Greece] (Athens: Psifydes, 2020). I am thankful to Iasonas Chandrinos for also sharing his experience with me.

41 Cohen, interview.

42 HVT-2794, Andreas Seficha Holocaust Testimony.

43 On Greek anti-Zionism, see Tobias Blümel, "Antisemitism as Political Theology in Greece and Its Impact on Greek Jewry, 1967–1979," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 2 (3 April 2017): 181–202.

44 VHA-43029, Florentin interview; Novitch, *Passage of the Barbarians*, 44.

45 VHA-48935, Seficha interview.

Bension's father had apparently given his full consent to the transfer; Bension's father-in-law Moise Matalon seems to have been more reluctant.[46] Claire had not and could not be consulted at all. Since she did not return until the end of summer 1945, and with no news of her whereabouts, she was considered dead.[47] A similar concern regarding the possible relocation of Germaine and her daughters to Palestine in the 1950s is apparent from the narrations of Vida, Paulina and Rina, who speak about their mother consulting Moise Matalon about Germaine's plans. They point out empathically that it was not anti-Zionism but the idea of a single mother, a widow with three children, pushing her way through the wide world, that made their grandfather act in that way.[48] Clearly, the daughters are struggling to articulate both loyalty to Greece and the Jewish homeland as well as to their mother and their grandfather.

Neither Claire nor Germaine ever mention the hierarchical relations with their father or husbands. Their children, nevertheless, seem to have overcome to some extent the traditional roles in the family, and they attribute to their mothers a strong agency in their actions, such as Germaine's decision to send her daughters to study abroad,[49] or Claire's determination to bring Ester back from Israel and Claire's second marriage to her friend and cousin Alfred Beza.[50] When Claire casually mentions this new bond in her French interview, she does so thinking about the decisions that she could not make on her own before: "[t]hen [in the second marriage] I understood the difference of marrying someone not chosen by your parents".[51] Ester, who appreciated her mother's new life partner "like a second father" but was never able to call him "daddy", is, apart from Claire, the only one to ever mention his existence.[52] In my interviews, when asked about Alfred Beza, the bond was admitted by her cousins, but also with some reluctance because of his sociocultural background.[53]

The memory of Sabetai Cohen, Germaine's husband who was murdered upon arrival in Auschwitz, also became traumatising in the Matalon family network, but in a different way. Due to their age, Sabetai's three daughters have little recollection of their father but some flashes. Unlike the Alcheh family, the identity of the Cohens – originally from Monastir – was not Zionist but was embedded locally, as Sephardic Jews of Macedonia. Until the very last moment before moving to Athens, Sabetai had hesitated about this family's decision, heavy-mindedly leaving his parents and his beloved city behind. Rina and Paulina recall the picture of him sitting in his armchair in Thessaloniki nearly crying and becoming depressed. Until today, in their view they convince themselves that their father was selected for the gas chambers at a relatively young age, in his early forties, because his guilt-driven depression took away all of his strength. Subscribing all agency to their mother once the Holocaust started, they even believe that Germaine wanted to leave the train but that their father prevented that. When asked about psychological treatment, Rina confesses that she looked for therapeutic help after her divorce. Paulina first remains silent, but then adds that "[their] generation suffers depression", perhaps the kind her father had, clearly relating to the intergenerationally transferred Holocaust trauma.[54]

46 JMG/OHA-094, Florentin; Florentin, interview.
47 VHA-43697, Beza interview.
48 Cohen, interview.
49 HVT-3011, Palomba M., Riketta C., and Vida C.; JMG/OHA-051, Mioni (with sisters).
50 JMG/OHA-094, Florentin; VHA-43029, Florentin interview.
51 VHA-43697, Beza interview.
52 JMG/OHA-094, Florentin; VHA-43029, Florentin interview.
53 Cohen, interview; Amaraggi, interview.
54 Cohen, interview; see also Koen, Israilitiki Kinotita Athinon. https://athjcom.gr/politismos/εκδήλωση-για-το-μπλόκο-της-συναγωγής-ε/, accessed 30 June 2022.

Internalised Personal Silence

Never having come to terms with the loss of her son, even claiming in view of all of her hardships that "childless people are better off", Claire questions in her written narration her own being: "[o]ther women who followed their children went straight to the crematoriums. But is it not better to die, mother and son together, than to survive and live with the memory of your child?"[55] After her return and recovery, Claire fully complied with the advice of her husband and father, who told her not to voice her suffering. As typical for many Jewish deportees who returned home and encountered those who survived in resistance or hiding, Claire recalls that her loved ones saw silence as a useful coping strategy and a healing process leading to forgetting.[56] The flow of her oral interview, which she gave long after her father's and husband's deaths, is often interrupted by outbreaks of crying or silence when touching upon the fate of her son. In this way, after years of renunciation, holding back, and self-censorship, it became a traumatic outcry.

Claire herself admitted how mentally exhausted and sick she had been when arriving in Greece and clearly recalls what her parents-in-law told her upon their first meeting in Athens: "[t]his is not a woman, she is ready to die". Constantly in tears and barely speaking, Claire had only one set of questions: "[w]here is my husband? Where is my child? Where is my house?" After the murder of her son in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Claire felt upon her return to Greece that her daughter had also been stolen from her. When Claire made the recovery of Ester from Palestine the ultimate goal, her second husband did not oppose. At the same time, he discouraged her from talking about the camp incarceration. "[t]his is a page you have to turn", Alfred Beza used to say, as she recalls. More to encourage than to reprimand her, Claire's father commented on her state of mind, indicating not to call back all of the bad memories: "you already died once". But she felt that the silencing had just the opposite effect. In the late stage of Claire's life, despite all family efforts and, as she said, with "no trust in anyone", she still considered herself "remaining in there [in Auschwitz] with [her] son".[57]

Comments made by her extended family regarding Claire's loss are more general. Perhaps most telling in this context is how her nephew Andreas framed it in his VHA interview, when speaking about the Jewish community in post-war Thessaloniki: "[t]here was a lot of desperation. New couples were formed. Husbands lost their wives and vice versa. […] There were people who were deprived of their families and created new ones. They all remembered the family they had lost. They emigrated".[58] In his dense account there were no names, but it seems as if Andreas was referring to the fates of Claire and Ester. Curiously, Claire's name occurs in his VHA interview only a few times: first when speaking about the four Matalon daughters and family life before the war, second when Claire and Germaine return from the Nazi camps, and third when showing prewar family pictures. This is also the only time he relates to his cousin Ninika (Ester Florentin). While he describes the pitiful physical state of Claire upon her return, as she had lost her hair due to typhus and was not able to sleep in a real bed anymore, Andreas adds that his other aunt, Germaine, was "lucky because she found her girls".[59]

55 Pardo, *548 imeres me allo onoma*, 94–95.
56 VHA-43697, Beza interview.
57 Ibid.
58 VHA-48935, Seficha interview.
59 Ibid.

Germaine, however, was also heavily traumatised as a mother, especially after she was confronted with the fact that her daughters already started to call their guardian "mother" and did not recognise Germaine anymore.[60] At that moment, she concealed from the girls that their father had died. As the girls had been told in the monastery in which they were safeguarded during the war that their parents had escaped to the Middle East, Germaine's daughters believed that their family would reunite. That kind lie was at least for a while nourished by their mother, who hesitated to tell them what had really happened to Sabetai Cohen.[61] Later in their life, they frame Germaine's post-war attitude in the following way:

> Mother didn't talk about the camps, about the loss she had experienced, about the hardships she had experienced. But I remember her talking about how hungry she was and she made sure we had enough food. My mother was an optimistic person, hardworking and active. She made sure to restore normalcy to our lives. She talked about her desire [for us] to be educated and to work.[62]

The "normalcy", "optimism" and, at the same time, silence about the internment, mixed with future prospects for a happy life, "work" and "education", are typical for survivors who try to protect their children born both before and after the Holocaust.[63]

Although Claire repeatedly related to the restrictions placed on her by her post-war husband and father, she never mentioned that her daughter had pressed her to do the same, making it her way of protecting her child. However, Ester has frequently regretted that she never let her mother talk, confessing that, in her dreams, she is "trying to hide [her] kids so that they cannot take them" and feeling that she, too, was forced into silence. This signalises that Ester was strongly influenced by her mother's experience and that the Holocaust trauma was transmitted to the next generation.

Claire, according to her daughter, was consumed by her loss but never sought help from a psychologist. Ester, however, resorted to such a solution late in life after suffering from a paralysing anxiety about going out on the street, which was due to disturbed ties within the Matalon family. Its cause was not a mother's trauma because of her son, but rather the family property issues following the death of Moise Matalon in 1966. This family conflict, which might not have occurred if the husbands of both deported sisters had survived and been able to continue their endeavours, does not surface in any of the narrations for oral history collections. Its details remained concealed even in my interviews of 2020 and 2022.[64]

Conclusion

Due to the successful escape of the Matalon family from Thessaloniki to Athens, as apparent from the personal accounts presented in this article, part of the family identity was built based on this agency. The credit for survival was, however, ascribed hierarchically, following apparently the male line, and materialised in the figure of the grandfather, Moise Matalon. Only Ester reflects on the endeavour of her father to

60 VHA-48674, Koen interview.
61 HVT-3009, Germain C.; JMG/OHA-051, Mioni (with sisters).
62 Koen, Israilitiki Kinotita Athinon, https://athjcom.gr/politismos/εκδήλωση-για-το-μπλόκο-της-συναγωγής-ε/, 30 June 2022.
63 Kangisser Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel,* 89–91.
64 Amaraggi, interview; Cohen, interview; Florentin, interview.

move the family to Palestine as a possibly better and more viable option. Nevertheless, given the Matalons' loyalty to Greece, and perhaps the overall political climate in Greece as well as the state's position regarding Zionism, which Ester learned to operate with, her suggestion remains indirect.

In contrast, the silence in the Cohen family regarding the father and the process of rescue is connected to the fact that the family members on the father's side consciously decided to stay in Thessaloniki, which resulted in their deportation and extermination in the Nazi camps. Living with the survivors' guilt of escaping and thus abandoning their loved ones in need undoubtedly contributed to their incapability to articulate their voice in this regard, instigating an attachment trauma between the adult deportees and their children. When combining the multifold personal accounts of one family and putting them into conversation, such silences become all the more apparent.

This also applies to the Holocaust survivor identity of the adult family members in hiding and the post-war hierarchisation of suffering. None of them ever delivered their personal accounts, nor do the two generations of Nazi camps survivors – the adult family members and their children who survived in hiding – refer to each other to a great extent. They only remain somewhat present in the narrations of their own children, Andreas and Maurice. Once only the mothers returned from the Nazi camps, their children willingly assigned them with another kind of agency, especially as regards family reunion and property restitution. However, none of the narrators seem to mention the misfortune of anyone other than members of their nuclear family by name or in detail. The social trauma of unrecognised Holocaust survivor identity shifts to some degree with the official acknowledgment of hidden children in the 1990s, when finally the Matalon grandchildren are given a voice, which subsequently gives power to their own story of survival and resonates until nowadays.

Once we regard the Matalon family as a specific mnemonic community, the internalised silence appears not only as a personal or submissive decision, a kind of self-prescribed coping strategy, but also as part of sociocultural family practices. This is even more true in regard to family property, when disturbed family ties become part of the unwritten conspiracy of silence leading sometimes to the need for therapeutic engagement. And, whereas some attitudes which have been questioned by the Greek government still remain veiled in silence in the narrations, others found their way out and are articulated rather freely. Again, the Jewish property restitution is quite telling. Although the narrators do not hesitate to speak in detail about how their families succeeded or not to reacquire their assets, they are hesitant to mention the names of Greek collaborators and do not open the question of antisemitism or anti-Zionism in Greece. That gives us the notion that even though their actions make them feel proud within their own mnemonic community, at least in Greece they still fear being an out-group.

What remains concealed both formally and informally within the Matalon family is the conflict between Greek and Jewish identities and the Jewish participation in the leftist resistance during the war. In light of the civil war, it has taken Greece long to recognise the leftist resistance and acknowledge Greek collaboration during the Holocaust (that is, in fact, a still lingering debt to the past). Thus, it has been difficult for the Holocaust survivors to overcome their silence, which over decades remains a social trauma. Therefore, while institutionally inducted silence has been broken in terms of property restitution, it has remained present in relation to Greek identity, resistance and collaboration. As regards the family, the once sociocultural silence determined by gender has been overcome, but disruption based on hurt feelings re-

garding family assets still persists as ineffable. On a personal level, and even transmitted to the next generation, what is most dominant is the unspeakable, deeply internalised guilt of loss combined with the guilt of a Holocaust survivor.

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Lovro Kralj

A Microcosmos of Fascism in the Age of Genocide

German Nazis, Croatian Ustašas, and the Hungarian Arrow Cross in the City of Osijek

Abstract

By combining microhistorical and regional approaches with theoretical findings from fascism, Holocaust, and genocide studies, this chapter examines the interaction between the Nazi, Ustaša and Arrow Cross movements in the city of Osijek. By analyzing the ideologies and praxis of the three fascist movements, this paper demonstrates that the future they wanted to build remained vague, contested, and contradictory despite many shared goals and enemies. Instead of bringing the three fascist movements together, antisemitism became a tool of competitive nation-building which contributed to the failure to create a genuinely transnational fascist front in a single city. Determining the pace of genocidal destruction became an instrument in the competitive fascist-elite-building. By relying on the concept of "genocidal consolidation", this chapter argues that the Holocaust in Osijek became one of the primary means in the attempted consolidation of power by one fascist group at the expense of the other. Attempts to neutralize rival fascist elites in the struggle for political dominance on the regional level brought unintended consequences of significantly delaying the deportations of Jews of Osijek compared to the cities in the Independent State of Croatia.

During the summer of 1941, a wave of antisemitic demonstrations swept the streets of Osijek, one of the largest cities in World War Two Croatia. Fascists, political activists, and ordinary citizens of the Croatian, German, and Hungarian ethnicities joined together in their demands that the city be "cleansed" of Jews. The seemingly harmonious scenes of fascists marching side by side, unified by antisemitism, suggests a triumph of transnational fascist ideas, which were to unite fascists of different national colours in their joint advance towards the "New Order". However, this article argues that a closer examination of the relationship between the Croatian Ustaša, German Nazi and Hungarian Arrow Cross movements paints a far more convoluted picture that raises several questions regarding the history of fascism, antisemitism, genocide, and the Holocaust, which are relevant not only for national, but also international, historiographies.

Historian Arnd Bauerkämper has warned his colleagues dealing with the history of fascism not to "exaggerate harmony between the national movements and groups". He has invited scholars to pay greater attention to and integrate conflicts within, and among, various fascist movements into contemporary historiography.[1] Others, such as historian Aron Brouwer, have criticised the contemporary approaches to transna-

1 Arnd Bauerkämper, "Between Cooperation and Conflict: Perspectives of Historical Research on Transnational Fascism," in *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, eds. Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 356.

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tional fascism by arguing that the term is "at least partially – paradoxical" because fascists gave precedence to the core idea of *nationalism* and there was not much room left for the *trans* part. Brower has further noted that "the current theoretical frameworks for understanding cross-border collaboration and interaction between fascists is limited" in contemporary scholarship, and he suggests a novel analytical concept of the "pan-fascist paradox".[2]

While the field of fascism studies is increasingly employing a transnational approach that tackles various methodological and conceptual questions, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the dynamics of fascist interactions between different movements on the regional and local levels.[3] By applying approaches from studies of fascism, the Holocaust, and antisemitism to a regional case study of Osijek, this paper examines the multifaceted interaction among different fascist movements on a local level with regards to the Holocaust. How did the cooperation and hostilities among different fascist movements impact the implementation of antisemitic measures, violence, and the decision-making behind the Holocaust on the local level?

Osijek is a particularly suitable subject for such a study because various fascist movements in the city espoused virulent antisemitism. However, the Holocaust survivor Aleksandar Goldstajn noted after the war that "the massive tragedy of the Jewish people was delayed in Osijek in comparison to other locations in Croatia".[4] Indeed, while parts of the community were deported in August 1941, most Jews remained in the city of Osijek for the next twelve months. Thus, the comprehensive deportations of Jews from Osijek were implemented significantly later than in some other cities and towns across the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna država Hrvatska*, NDH), such as Varaždin, Križevci, Bijeljina, or Sarajevo, as will be discussed later. Holocaust survivors such as Vlado and Nada Salzberger tackled the question of the "long gap" regarding the deportations of Jews from Osijek, ascribing it to the specific "ethnic make-up" of the city. The Salzbergers argued that the decision-making regarding the deportation of Jews from Osijek was slowed because of the power struggle between Germans and Croats on the local level. Determining the tempo of the persecution of Jews, including the requisition of their property, as well as their deportations, became a means of asserting power over the entire city. Thus, the Jewish Religious Community – an institution which performed a similar role to the Jewish Council in Nazi-occupied Europe – became a battleground for the struggle between the local German and Croatian fascists.[5]

The history of the Holocaust in Osijek is therefore ridden with contradictions. While no less than three fascist movements were active in the city, it was also one of the last places in the NDH where large-scale deportations occurred. With the aim of addressing this seeming paradox, this article examines how different ethnic groups and fascist movements interpreted antisemitic ideologies and policies, as well as how

2 Aron Brouwer, "The Pan-Fascist Paradox," *Fascism* 11, no. 1 (2022): 2, 29.

3 For a regional approach, see Samuel Huston Goodfellow, "Fascism as a Transnational Movement: The Case of Inter-War Alsace," *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 1 (2013): 87–106. For examples of studies dealing with the transnational history of fascism, see Jordan Kuck, "Renewed Latvia: A Case Study of the Transnational Fascism Model," *Fascism* 2, no. 2 (2013): 183–204; Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, eds., *Fascism without Borders*; Johannes Dafinger and Dieter Pohl, eds., *A New National Europe under Hitler: Concepts of Europe and Transnational Networks in the National Socialist Sphere of Influence, 1933–1945* (New York: Routledge: 2019); Ángel Alcalde, "The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research," *Contemporary European History* 29, no. 2 (2020): 243–252; Brouwer, "The Pan-Fascist Paradox," 1–30.

4 Goldstajn, Aleksandar, Interview 6204, Segments 42–43, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995. Accessed 30 March 2021.

5 Aleksandar Gaon, ed., *We Survived …: Yugoslav Jews on the Holocaust*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: The Jewish Historical Museum, Federation of Jewish Communities in Yugoslavia, 2005), 145–146.

they adapted antisemitism and tailored it to serve their specific ideological aims. This article argues that each fascist movement in Osijek instrumentalised antisemitism in service of its own national agenda, with these national agendas differing from each other significantly. While the antisemitism of each movement maintained certain universal and transnational elements, it was also increasingly tailored to the needs of particularistic national projects. Therefore, instead of bringing the three fascist movements together, antisemitism became a tool of competitive nation-building. Fascists in Osijek thus instrumentalised genocide not only to eliminate the outgroups identified as Serbs, Jews, and Roma, but also to reduce the power of rival political organisations.

The Making of a Microcosmos of Fascism

Located on the southern bank of the Drava River, between the Danube River in the east and the Sava River to the south, the city of Osijek has held an important strategic position since its founding. Geographically part of the Pannonian basin, its fertile land was attractive to various peoples who migrated through the region. After the Habsburg monarchy took over the city in the seventeenth century, a migration wave thoroughly changed its social fabric. Expelled Muslims were replaced with waves of German, Hungarian, and South Slavic-speaking populations.

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes brought substantial political, economic, and demographic changes. Much like in the rest of southeastern Europe, the Hungarian and German-speaking populations were shaken by the severance of economic and political ties with the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as the emergence of new nation-states in which they became a minority. Up to 25 per cent of ethnic Hungarians, as well as almost 3,000 German speakers, left the regions surrounding Osijek after World War One. In their stead, approximately 40,000 "Serbian volunteers" who served in the army of the Kingdom of Serbia received fertile plots of land to settle in the regions of Slavonia and Syrmia.[6]

The interwar history of Osijek was marked by a series of political conflicts between Serbian, Croatian, and Yugoslav nationalist organisations. However, political violence was sometimes also applied on an intra-ethnic axis, against members of the ethnic community who diverged in their political beliefs.[7] Even though anti-Jewish sentiments were on the rise in the 1930s, which led to antisemitic incidents in Osijek, those concerning themselves with the "Jewish question" remained on the margins of city politics.[8]

After 1933, the German minority in Yugoslavia witnessed the arrival of a new generation of leaders, the so-called "Rejuvenators" (*Erneuerer*), who argued for a re-

6 Filip Škiljan, *Organizirana prisilna iseljavanja Srba iz NDH* [The Forced Expulsions of Serbs from the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Srpsko narodno vijeće, 2014), 115.

7 Zdravko Dizdar, "Osnivanja i djelatnost četničkih udruženja na području grada i kotara Osijek u monarhističkoj Jugoslaviji (1918.–1941.) (Drugi dio)" [The Founding of Chetnik Associations and Their Activities in the City and District of Osijek during the Yugoslav Monarchy], *Scrinia Slavonica: godišnjak Podružnice za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje Hrvatskog instituta za povijest* 6, no. 1 (2006): 342–401. See also Željko Karaula, *HANAO – Hrvatska nacionalna omladina: teroristička organizacija mladih u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca (1921.–1925.)* [HANAO – Croatian Nationalist Youth Organisation: Terrorist Organisation of Youth in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes 1921–1925] (Zagreb: Naklada Breza, 2011), 107–108.

8 Croatian State Archives, The National Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Committed by the Occupiers and their Collaborators, HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 187, The Vinski Report.

awakening of a stronger German identity based on Nazi ideology. The leader of the Rejuvenators in Osijek, Branimir Altgayer, denounced the previous leaders of the German community as "clerical" and insufficiently nationalistic.[9] He managed to establish himself as one of the key leaders of the Osijek *Kulturbund* (Cultural Federation) – one of the main ethnic German organisations in Yugoslavia.[10] The increasing alignment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany in the second half of the 1930s made the German minority an important political power broker. Altgayer received instructions from Berlin to support the Yugoslav government. He considered that cooperation with the dominant Serbian parties could be more beneficial than with the Croatian parties, which he described as "powerless in every regard".[11]

In the 1938 elections, approximately 120,000 Germans voted for Milan Stojadinović, a Serbian politician who was dedicated to forging closer ties with Germany.[12] Leaders of the dominant Croatian Peasant Party (*Hrvatska seljačka stranka*, HSS), who counted on the votes of German peasants, considered this a stab in the back by the leadership of the Kulturbund. One of the leaders of the HSS in Slavonia, Stjepan Hefer, himself of German origin, accused Branimir Altgayer and the Rejuvenators of collaborating with the regime in Belgrade. He warned German leaders to rethink their political steps, because "nobody knows what might happen tomorrow" when Croats win their liberty.

In 1939, the HSS managed to negotiate an autonomous Croatian entity called the "Banovina of Croatia". Seeing that the HSS was now in charge of large swaths of land populated by ethnic Germans, Altgayer demanded a meeting with Hefer due to rumours that the German minority would be "liquidated" and to fears that there would be attempts to assimilate Germans into the Slavic majority.[13] Members of the HSS were in turn frustrated with the Kulturbund's relentless attempts at the national homogenisation of real and alleged ethnic Germans. Kulturbund members were known to come into various villages and threaten Croats with German-sounding last names to either join the organisation or be blacklisted as "traitors" who "would be deported to concentration camps" once Hitler would conquer these lands.[14] When various members of the HSS complained against such practices, Altgayer responded that the "Croats should be careful. Otherwise, they will end up like the Czechs."[15]

9 Vladimir Geiger, "Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera vođe Njemačke narodne skupine u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj u Upravi državne bezbjednosti za Narodnu Republiku Hrvatsku 1949. godine" [The Interrogation of Branimir Altgayer, the Leader of the German National Group in the Independent State of Croatia, in the Office for National Security of the People's Republic of Croatia in 1949] *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 31, no. 3 (1999): 579.

10 For a detailed elaboration of the history of the Kulturbund and a *longue durée* analysis of interethnic relations in Slavonia, see Carl Bethke. *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache? Aspekte deutsch-jüdischer Beziehungsgeschichte in Slawonien, 1900–1945* (Berlin: LIT, 2013).

11 Zdravko Krnić and Martin Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji* [Sources on the History of the National Liberation Struggle in Slavonia], vol 1 (Slavonski Brod: Historijski arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, 1962): 127–128; Main Security Office in Zagreb (RAVSIGUR) to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the NDH, 28 August 1941.

12 Suzana Leček, "Hrvatska seljačka stranka i Nijemci u Hrvatskoj (1918.–1941.)" [The Croatian Peasant Party and Germans in Croatia (1918–1941)], in *Nijemci u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini: nova istraživanja i perspektive* [Germans in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina: New Research and Perspectives], ed. Enes Omerović (Sarajevo and Zagreb: Institut za istoriju and Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2015), 259.

13 State Archives in Osijek, HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., Document number AP-XXII/H – 8/14, Letter of Branimir Altgayer to Stjepan Hefer, 31 August 1939.

14 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., Letter from Čačinci to Stjepan Hefer, 15 January 1941.

15 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943. Letter of Mirko Vulanac to Stjepan Hefer, 16 March 1940.

After the coup d'état in Belgrade on 27 March 1941 deposed the pro-German government of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, representatives of the Nazified Kulturbund from across the country were invited to an urgent meeting in Novi Sad.[16] Leaders of the Kulturbund, Altgayer included, met on 1 April 1941 and awaited the Axis invasion of Yugoslavia, which began on 6 April 1941. The attack on Yugoslavia was considered an opportunity for the leaders of the Kulturbund to flex their muscles and assert themselves as the future political elite in the region. They entertained a vague idea of carving out parts of Yugoslavia populated with ethnic Germans and of creating an autonomous region under their control, or a new *Gau* – a regional political and administrative unit attached directly to the Third Reich. To their disappointment, such proposals were rejected by Berlin, and they were instead informed that the regions of Slavonia and Syrmia would be incorporated into the newly established NDH.[17] A small concession was made in creating a semi-autonomous territory in Banat where the local ethnic Germans took the position of a decision-making elite. Even though the proposition of a German state in the Lower Danube was a "wild political fantasy", as the historian Mirna Zakić has put it,[18] it continued to feed the fears of some Croats that ethnic Germans would agitate for similar ideas in the future.

While Altgayer was in Novi Sad, Wehrmacht units entered the city of Osijek, where they were greeted by cheering crowds waving Nazi flags. They encountered a multi-ethnic city with more than 40,000 residents. The relative majority was held by Croats, followed by Germans who made up roughly a third of population. Other ethnic groups included Serbs who constituted about 15 per cent, Hungarians 7 per cent, and Jews 6 per cent of the city's population.[19] In the months following the occupation, the coexistence between these ethnic groups started to fragment as the city came under the increasing pressure of quickly emerging fascist organisations which competed for control over Jewish and Serbian property, government buildings, and other important resources in the city.

The Croatian fascist Ustaša movement, which did not have a significant following in the interwar period, emerged as nominally the only permitted political organisation in the newly formed NDH. The Ustaša programme considered the multiethnic nature of the NDH a threat. Reducing the number of minorities through ethnic cleansing and social engineering was of utmost importance to the Ustaša leadership

16 Geiger, "Saslušanje Branimira Altgayera," 584–585.

17 Krnić and Kaminski, *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, vol. 1, 329, German National Group in Croatia: Current Situation and Development from April to November 1941, 5 December 1941.

18 Mirna Zakić, *Ethnic Germans and National Socialism in Yugoslavia in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 77.

19 According to the 1931 census, the total population of the city of Osijek was 40,337. There was no ethnic census and only religion and language were included as criteria. There were 30,330 Roman Catholics, followed by 5,884 Orthodox Christians, 2,445 Jews, and 1,049 Protestants. According to language, 26,382 opted for Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue, followed by 9,731 who spoke German, and 2,839 Hungarian speakers. An approximation of the ethnic composition can be made through the imprecise method of considering all Orthodox Christians as Serbs, and then by deducting the Hungarian and German speakers and Jews to arrive at the number of Croats. *Definitivni rezultat popisa stanovništva od marta 1931 godine* (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1938), X. According to Pavle Vinski, who made an extensive report about the persecution of Jews in Osijek, the number of Germans just before the war was 18,000 out of the entire city population of 42,000. This would set the percentage of Germans at almost 43 per cent. Even though it is quite possible that there were more people who identified themselves as ethnic Germans than was captured by the census of 1931, because it only acknowledged the language that an individual considered as their mother tongue, I find Vinski's number too inflated for the interwar period. However, it is possible that Vinski used this number to refer to 1941, when a significant number of Serbs and Croats decided to declare themselves as ethnic Germans in order to reap the benefits offered by being a member of the German National Community, a political organisation. See HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 187.

and it became an integral part of the regime's policies.[20] In Osijek, which was in the northeast of the NDH, the Ustašas together with members of the Kulturbund (rebranded as the *Deutsche Volksgruppe in Kroatien* (German National Group in Croatia)[21] immediately unleashed terror against Serbs, Jews, and political enemies. In the first days after the occupation, the Volksgruppe spearheaded the persecution of Jews and the takeover of their property, while the Ustašas focused on the persecution of Serbs.[22]

The Arrow Cross in Osijek

The Hungarian Arrow Cross was the least numerous of the three fascist movements in Osijek. Yet, its members were ambitious and active, aspiring to turn Osijek into a breeding ground for political agitation outside of Hungary. It was Arrow Cross members who organised one of the first antisemitic demonstrations in the city in early May 1941.[23] Dressed in their green uniforms and waving flags with party symbolism, they bore standards with trilingual inscriptions in Hungarian, German, and Croatian declaring "victory persists".[24]

Members of the Arrow Cross marching through the streets of Osijek in 1941. Source: Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Judenfrage? (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 11. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 149.

20 Lovro Kralj, "The Evolution of Ustasha Mass Violence: Nation-Statism, Paramilitarism, Structure, and Agency in the Independent State of Croatia, 1941," in *Fascist Warfare, 1922–1945: Aggression, Occupation, Annihilation*, eds. Miguel Alonso, Alan Kramer, and Javier Rodrigo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 241–268.

21 The German National Group was formed in May 1941 as the main institution which was supposed to represent the interests of ethnic Germans (*Volksdeutsche*) in Croatia. It was modelled on a similar organisation in Romania. The seat of the German National Group, or Volksgruppe, in Croatia was in Osijek, and it was led by the *Volksgruppenführer* Branimir Altgayer. In this paper, when I use the term "Volksgruppe" I refer to the organisation, and when I use the term "Volksdeutsche" I refer to ethnic Germans. Volksdeutsche took the oath of allegiance to Hitler, and they had their own military formations in the form of the *Einsatzstaffel der Deutschen Mannschaft* [Action Corps of the German National Group], which by 1942 had around 1,500 men.

22 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number, 193, The Vinski Report.

23 Bethke, *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache?*, 291.

24 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 149, Hungarian National Group, *Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Juden Frage?*, Osijek 1942, 10–11.

The sights of marching columns of Ustaša, Nazi, and Arrow Cross members side by side in Osijek invoke the image of the ideal "New European Order", propagated at the time by various fascist intellectuals across the continent. Like many other fascist movements in Europe, all three groups shared a belief in the "history-making" project to bring about a new civilisation, one based on a radically transformed society. They saw themselves as the avant-garde of the "New Man", acting in the name of an "all-encompassing, regenerated nation-state". This was to be achieved through "creative destruction" which was supposed to annihilate the old world of perceived "decadence" and purify the nation in order to give birth to a new civilisation accomplished through anthropological revolution.[25]

Fascists shared a hostility against common enemies, primarily identified as communists, democrats, conservatives, and liberals.[26] In the minds of the Ustašas, Nazis, and the Arrow Cross, Jews epitomised everything they opposed. Antisemitism became a cultural code which projected all the wrongs of a "decadent" society onto Jews.[27] In Osijek, too, antisemitism was supposed to be a unifying force which would bring various agents together and harmonise life in a microcosmos of fascism. In 1942, the Ustaša regime, in cooperation with the German embassy in Zagreb, organised a joint "anti-Masonic" exhibition in Osijek. The exhibition was supposed to demonstrate a unified German-Croatian effort in a shared struggle against Jewry.[28] Members of the Arrow Cross visited the exhibition wearing uniforms and armbands and carrying flags with party symbolism. While little is known about their number, according to the Arrow Cross' own propaganda three thousand of its members visited the exhibition.[29] This number might have been inflated for propaganda purposes, and it certainly included members of the Arrow Cross from across the NDH, since the number of attendees exceeded the total number of Hungarians in Osijek according to the 1931 census. Nonetheless, the Arrow Cross' activism and propaganda efforts demonstrate its disproportionate visibility, as well as its ability to mobilise a significant number of Hungarians in Croatia around its ideology.

In 1942, the Arrow Cross in Osijek published a propaganda booklet written in Hungarian, Croatian, and German titled "The Jewish Question?" In it they showed admiration for Adolf Hitler, Ante Pavelić, and Ferenc Szálasi as the fascist triumvirate united in their struggle against Jews. The Osijek branch of the Arrow Cross lauded Hitler as "the great liberator of Europe from the Jewish-Bolshevik invasion". The leader of the Ustaša movement, Ante Pavelić, was praised as the one who "managed to solve the Jewish and Masonic question" within a year after coming to power. Finally, the leader of the Arrow Cross, Ferenc Szálasi, was depicted as a victim of Horthy's regime which, it was alleged, had imprisoned him because of his "opposi-

25 Aristotle Kallis, "Transnational Fascism: The Fascist New Order, Violence, and Creative Destruction," in *Fascism without Borders*, eds. Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, 41.

26 Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, "Introduction: Fascism without Borders. Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe, 1918–1945," in *Fascism without Borders*, eds. Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, 3.

27 The idea of antisemitism as a cultural code was developed by Shulamit Volkov in the end of the 1970s by building upon and further developing the ideas of Clifford Geertz. She applied her interpretative model primarily to a case study of the German Empire. Yet, the concept of antisemitism as a cultural code is transferrable to other periods as well. For further elaboration, see Shulamit Volkov, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23, no. 1 (1978): 25–46.

28 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan (Esteban) Hefer, odvjetnik političar, veliki župan župe Baranjske [Stjepan (Esteban) Hefer, Lawyer, Politician, and the Head of the Baranya County], box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno [German National Group – Various Files], 1937.–1943, document number 8-588, Letter of the German Embassy in Zagreb sent to Veliki Župan Stjepan Hefer, 24 February 1942.

29 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 173, Hungarian National Group. *Zsidó Kérdés?*, 35.

Members of the Arrow Cross visiting the "anti-masonic" exhibition in Osijek in 1942. Source: Zsidó Kérdés? Židovsko Pitanje? Die Judenfrage? (Osijek: Hungarian National Group, September 1942), 12. HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 150.

tion to Jewish plutocracy". Osijek's Arrow Cross members announced that Szálasi "will solve the racial question and bring harmony for all working nations so that they can earn their daily bread. He will cleanse this beautiful homeland of ours of Jews."[30] While the Arrow Cross, as well as the other two fascist movements, used antisemitism as a consensus-building tool which could transcend political and other divisions in the city, it becomes clear upon a closer examination that the differences between Osijek's fascists persisted.

Where did the "homeland of ours" that Osijek's Arrow Cross members referred to in their propaganda begin and where did it end? They supported the ideal of a Greater Hungary or, as Szálasi put it, a Hungarian state which is territorially "circumscribed by the Carpathians and stretching out to the Adriatic". According to this perspective, the Croatian lands were supposed to be a part of the *Hungária Egyesült Földek* (United Lands of Hungary). Moreover, Szálasi considered only the Germans, Italians, and Hungarians to be among the "leading" nations of Europe. Therefore, the Croats were supposed to be subjugated to the Hungarian "masterclass".[31] This stood in clear contradiction to the Ustaša's territorial and ideological aspirations. According to the *Načela Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* (Principles of the Croatian Ustaša Movement), one of its founding documents, the Croats could be the only sovereign nation in the NDH. Moreover, the Ustašas argued that "only those who are descendants of Croats by blood can govern [*odlučuju*] in Croatia".[32] Despite the fact that Arrow Cross members in Osijek toned down their Greater Hungarian rhetoric, their overall ideology could not coexist on an equal footing in the NDH with that of the Ustaša.

30 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 172, Hungarian National Group. *Zsidó Kérdés?*, 34.
31 Áron Szele, "The Arrow Cross: The Ideology of Hungarian Fascism – A Conceptual Approach" (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2015), 99, 106.
32 Danijel Crljen, *Načela Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta* [The Principles of the Croatian Ustaša Movement] (Zagreb, 1942), 60, 63.

The Ustašas viewed the Arrow Cross with suspicion. According to their own reports, most Hungarians in Croatia would have preferred to live under Hungarian sovereignty.[33] The presence of ethnic Hungarians in the region around Osijek was considerable as they populated fifty-eight different villages and towns and amounted to almost 10 per cent of the entire population in the region.[34] The feeling of a threatening Hungarian irredentism was especially felt in Osijek since the city was located right on the border with Hungary. The Ministry of the Interior of the NDH concluded in December 1941 that Hungarian agents were infiltrating Croatia and "spreading the news that Syrmia and Slavonia will be annexed to the Hungarian crown".[35]

Ethnic Hungarians, much like Croats and Germans, did not single-heartedly support the fascist movements which claimed to represent them. Hungarians were deeply divided between supporting the Hungarian Cultural Community (*Horvátországi Magyar Közművelődési Közösség/Mađarska kulturna zajednica*) with its seat in Zagreb, and the Arrow Cross with its seat in Osijek. However, the tensions between the Hungarian Cultural Community and the Arrow Cross ran so high that they often applied physical violence against each other.[36]

Osijek's Arrow Cross members travelled across the NDH in a relentless effort to recruit as many ethnic Hungarians as possible. They weaponised antisemitism in an attempt to discredit the rival Hungarian Cultural Community by arguing that the latter's members were covertly helping Jews to migrate from Croatia to Hungary. The Arrow Cross stressed that such actions ran contrary to the principle of "national socialism" and that they were a stain on all Hungarians in the NDH.[37] In a subsequent investigation, the Croatian authorities completely rejected these Arrow Cross claims, concluding that there was no evidence to support their accusations against fellow Hungarians from a rival organisation.[38]

The Arrow Cross members attempted to create a Hungarian National Community that would be modelled on the German Volksgruppe, aiming to monopolise the political representation of ethnic Hungarians in Croatia. Despite their energetic activism in seeking to mobilise new members, the majority of ethnic Hungarians in Croatia refused to join the Arrow Cross.[39] Available evidence suggests that the Arrow Cross could perhaps muster the sympathy of, at best, up to a third of all Hungarians living in the NDH.[40] Further efforts of the Arrow Cross to increase its power were "obstructed" by the Ustaša authorities in Osijek. The Ustašas blocked the Arrow Cross' efforts to formalise its organisation and therefore denied it legitimacy. The Croatian authorities argued that Hungarians could organise themselves on cultural

33 Davor Kovačić, "Pitanje Međimurja u redarstveno-obavještajnim odnosima Nezavisne Države Hrvatske i Kraljevine Mađarske u Drugom svjetskom ratu" [The Međimurje Question as a Security and Intelligence Concern in the Relationship between the Independent State of Croatia and the Kingdom of Hungary during the Second World War], *Polemos: časopis za interdisciplinarna istraživanja rata i mira* [Polemos: Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on War and Peace] 13, no. 26 (2010): 69.

34 HR-DAOS-1281, box 1, Stjepan Brlošić, *Osijek i okolina u Narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi* [Osijek and its Surroundings during the National Liberation Struggle], Chapter III, unpublished manuscript, 21–22.

35 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa*, vol. 1, 399, Report of the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 18 December 1941.

36 Marica Karakaš Obradov, "Dobrovoljna i prisilna preseljenja u Hrvatskoj tijekom Drugog svjetskog rata i poraća" [Voluntary and Forced Resettlement in Croatia during the Second World War and Post-war Period] (PhD dissertation, Hrvatski studiji 2011), 236–237.

37 HR-HDA-1521, box 36, book XIV, 272, Hungarian National Group (Affiliated with the Arrow Cross) to Gospodarsko redarstvo pri državnoj riznici [Economic Inspection of the State Treasury], 20 July 1941.

38 HR-HDA-1521, box 36, book XIV, 275, Ministry of the Interior of the NDH to the German Embassy, 18 March 1944.

39 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), RG-61.030, HR-DABJ 20-7, 90, District of Grubišno Polje to Velika Župa Bilogora, 21 October 1941.

40 Bethke. *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache?*, 336.

grounds but concluded that nationalist activism should be avoided. The leader of the Arrow Cross in Osijek, Antun Kovač, did his best to secure the support of the Croatian authorities by relying on arguments about shared fascist values. In October 1941, he wrote a letter to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH in which he argued that Arrow Cross members

> consider it our duty, to respect and defend this homeland of ours in which we live together. Therefore, we think that we have the same right to rally our brethren around us and prepare them for the new order. Through this, we can only affirm the brotherhood between our two nations […] we ask to be protected and to be allowed to continue with our work which we began among our brethren because we are all fighting for the same idea, here in the homeland as well as at the front, the creation of a new and more optimistic future of Europe.[41]

This Arrow Cross plea fell on deaf ears, as the organisation was closely monitored by the Ustaša secret service. In June 1942, the police arrested Kovač and his secretary under the suspicion that they were conducting espionage for the Hungarian authorities.[42] Soon afterwards, in September 1942, the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH declared that all the activities of the Arrow Cross in Croatia were "illegal", including the public display of any party symbols or flags associated with the organisation.[43] The goal of the Arrow Cross to create the Hungarian National Group inspired by the German Volksgruppe was thus a failure. Despite its ambition, the Arrow Cross could not rely on the institutional, diplomatic, and political capital of Hungary in comparison to the Volksgruppe, which skilfully used the Third Reich as leverage in Croatia. Nor did the Arrow Cross ever establish its political dominance over the majority of ethnic Hungarians in Croatian, unlike the Volksgruppe over the ethnic Germans. The Arrow Cross' relationship with the Ustašas was further strained by the question of Međimurje, a region in the north of Croatia which was annexed by Hungary after the occupation of Yugoslavia even though it was overwhelmingly populated by Croats. When Szálasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross, took power in Hungary in 1944, there were attempts to establish closer relations between the Ustašas and the Arrow Cross. For this purpose, the Hungarian minister of foreign affairs, Gábor Kemény, visited Pavelić, and they discussed the possibility of allowing Croats in Međimurje to form Ustaša party organisations, as well as of giving Hungary privileged access to the port city of Rijeka. The agreements were supposed to be finalised in a meeting between Szálasi and Pavelić that was being planned. However, upon Kemény's return from Zagreb, he gave a speech in which he proclaimed Hungary to be the dominant state in the Danube basin. This did not sit well with Pavelić, who saw this as a continuation of Hungarian imperialism and territorial expansion. Thus, all plans for another meeting between Pavelić and Szálasi were abandoned.[44]

41 Zdravko Krnić and Martin Kaminski, eds., *Građa*, vol. 1, 218–219, Antun Kovač to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 17 October 1941.

42 History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HM), fond UNS, box 2, file number 364, document number 1492, High Command of the 3rd Gendarmes Regiment to RAVSIGUR, 6 September 1942.

43 State Archives in Zagreb, HR-DAZG-26, Redarstvena oblast za grad Zagreb [Police District for Zagreb], box 874, file: Povjerljivi spisi/dnevne zapovijedi 1942 [Secret Files and Daily Orders 1942] (21/68), Order no. 47, 11 September 1942.

44 Hrvatski državni arhiv [Croatian State Archives], Služba državne sigurnosti [State Security Service], Republički sekretarijat za unutrašnje poslove Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske [Republican Secretariat for Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Croatia], HR-HDA-1561, 013.5.50, 22, Testimony of Mehmed Alajbegović, the last Minister of Foreign Affairs of the NDH.

The German Volksgruppe in Osijek

Even though the differences with the Arrow Cross and the fears of the Hungarian occupation of Osijek and its surroundings were considerable among the Ustaša, they were only secondary compared to the conflicts with the German Volksgruppe. The local Nazis were put into a contradictory position ever since the occupation of Yugoslavia. They were encouraged to perceive themselves as members of the "master race" destined to lead the new Europe as the continent's foremost elite. Yet, they were supposed to subjugate themselves to the decision-making of the de facto Slavic-led, second-tier fascist state of the NDH. Nevertheless, considering that the Third Reich was in their minds going to be the primary arbiter in international relations after the war, some members of the Volksgruppe in Osijek still fantasised about creating a German-led state in southeastern Europe. Paying homage to Eugen of Savoy, after whose conquests the intensive German settlement of southeastern Europe started, and who was idealised and refashioned as the champion of Germandom, the imagined state was referred to as "Prinz Eugenland".[45]

Ever since the occupation of Yugoslavia in April 1941, local Volksgruppe members took decisively independent steps in Osijek. They conducted mass arrests of Jews, confiscated the Jews' property, and took over the control of the Jewish Religious Community – an institution which served a similar role to the "Jewish councils" in Nazi-occupied Europe. Most of these actions were conducted independently from the Ustaša as the Croatian authorities were only being formed in April 1941. The independent actions of the Volksgruppe were seen as disruptive and potentially undermining of the monopoly over the force that the Ustaša and the local police wanted to establish for themselves. Upon intervention from the German embassy in Zagreb, they were brought into line. On 7 May 1941, representatives of the Volksgruppe in Osijek met with Wehrmacht and SS Security Service officials, as well as the newly appointed German ambassador in Croatia, Siegfried Kasche. He insisted that the Volksgruppe could not act in an independent way anymore. Kasche demanded that they submit to his will and pledge that they would cooperate with the new Croatian authorities. Volksgruppe members tried to legitimise their actions by arguing that Croats were too lenient towards Jews, but the ambassador insisted on a stop to any independent Volksgruppe action against Jews. He also demanded that the Volksgruppe hand over all of the Jewish valuables which it had confiscated so far, in order for the German embassy to mediate the redistribution of this property with the Ustaša regime.[46]

The issue of Jewish property heavily burdened the relationship between the Ustašas and the Volksgruppe in Osijek. The Ustašas feared that sharing any sign of an equitable financial "opportunity" with others (that is, the local German community) could result in the emergence of a new "foreign" economic elite. According to Ustaša ideology, this position was to be reserved exclusively for Croats. In other words, the Ustašas thought that replacing one "foreign" financial elite with another did not accomplish their promise of an ethnically homogenous state. Osijek's Ustašas were not exceptional in this line of argumentation; similar incidents were registered in Romania. As one leader of the Romanian fascist Iron Guard put it:

45 Slavica Hrečkovski et al., eds. *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji*, vol. 2 (Slavonski Brod: Historijski arhiv u Slavonskom Brodu, 1963), 264, Report of the High Command of the II. Domobran Group to the Chief of Staff of Domobrans, 5 July 1942.

46 HR-HDA-1521, Hans Helm – policijski izaslanik pri Poslanstvu Trećeg Reicha u Zagrebu, box 37, book XIX, 132, report titled "Dogovor u Osijeku" [An Agreement in Osijek], 8 May 1941.

> [w]hen Antonescu and Horia Sima came to power […], many Jews started to sell their companies. They felt threatened and tried to sell their businesses. To whom did they sell? In general, they sold to the Saxons [local ethnic Germans] and to German citizens. They had money. Very few ethnic Romanians possessed the necessary capital for investment […] In this way, these businesses entered into the hands of foreigners […] perhaps worse than the Jews, because they also had substantial political power.[47]

In Croatia, too, some Ustaša supporters referred to ethnic Germans as "Other Jews" due to the xenophobic projection that Germans, as foreigners, would dominate the political and economic landscape of Croatia.[48] The Ustašas in Osijek argued repeatedly that all companies "owned by Jews and foreigners" should be awarded to Croats. Being aware that relatively few Jewish businesses which were "Aryanised" ended up in Germans hands, Volksgruppe members argued that they could cement their economic prosperity by securing a monopoly on trading with all imported German-produced goods in the NDH.[49] However, this idea never came to fruition. The Ustašas and Nazis shared the antisemitic belief that Jews ran the economy, and this ironically placed the two fascist movements at odds with each other. They maintained that whoever controlled "Aryanisation" would control the economic future of the city. Therefore, the struggle over Jewish property became a battlefield for fascist elite-building and for securing dominance over future city politics.

A further point of contention between the Ustašas and the Volksgruppe was the emphasis on the racial superiority of the Germans, which disturbed many Croats.[50] Volksgruppe members considered themselves as pioneers of modernisation. They argued that Slavonia was a prosperous region because

> German craftsmen and German peasants contribute to the development of the economy through their progressive methods far more than their Croatian counterparts […]. This is the result of greater work capabilities, and the diligence of the German peasants and craftsmen […] the German peasant and craftsmen should be rightfully seen as the teacher of other nations in this region.[51]

Due to such attitudes, many local non-German residents expressed "dissatisfaction due to the arrogance of the German minority".[52] The feeling of resentment was further deepened by the special privileges that the Ustaša regime in Zagreb gave to the Volksgruppe. In August 1941, Branimir Altgayer, the leader of the Volksgruppe, wrote to the NDH authorities in Zagreb requesting that in "purely German" villages only Germans should have the right to hold public office, while in "mixed [German-Croatian]" municipalities this power should be shared. In the latter cases, no Croatian official should take public office without approval from the Volksgruppe.[53]

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47 As quoted in Stefan Cristian Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to "Romanianization", 1940–44* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 120–121.

48 Danijel Matijević, "Germans, Jews and 'Other' Jews: The Holocaust in Vukovar, Croatia, in Light of the Historical Record" (Presentation held at the Claims Conference Saul Kagan Fellowship in Advanced Shoah Studies, Online Summer Workshop, 19–23 July 2021).

49 Bethke, *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache?,* 275–277, 279.

50 Hrečkovski et. al., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 2, 283, Report of Velika Župa Baranja sent to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 11 July 1942.

51 Krniuć and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 333, German National Group in Croatia: Current Situation and Development from April to November 1941, 5 December 1941.

52 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 124–125, Command of the Osijek Division Area to the Ministry of Armed Forces of the NDH, 28 August 1941.

53 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., Branimir Altgayer, the leader of the German National Group to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 2 August 1941.

It seems that the authorities in Zagreb had given verbal consent to such a practice, which put the Volksgruppe in Slavonia in a powerful position from which they could influence the appointments in public offices across the regions around Osijek. The Ustaša elite in Zagreb considered this a minor concession because ethnic Germans constituted around 3 per cent of the population throughout the NDH. However, what was seen as a minor concession in Zagreb was a major political threat to the Ustašas in Osijek, where the number of ethnic Germans allegedly skyrocketed.

In mid-1941, a rumour started to circulate about the potential population census which was meant to take place in the NDH by the end of the year.[54] This created an incentive for the Volksgruppe to recruit as many members as possible to consolidate its power through the above-mentioned agreement. In other words, it had to "make" more Germans. This was, for example, reported by one of the local NDH officials from Slavonia in November 1941: "since the legal regulations gave certain privileges to the German National Group which are based on certain percentages [of the population in a given community] they are trying to raise their numbers from 8% to 20% by all available means".[55] The recruitment was primarily conducted among Serbs and Croats. Some Croats decided to declare themselves ethnic Germans under the promise that they would receive better food provisions, while others joined to evade military conscription since Germans did not have to serve in the NDH's armed forces.[56] The German recruitment campaign was a major success in certain areas. Some local German schools reported that they had up to 70 per cent of newly registered children who did not speak a single word of German.[57] Even though there was no census in 1941, Holocaust survivor Pavle Vinski estimated that there were 18,000 ethnic Germans in Osijek, which implied that their population had risen from around 24 per cent in 1931 to more than 40 per cent of the city population in 1941.[58]

One of the greatest thorns in the eye of the Ustaša was a perception that the Volksgruppe was recruiting ethnic Serbs, promising them protection from the Ustaša's genocidal campaign if Serbs declared themselves as ethnic Germans. The Ustaša saw this as an impediment against Croatian dominance.[59] According to a report which reached the German embassy in Zagreb, "the overwhelming majority of Ustaša [in Osijek] are agitating against the Volksdeutsche and Germany. The Ustaša claim that Germany is to be blamed for the insurrection in Croatia, because they did not allow the Ustaša to destroy the Serbs last year."[60] Therefore, in the eyes of some Ustašas,

54 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 341–342, Minutes from the Meeting of the Regional Leader [of the German National Group], 5 December 1941. See also Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 325, German National Group in Croatia: Current Situation and Development from April to November 1941, 5 December 1941.

55 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 258–259, Kotarska Oblast Virovitica to Velika Župa Baranja, 1 November 1941.

56 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 32, Zapovjedničtvo Osječkog divizijskog područja to Zapovjedniku kopnene vojske (Vojni ured), 18 June 1941.

57 Hrečkovski et. al., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 2, 282, Report of Velika Župa Baranja sent to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 11 July 1942.

58 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 365, Testimony of Holocaust survivor Pavle Vinski. Historian Zlata Živaković Kerže concurs with Vinski's estimates, arguing that the population of ethnic Germans grew from 14,000 in 1940 to 18,000 after the NDH was formed. See Zlata Živaković-Kerže, *Stradnja i pamćenja: Holokaust u Osijeku i život koji se nastavlja* (Osijek: Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baraje, Slavonski Brod, Židovska općina Osijek, 2006), 12.

59 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 226, Report of the High Command of the Osijek Divisonal Area, 18 October 1941.

60 HR-HDA-1521, Hans Helm – policijski izaslanik pri Poslanstvu Trećeg Reicha u Zagrebu, box 36, book VIII, file II "Ustaški pokret", 171, document dated 28 August 1942, document number 31/8, 2170/2.

ethnic Germans had become a genuine obstacle in the attempt to create an ethnically homogenous Croatian state.

Various Croatian officials complained to the state authorities in Zagreb that members of the German Volksgruppe were behaving as if "they are a state within a state" and demanded concrete instructions on how to deal with them.[61] In various localities, the Ustašas obstructed the formation of Volksgruppe organisations. For example, in one village the Ustašas prevented the participation of Volksgruppe members in a Labour Day celebration, threatening violence and issuing them a warning: "[w]e are not an occupied country".[62] In the nearby city of Vinkovci, located some thirty kilometres south of Osijek, Ivan Tolj, the head of the police, addressed similar concerns. He held a speech on 11 June 1941 in which he reportedly described his policy towards the Volksdeutsche in the following words:

> I am fully aware that certain secret channels and conspiratorial meetings are being held [by ethnic Germans]. They are planning various things […], I will annihilate this secrecy. I have prepared bullets for this occasion, and blood will flow. There are six million of us, and we will fight. I am the authority, and I have the police, gendarmes, and the military under my command. Either we will win, or we will die. Who do they [ethnic Germans] think they are to simply requisition the [Jewish owned] houses? I am a lawyer, and I know they cannot do this. I will stop this [wild] robbery. Germans are merely settler-colonists. This is Croatia, and only Croats have a say in how things should be. Those who do not like this can move out [of our country].[63]

The speech caused an uproar among the Volksgruppe members in Croatia, who declared Tolj to be an enemy of Germany. From a larger perspective, the conflicts between the Ustašas and the Volksgruppe remained issues of a regional nature, so only in those areas where ethnic Germans constituted a significant minority of the population. Locally, however, the relations between the Ustašas and the Volksgruppe reflected serious political conflict. Local leaders, such as Tolj, believed that their demand for the complete subjugation of the Volksgruppe to the Croatian authorities was consistent with the foundational principle of Ustaša ideology that held that "only full-blooded Croats can govern in Croatia".[64] Moreover, pursuant to the totalitarian aspects of Ustaša ideology, Tolj aimed to eliminate any competing political organisations that were outside of the control of the state. In one of his meetings with local Volksgruppe leaders, Tolj warned them not to disseminate propaganda without his prior approval. When Volksgruppe members argued that they did not answer to him, Tolj responded that "those who do not abide and respect the laws [of the NDH] will get a bullet in the head. I will issue a warrant for the arrest of those who are printing and spreading these [German] propaganda posters."[65] Following a series of con-

61 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 35, High Command of the Osijek Division Area to the High Command of the Land Forces (Military Office), 18 June 1941. See also Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 248, Report of the High Command of the Osijek Division Area, 28 October 1941, and 258–259, Kotarska Oblast Virovitica to Velika Župa Baranja, 1 November 1941.

62 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 17, Report of the leader of the German minority in Croatia – Branimir Altgayer, 12 May 1941.

63 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 455, Report of the German National Group from the Sava-Dunav district with the seat in Vinkovci, 31 December 1941.

64 Crljen, *Načela Hrvatskog ustaškog pokreta*, 63.

65 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 452–453, Report of the German National Group from the Sava-Dunav district with the seat in Vinkovci, 31 December 1941.

flicts with Tolj, Volksgruppe members intervened with the central authorities of the NDH and insisted that he had to be removed from his position due to "anti-German attitudes" and the "mistreatment of Germans".[66] Their plea was successful, and Tolj was forced to leave Vinkovci; he received a new position in the city of Bijeljina, where he continued to exercise his power.

The conflicts between the Volksgruppe and the Ustašas did not remain at the verbal, written, or abstract ideological level. It sometimes escalated into open violence. In the summer of 1942, members of the Ustaša Youth who were armed with pistols organised an attack on the Hitler Youth in Osijek. They surrounded its headquarters with the intention of starting a full attack, but their intentions were obstructed by the police, who prevented the bloodshed with timely intervention.[67] In other cases, conflicts escalated into outright violence, such as in the village of Kapan, where the Volksgruppe tried to disarm the local Ustašas after they harassed local ethnic Germans. The Ustašas refused to surrender their weapons and, in the ensuing brawl, three Ustašas were wounded. In a later incident, ethnic Germans occupied the local school and refused to host classes in Croatian. The Ustašas intervened and tried to force ethnic Germans to accept Croatian children. However, they were chased away by an armed mob of local Germans.[68]

Besides the common arguments that the Ustašas were generally incompetent, corrupt, and disorganised governors, one of the most widely used accusations by the Volksgruppe against the Ustašas was the misleading notion that they were not antisemitic enough. For example, Branimir Altgayer argued that the clerical elements in Osijek were protecting Jews in the city.[69] Others accused Ustaša officials of "fraternising with Jews in broad daylight".[70] Such accusations partly stemmed from the specific circumstances in which the Holocaust was implemented in Osijek.

The Holocaust in Osijek

After the initial wave of the Volksgruppe's and Ustašas' persecution of Jews in April 1941, a power struggle over the control of the "Jewish council" emerged between the two fascist movements. In less than a year and a half, five different people held the position of the "commissioner" of the Jewish Religious Community in Osijek. In cooperation with other security agencies, the "commissioner" could often determine the pace of the persecution of Jews locally.[71] This was an exceptional development, and there was no other case in the NDH in which so many "commissioners" were replaced. This was the result of a power struggle between the Volksgruppe, the Ustašas, and Osijek's city police, which all tried to assert their influence in the shaping of anti-Jewish policies.

66 HR-HDA-223, MUP NDH, file 463 (Ivan Tolj), Veliki župan Jakob Elicker to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 25 April 1942.

67 HR-HDA-1521, Hans Helm, document number 31/8, 2170/2.

68 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 276–277. Kotarski rukovodioc of Kotar Srednja Drava-Ilova to the Leader of the National Group, 10 November 1941.

69 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 17, Report of the leader of the German minority in Croatia – Branimir Altgayer, 12 May 1941.

70 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., document number 3832-42-SK/B, Deutsche Volksgruppe section Unterdrau to Veliki Župan Stjepan Hefer, 10 June 1942.

71 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2943, frame number 1242–1258, Analysis on the persecution of Jews in Osijek created by Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum, 18 July 1945.

The greatest influence over the Jewish Religious Community was wielded by Osijek police chiefs and the regional prefect (*veliki župan*[72]), Stjepan Hefer, who worked together to instrumentalise anti-Jewish policies and curb the power of the Volksgruppe. Hefer was a nationalist, anticommunist, and antisemite. Holocaust survivor Pavle Vinski met Hefer several times, and Vinski recalled that in their conversations Hefer

> pointed out that only Croats have the right to rule over Croatian soil and only they can have full citizenship, while all others can only be residents of Croatia. When I asked him once whether he ever read the constitution of Soviet Russia, which makes no difference among various citizens, he answered me that he never read it, and that Soviet Russia is a rotten country created by the Jews. Then he continued to debate about the Jews. Hefer said that Jews in Osijek are showing off too much and that the people are bothered by that. Jews are wearing expensive jewelry and they should know that this is the land of the Croats.[73]

In line with his antisemitism, Hefer also attended antisemitic lectures and manifestations in Osijek. He equipped his office with confiscated Jewish property and encouraged the distribution of Jewish-owned possessions to different regime organisations, such as the Ustaša Youth. Nevertheless, Hefer was concerned about the pace with which antisemitic measures proliferated. In a letter sent to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH on 22 June 1941, he wrote that he was

> tormented with issues related to the Jewish question. Since the first day [I took office], I did not have a single day of rest when it comes to this because many people constantly brought up various issues related to it. This is because our authorities implement [antisemitic] measures too quickly and too eagerly while they only later realise that these measures cannot be enforced.[74]

It is unclear which specific measures Hefer was referring to. However, the available documents suggest that, much like Osijek's chiefs of police, he maintained that the antisemitic measures were to be implemented gradually through a strictly legal framework. Interpreted within the context of interethnic relations in Osijek, the emphasis on the institutional and legal framework gave a competitive edge to the Ustašas. Chiefs of Osijek's police reportedly told members of the Jewish Religious Community that they would follow the orders related to the "Jewish question" issued at the state level, but that they would not introduce any new radical measures locally if Jews complied with all the orders of the police.[75] When state-wide orders were issued to signal the beginning of the mass deportations of Jews across the NDH to Ustaša-run concentration camps in July 1941,[76] approximately 300 of Osijek's Jews were deported to camps during August 1941, accounting for roughly 10 per cent of the entire

72 Velika Župa Baranja was one of twenty-two regional administrative and political units in the NDH. It had a seat in Osijek and included jurisdiction over the city and the municipality of Osijek, and the municipalities and towns of Našice, Donji Miholjac, Podravska Slatina, Djakovo, Valpovo, Orahovica, and Virovitica.

73 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2942, frame number 367, Testimony of Pavle Vinski given to the Comission for War Crimes on 7 September 1945.

74 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 14, file Veliki Župan Velike Župe Baranja 1940–1944, document dated 22 June 1941.

75 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2943, frame number 1312, Testimony of Holocaust survivor Arnold Kohn. See also HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2943, frame number 1247, Testimony of Holocaust survivor Vladimir Grunbaum.

76 Slavko Vukčević, ed., *Zločini na jugoslovenskim prostorima u Prvom i Drugim svetskom ratu: zbornik dokumenata* [War Crimes in the Yugoslav Areas during the First and Second World War: Collection of Documents] (Beograd: Vojnoistorijski institute, 1993), 366, Main Ustaša Police Headquarters to all Velike Župe, 23 July 1942.

Jewish community in the city.[77] However, the deportations suddenly stopped after that and the bulk of Osijek's Jews remained in the city until August 1942. This was a divergent development in comparison to many other cities in the NDH, where the deportations continued throughout 1941 and the beginning of 1942. For example, all Jews in the city of Bijeljina[78] were deported in August 1941, and in Sarajevo virtually the entire Jewish community was deported by the end of December 1941. However, the comprehensive deportations of Osijek's Jews were "delayed" significantly in comparison to these locations as well as to many others across the NDH.[79]

The available sources do not offer a conclusive answer as to why this case of a "delayed" Holocaust occurred in Osijek. Instead of mass deportations, at least two local "solutions to the Jewish question" were contemplated. According to one, the Ustašas wanted to baptise Jews.[80] These suggestions, however, were completely unrealistic. The Ustaša regime in Zagreb rejected such options because they were contrary to the existing race laws that had been introduced on 30 April 1941; the Volksgruppe leadership echoed a similar position. Another solution was a proposed by the regional prefect Stjepan Hefer, who suggested creating a "Jewish settlement," a ghetto just outside of Osijek. Hefer made all the arrangements for the beginning of the construction of the Tenja ghetto in March 1942, and its construction was planned for completion in the following three months. This was the only initiative undertaken in the NDH to create a Jewish ghetto, since the deportations were usually swift enough that ghetto spaces were not needed.[81]

It is unclear why Hefer preferred to organise a ghetto, as he had the means and the incentive from the top to proceed with the deportations to Ustaša-run concentration and death camps. This is particularly intriguing considering that, at the same time that Hefer was thinking about ghettoisation, the deportations of Sarajevan Jews to the Jasenovac camp were in full swing and included approximately 7,000 Jews. A potential answer could be connected to a specific demographic concern related to the city of Osijek. A document from 20 November 1941 clearly demonstrates that the local Croatian authorities made serious plans to convert as many Jews and Serbs as possible to Catholicism, which would effectively mean their assimilation into the Croatian nationality.[82] The potential success of this plan would provide a competitive advantage to the Croats, as it would reduce the proportion of Germans in Osijek and potentially eliminate them as a power broker if their number were to drop to below 20 per cent of the city's population. By implementing the deportations of Serbs and Jews too quickly, the local Croatian elites would lose this opportunity.

The ghettoisation would have allowed the Ustašas to strip the Jews of all property and easily police their activities while keeping the ethnic balance, and the potential for conversions, in the city relatively intact. Maintaining the demographic status quo favoured Croatian ethnic dominance. In this regard, Ustaša actions echo Helen Fein's "role theory", according to which even antisemites are prone to hold back

77 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 213, The Vinski report.

78 HM, UNS, box 1, file 25, 2, Ustaša Regional Office [Logor] in Bijeljina to the Main Ustaša Headquarters (GUS), 9 August 1941.

79 Goldstajn, Aleksandar, Interview 6204, Segments 42–43, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1995, accessed 30 March 2021.

80 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 209, The Vinski Report.

81 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2944, frame number 205, The Vinski Report. See also Hrečkovski et. al., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 2, 115–116, Report of the Velika Župa Baranja sent to the Zapovjedništvo ustaške nadzorne službe Zagreb, 23 March 1942.

82 HR-DAOS-10, Gradsko poglavarstvo Osijek, document number 89, Prs – 1941, Report of the Deputy Mayor of Osijek to Velika Župa Baranja, 20 November 1941.

antisemitic actions when rewards "are positive and there are no negative costs or sanctions to consider, however, the same actor might be more likely to discriminate against or destroy Jews when the rewards for such acts are greater than the costs".[83] In any event, Stjepan Hefer's plan for the ghettoisation of the Jewish community failed because of the deportation plans which the Ustaša regime in Zagreb set in motion. In May 1942, the Ustaša government inquired whether Germany would be willing to deport the remaining Croatian Jews "to the East". The Germans approved the Croatian request and preparations were made to for the deportations of the remaining Jews of the NDH to Auschwitz.[84]

The entire remaining Jewish population of Osijek, approximately 2,000 people, were deported in the first half of August 1942.[85] A small number of Jews remained in the city of Osijek, mostly those in "mixed marriages". However, the Volksgruppe was dissatisfied and resorted to continuous accusations that the Ustašas protected Jews. When the Volksgruppe demanded the removal of Jews who were intermarried with "Aryans", Altgayer accused Hefer and Osijek's police of informing the remaining Jews and promising them protection. The antisemitic conspiratorial thinking within the Volksgruppe continued in 1943, when its officials still expressed disappointment at the "lack of zeal in the persecution of Jews", even though more than 90 per cent of Osijek's Jews either had been deported or had fled the city.[86]

Fears and Fantasies of Mutual Annihilation

Various fascist and right-wing authoritarian movements across Europe unleashed programmes of ethnic reorganisation and the homogenisation of states on a massive scale. At least to a degree, virtually all of them were unified in their intention to create a world devoid of Jews. The institutions created to persecute Jews and other minorities were empowered to plan the mass executions, rob the dead and replace them with ethnically or racially desirable substitutes. In the NDH, Serbs and Roma were persecuted simultaneously with Jews. They were often arrested in the same neighbourhoods, placed in temporary detention sites together, transported in the same trains, killed right next to each other, and finally buried in the same mass graves. Even though the genesis of their ideas motivated the perpetrators to persecute each of these minorities, they also shared a common cause rooted in the ideological core of Ustaša xenophobia and chauvinism. In the desire to create a homogenous nation-state, the Ustaša tore down the previous social order, civil morality, and institutional checks and balances, and produced habitual murderers, all under the promise of bringing security and prosperity. Yet, none of these promises were ever delivered upon.

The ambition to achieve ethnic homogenisation was seen as a shortcut in catching up with the imagined ideal of the "West". Ethnic cleansing and genocide were, therefore, a central part of the Ustaša's project of modernisation. This gave rise to fantasies that did not end with the destruction of Jews, Serbs, or Roma in the NDH. Ideas of ethnic homogenisation could at least theoretically target anyone identified as a

83 Helen Fein, ed., *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 1987), 82.

84 Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941–1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 595.

85 HR-HDA-306, ZKRZ, microfilm roll 2943, frame number 1298, Testimony of Holocaust survivor Dragutin Glasner.

86 Bethke, *(K)eine gemeinsame Sprache?*, 374–375, 378.

non-Croat. In Osijek, members of all three fascist groups which produced Holocaust perpetrators – Croats, Germans, and Hungarians – both feared and fantasised about the question of who would come next after the last Jew, Serb, and Roma would have disappeared. On 5 June 1942, the regional governor Stjepan Hefer complained that "every single day, delegations of Croats from villages surrounding Osijek visit me and complain that various members of the German National Group openly speak that after the Gypsies and Jews have been deported, then Croats will be next".[87] In another report, Hefer wrote that he thought that Germans "dislike Croats altogether" and posed a rhetorical question: "Croatian peasants want the ultimate victory of Germany but they ask themselves: 'How will our local Germans behave after Germany wins the war, if this is how they treat us now?'"[88]

During the mass deportations of Roma to the concentration camps in the NDH in May 1942, some Croats in Slavonia complained that a member of the Volksgruppe could be heard telling Croats that "after the gypsies, it is your turn to be deported". When a Croatian teacher in the company of an Ustaša activist tried to uphold orders to start a Croatian school programme in a German-dominated village, they were chased away by local Germans who told them that "for us, there are no legal decrees. In Croatia, Germans have 75% of the rights and Croats 25%." A brawl ensued between the Ustašas and the Germans, and children of both ethnicities joined in following the footsteps of the adults. Afterwards, the Germans told the Croats that they will be deported to a concentration camp intended for Jews and that "not even hundreds of Poglavniks can save you [from us]".[89]

Local ethnic Germans had fears similar to those of their Croatian neighbours. They primarily feared that they would share the same fate as the Baltic Germans who were "resettled" in Poland beginning in 1939. However, they also feared the aggressive policies of the Ustašas. A report from the Volksgruppe issued in the town of Vinkovci in December 1941 claimed that there were widespread rumours that Germans would be deported from this area and that their lands would be settled with Slovenes. Moreover, according to the same report, local Ustaša leaders said that "first the Serbs, and then the Germans – either they will be converted [assimilated] or deported".[90] When Ustašas escorted columns of Roma through the streets of Osijek on their way to the railway station for the deportation of the Roma to the Jasenovac death camp, large crowds of citizens gathered to watch. When some ethnic Germans ridiculed the Roma, one Croatian family turned towards them and shouted: "Hitler still hasn't won! One day you will march here just like these Gypsies today – then it will be our turn to laugh!"[91] This was not the only such case. On the same day in a village near Osijek, a Croatian peasant told local Germans "[fuck] your Hitler! He will never enter Moscow! Rather than that, all of you Germans will lose your heads. A time will come when we [Croats] will deal with you."[92]

87 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., document number 18:00-I/3-1942, Telegram sent by Veliki Župan Stjepan Hefer to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the NDH, 5 June 1942.

88 Hrečkovski et. al., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 2, 282, Report of Velika Župa Baranja sent to the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH, 11 July 1942.

89 Hrečkovski et. al., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 2, 286, Report of Velika Župa Baranja sent to the Ministry of Interior of the NDH, 11 July 1942.

90 Krnić and Kaminski, eds., *Građa za historiju Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta u Slavoniji,* vol. 1, 459, Report of the German National Group from the Sava-Dunav district with the seat in Vinkovci, 31 December 1941.

91 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., document number 3854-42-H/B, Testimony of Matilda Beck given to the German national group in Osijek on 9 June 1942.

92 HR-DAOS-1177, Stjepan Hefer, box 17, file: Njemačka Narodnosna Skupina – Razno, 1937.–1943., document number 3781-42-Sk/B, Report of Mathias Geiger to Okružno vodstvo "Unterdrau", 1 June 1942.

Conclusion

The Ustaša, the Nazis, and the Arrow Cross in Osijek shared many goals and enemies. Yet, the future that they wanted to build remained vague, contested, and contradictory. Parallel programmes of territorial expansion and ethnic homogenisation stood in the way of each other. Despite all the preconditions being met, the three fascist movements failed to create a transnational fascist city-state, a fascist Eden. This was not unique to Osijek. For example, historian Dietrich Orlow has examined the relations between French, Dutch, and German fascists and concluded that "international fascism was a failure".[93] A similar conclusion was reached in a regional study of Alsace, where various fascist movements interacted in the interwar period. According to historian Samuel Huston Goodfellow, despite "the existence of common regional themes, the diversity of the fascist movements meant that no single consensus presentation of fascism emerged".[94]

However, unlike the previously mentioned cases, Osijek provides us with a particular example of attempted transnational fascist mobilisation during the Holocaust. Even though antisemitism should be rightly studied as a transnational ideology, it must also be carefully contextualised in terms of how it blends, or is adapted to, different fascist ideologies. In Osijek, fascists seemingly spoke the same political language of antisemitism. However, antisemitism was also adapted to serve national interests which could be directed against another fascist movement. Osijek's Nazis weaponised antisemitic rhetoric against the Ustaša on several occasions. Accusations that Ustašas were not antisemitic enough, or that they even helped Jews, were supposed to delegitimise the Ustaša. Similarly, the Arrow Cross used antisemitism to discredit its rival Hungarian Cultural Community. In Osijek, therefore, antisemitism became a means of competitive nation-building.

93 Dietrich Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe: German Nazis, Dutch and French Fascists, 1933–1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 153.

94 Goodfellow, "Fascism as a Transnational Movement," 90.

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A Shoe, a Broken Watch, and Marbles

How Objects Shape Our Memory and Our Future

Abstract

Desire objects – that is, personal items of the missing or killed found at the sites of mass atrocities – are often understood as the last tangible link to the absent person. In this article, I try to conceptualise what is happening in this human-object relationship and how this relationship is shaped when desire objects move through different social circuits. I demonstrate how the emotional energy charge changes with the objects' transition from one circuit to another, which consequently leads to the alteration of the perceived value of the desire objects. Using the biography and the ascribed agency of desire objects, I trace how human-object relations shape political action.

Introduction

Objects are all around us: we buy them, we build them, we sell them, we repair them, we break them, we give them away, we trade them, we replace them. We are surrounded by the material world. In fact, material culture co-constitutes our life. Things and objects have no value apart from the human transactions, attributions, and motivations that endow them with meaning. Hence, their meanings are always inscribed in their forms, their uses, and their trajectories. Things bear historical witness to the affective relationship of people with the material world as well as with ideas and feelings. Much of the research that relies on material culture sees objects as tangible markers of past experiences and, by association, as evidence and carriers of memory. Whether we understand them as "material witnesses"[1] or "surviving objects",[2] scholars across disciplines agree that such objects constitute powerful narrative devices as they direct us on how to structure and plot a story.

In this article, however, I will discussing a very narrow category of objects found at the sites of mass atrocities, which I call "desire objects". Personal items of the missing/killed found at the sites of mass atrocities, such as mass graves, concentration camps, places of torture, and sites of terrorist attacks, are often understood as the last tangible link with the absent person. They are desire objects – but not in the sense of commodities, when a desire to acquire objects stands against the ability to purchase them. Rather, they are such because those objects instigate emotional responses that reflect different sorts of desires regarding loved ones: a desire that they might come

1 Susan Schuppli, *Material Witness: Media, Forensics, Evidence* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9953.001.0001; Zuzanna Dziuban and Ewa Stańczyk, "Introduction: The Surviving Thing: Personal Objects in the Aftermath of Violence," *Journal of Material Culture* 25, no. 4 (December 2020): 381–390. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183520954514.

2 Paul Harvey Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007).

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back from the dead; a desire that their memory may be prolonged in the face of their unjust death; a desire that some sense can be made of their loss; or a desire to come to peace with the violent passing of a family member. Desire objects represent the desires and hopes of people to whom the objects are significant. Those who establish human-object relationships screen into them all kinds of desires – a strong feeling of wanting something or wishing for something to happen. The logic of how and why the desire objects are kept privately or donated, then preserved individually or publicly, collected, displayed, left to decay or destroyed, or, in fact, transformed into political symbols, is often obscured or taken for granted. However, their transition from one social circuit to another and the ways in which they aggregate emotional energy and are ascribed value may result, I suggest, in various moral claims and political action. Political action as "action designed to attain a purpose by the use of political power or by activity in political channels"[3] is used here mainly to demonstrate how different biographical trajectories of the desire objects affect a broad spectrum of political involvement.

I define desire objects through three conditions that help us distinguish them from other objects. First, they are present during a death that is not regarded as being part of a "natural" cycle of life. The events linked to desire objects *must* involve: a) a party responsible for intentionally killing or inflicting harm; b) a violent act; c) a deep feeling by the surviving party that an injustice has been committed. Desire objects refer only to personal items that belong to civilians or people who are perceived as "innocent" and did not die in combat as soldiers and fighters. Second, desire objects are scarce and their "survival" ignites an instant link between the killed and the act of killing. Third, desire objects provide a direct link to the "crime scene" where the atrocity is still part of a living memory, whereby those immediately affected are themselves direct carriers of the memory of an event. The objects represent both hope and despair, the ghostly leftovers of lives never fully lived since "things and objects can 'speak' to the beholder and may contain the spirit of the past".[4] They are silent, yet, under the right conditions, they maintain a promise of the resurrection of the dead. They are scarce and irreplaceable, and their survival makes them potent with powers far beyond their usual mundane function. How these bonds between people and objects are forged, and how this sudden significance of the desire objects is shaped beyond their importance for the close community and those who are directly affected by the atrocity, are the main foci of this paper.

This article is a work in progress and should be read as such. It proposes a conceptual model to show how and why desire objects, when moving from one social circuit to another, change their value and shape human-object relationships in some extraordinary ways. This is the story of a shoe, an ID, a photo, a marble, and many others personal items found after extreme forms of violence – and yet it is not about any particular object, but about desire objects as a category. I follow the trajectories of various desire objects in order to establish their shared patterns of movement, with those patterns pointing to the changing nature of human-object relations. This seems to be crucial as, with each movement, desire objects are allocated different meanings that may lead to a wide range of political actions. Hence, the model presented here does not account for any specific object but aims to sketch possible tra-

3 Merriam-Webster, "Political Action," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed 15 November 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/political%20action.

4 Tanja Luckins, "Collecting Women's Memories: The Australian War Memorial, the Next of Kin and Great War Soldiers' Diaries and Letters as Objects of Memory in the 1920s and 1930s," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 1 (February 2010): 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020903444635.

jectories that explain how it is that desire objects which start from a similar categorical venture point – sites of mass atrocities – end up, at times, producing a wide variety of political actions.

Human-Object Relations and Bereavement Objects

Finding an object that belonged to someone close is often accompanied with sentiments or different degrees of emotions. After their loved ones have passed, during the process of mourning, people get attached to different personal items, and personal items play a crucial yet often ambiguous role. The bereaved, religious or not, are often deeply attached to the material legacies of the deceased, and the memory of the deceased is indelibly tied to places, objects, images, and bodies.[5] Attachment theory,[6] which utilises examples from animal and human behaviour, shows the powerful bonds between humans and the disruption that arises when these bonds are jeopardised or destroyed. Objects play a role in grieving because they are embedded in the construction of identity and "trajectories between persons".[7] It has been well established that, during a grieving process, objects play a crucial role. Whether we understand them as "transitional objects", objects that help us move from one stage of grief to another,[8] or as "melancholy objects", objects that signify absence,[9] objects are central to understanding the experience and process of grief that transitions with and through objects. However, within the mourning process, objects also transition in terms of their status, value, and meaning,[10] and they function as metaphorical and metonymic traces of corporeal absence.[11]

Finding objects belonging to those who have perished differs from possessing bereavement objects belonging to those whose passing is understood as an inevitable part of the "circle of life". This distinction matters greatly, as these objects generate a different intensity of emotions and, even more importantly, the "regular" bereavement objects carry limited power when it comes to generating feelings and discourses beyond the realm of the close and loved ones. When personal items are recovered from locations where recent atrocities have taken place, objects relating to a sudden and unjust death bring an emotional potency that resonates with a much wider audience. The proximity of the atrocity, together with the explicit innate violence which is embedded as the main feature of the rescued objects, increase the relatability and the emotional impact the objects produce on the wider communities. A sudden and

5 Maurice Eisenbruch, "Cross-Cultural Aspects of Bereavement. II: Ethnic and Cultural Variations in the Development of Bereavement Practices," *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 8, no. 4 (December 1984): 315–347. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00114661; Therese Richardson, "Spousal Bereavement in Later Life: A Material Culture Perspective," *Mortality* 19, no. 1 (January 2014): 61–79, https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2013.867844; Elizabeth Hallam and Jennifer Lorna Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture*, Materializing Culture (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001).

6 John Bowlby, "The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds: I. Aetiology and Psychopathology in the Light of Attachment Theory," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 130, no. 3 (March 1977): 201–210. https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.130.3.201.

7 Aafke Komter, "Heirlooms, Nikes and Bribes: Towards a Sociology of Things," *Sociology* 35, no. 1 (February 2001): 59.

8 D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, 2018[1958]). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429482410.

9 Margaret Gibson, "Melancholy Objects," *Mortality* 9, no. 4 (November 2004): 285–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270412331329812.

10 Gibson, "Melancholy Objects."

11 Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture*.

violent death is a specific case of loss that has unique characteristics and makes unique demands on survivors, as well as on their grief. This is because the survivors of a sudden death are more likely to experience what is characterised as abnormal or pathological grief and it is more likely that the grief will endure longer and be more difficult to resolve.[12] This grief is not easily resolved, not only because of the sudden nature of the death, but because it is intrinsically associated with violence and deep feelings of injustice. Survivors of a sudden and violent death experience have a strong need to understand why it happened and to make sense of their loss.[13] Hence, the scarce objects that are in their possession, relating to the loved ones who have been violently killed, play a crucial role as they generate deep emotional power and attachments.

Therefore, desire objects affect people in the most profound ways. Any object that survives war, genocide, or forced migration is a powerful "material witness",[14] harbouring evidence of pre-conflict life, of violence, and of subsequent travels. Desire objects are relational: they help us to establish the meanings in the gap between realities and emotions, as a way to define who we are to ourselves and to others.[15] Desire objects are emergent "sites of feeling" capable of triggering bodily reactions and emotional responses. Desire objects convey symbolic messages, referring to the nature and (actual or desired) status of the relationship between human beings. The power of the artefacts, in general, lies in the fact that their uniqueness, or their immediate associability with their owners, can generate meanings to oblige reciprocity through their symbolic value. Objects are "tie-signs": signs of social bonds.[16] Desire objects, in particular, are activated through bodies and minds, just as storytelling cannot be reanimated without places, events, and the imagination. As Zuzanna Dziuban and Ewa Stańczyk,[17] as well as others,[18] note, personal items recovered from the sites of political violence, especially in the absence of a body, become potent embodiments of feeling and loci of emotional investment, of mourning, and of memory.

Therefore, objects relating to brutal and unjust deaths, even the most mundane objects such as a watch, a shoe, a wallet, or marbles, can rise in symbolic, emotional, and mnemonic value, often outweighing all other measures of value – particularly their initial economic value.[19] The value of objects found after atrocities is closely connected to their generative power and the ways in which they acquire potency in order to transcend their original purpose. These objects develop biographies and careers of their own and are endowed with various qualities – sentimental, mnemonic, economic, evidentiary, and aesthetic – as they move between various contexts and are exposed to a host of meanings, ownership claims, and regimes of worth,[20] and to symbolic and ideological appropriations and interpretations. The forging of their

12 J. D. Fast, "After Columbine: How People Mourn Sudden Death," *Social Work* 48, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 484–491. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/48.4.484.

13 J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 5th ed. (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2018).

14 Dziuban and Stańczyk, "Introduction," 385; Schuppli, *Material Witness*.

15 James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700*, Material Cultures (London: Routledge, 2012).

16 Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010).

17 Dziuban and Stańczyk, "Introduction," 383.

18 Sophie Baby and François-Xavier Nérard, "Les objets des disparus: Exhumations et usages des traces matérielles de la violence de masse," *Les Cahiers Irice* 19, no. 2 (2017): 5. https://doi.org/10.3917/lcsi.019.0005; Layla Renshaw, *Exhuming Loss: Memory, Materiality and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War*, Critical Cultural Heritage Series (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011).

19 Gibson, "Melancholy Objects."

20 Dziuban and Stańczyk, "Introduction."

value is often reflected in the development of a collectors' market as we move further away from the time of the event.[21] Hence, to understand the foregrounding of the trajectories of this specific category of objects – objects that are associated with a sudden, unjust, and brutal death – and against the different biographical configurations of the objects, we need to understand the multiple transformations in the ways in which they acquire meanings and values. Or, in other words, how and under what circumstances do a shoe, marbles, or an old watch, found in places where atrocities took place, give rise, or not, to political actions that are detached from their initial meaning?

Moving Circuits: Emotional Energy and Value

The main argument of this article is that the movement of the desired object – from one circuit to another – changes the emotional energy and the ascribed value of the object. Under particular circumstances, this may lead to ascribing agency to objects, which leads to various political actions. Emotional energy is the main driving force in social life.[22] Randal Collins (2005) defines emotional energy as the amount of emotional power that flows through one's actions and does not refer to one specific emotion. Emotional energy refers here to a dynamic created by inter-human relations that mobilises and generates feelings, aggregated over time. According to Collins' model of Interaction Ritual Chains,[23] emotional energy is carried across situations by symbols that have been changed by emotional situations. The participants focus attention on the same thing, they are aware of each other's focus, and they become caught up in each other's emotions. Hence, emotional energy is the emotional charge that people take away with them from an interaction.

Though the notion of emotional energy speaks, in a narrow sense, about inter-human interaction, I suggest that it can also be applied to human-object relations to show how it shapes the value of the object, and consequently the potential political action, namely, action staged to advance certain political agendas. To that end, it is important to understand both the biographies of objects and how these gain agency. The biographic approach to objects[24] asserts that "objects have social lives".[25] At the heart of the notion of biography are questions about how ways, meanings, and values are accumulated and transformed between objects and people. Certain objects acquire very specific biographies, and consequently acquire values, as they move from place to place and from one social circuit to another. The agency of objects is under-

21 This is especially the case with objects from World War Two, particularly those connected to Germany.

22 Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

23 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.

24 Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–63. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819582.003; Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (1999): 169–178; Jody Joy, "Reinvigorating Object Biography: Reproducing the Drama of Object Lives," *World Archaeology* 41, no. 4 (December 2009): 540–556. https://doi.org/10.1080/00438240903345530; Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things*, 64–92. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819582.004; Sandra Dudley et al., eds., *The Thing about Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation: Essays in Honour of Professor Susan M. Pearce* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018). https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1v2xskk; Williams, *Memorial Museums*.

25 Carl Knappett, "Photographs, Skeuomorphs and Marionettes: Some Thoughts on Mind, Agency and Object," Journal of Material Culture 7, no. 1 (March 2002): 97–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183502007001307.

stood as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act".[26] The agency of objects, their ability to affect, and their divergent biographies are not consistent in terms of their significance but, rather, they change while circulating in different value regimes. Consequently, there are different paths, diversions, and strategies (both individual and institutional) that make the creation of value a politically mediated process. As will be demonstrated later in this article, desire objects are attributed different types of value as they move through different social circuits – emotional, economic, mnemonic, evidentiary, aesthetic, or symbolic value. The value that the desire objects attract will change during their "life cycle" through their movement in different societal circuits. The more that the desire objects are exposed and circulated, the more likely it is that their value will grow, reflecting the demand for their multiplication.

comics by: Aya David Ramati, age 11

Biographies of Desire Objects and their Movement From one Social Circuit to Another — a Model

Consider a mass atrocity. Time passes by and, at the same location as the atrocity, a family is having a picnic. Suddenly someone finds a lovely, rusted watch on the ground. The watch belonged to a person who was executed there. Let us imagine that the watch is returned back to the home of the family of the deceased. For them, this is the most precious treasure. The watch gets a special place in the house – maybe it is placed on a wall, or kept in a drawer in secrecy, or elsewhere, because that is the only thing that actually remains from the person who was killed. However, for all sorts of reasons, the surviving family members may decide to donate this scarce object to a museum or other relevant institution. Sometimes the emotions attached to the object are unbearable and too difficult to handle, or there is a desire to utilise the objects as educational tools or to prolong the memory of the deceased and/or the event through which the loss was experienced. But once a desire object becomes displaced and is moved to another circuit – like a public display – we have a completely different setting, a different audience, a different emotional charge – all of which consequently results in the alteration of the object's value. Yet the lifespan of desire objects, at times, does not come to an end with a museum display. Instead, the objects – often not as material, physical objects but as images – start to be circulated through popular culture, mass media, and educational projects, through which they become grounded and embedded as a particular set of meanings. Finally, some desire objects will gain the potential to translate human-object relationships into a set of moral claims and political actions, moving yet again to another domain. The emotional energy charge, the value of the desire objects, and the audience again alter, resulting in a variety of political actions with diverse moral claims. However, with the move-

26 Laura M. Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 109–137.

ment from one circuit to another, the scope of the desire objects becomes narrower, and with each transition fewer and fewer desire objects will have the potential to become significant for a wider audience. Many of the objects will simply remain silent and bleak reminders of a past atrocity, but some will rise in value and will ignite moral claims and political action.

The Rediscovery – in Between Ordinary Life and the Afterlife

The rediscovery represents the moment at which the desire objects suddenly surface. Their discovery marks the invisible boundary between the ordinary life of any object – they were bought, made, given, exchanged, used – and the afterlife of the objects, in which they survive their owner's lifespan and their mundane function becomes altered into new meanings, projections, and desires.

Desire objects appear from the depth of death pits, muddy forests, idyllic hills, murky rivers, abandoned prisons, schools, churches, factories, and shelters, from both unexpected and remarkably central places, carrying secrets of torture, agony, suffering, execution, and death. Most often, they vanish and sink together with their owners into an irreversible and definite decay and demise. But sometimes, just every so often, like precious hidden gems, they survive, they appear suddenly, they become rediscovered and kept. From there, their second life on earth begins with an uncertain trajectory: some will end up being well kept and preserved in dark and cold storage rooms where they will be used to establish victims' identities; others, in a state of putridity, will be discarded as useless and destroyed. Yet, others still will be brought back to the family members of the deceased who will recognise them immediately, and cry tears of hope and despair.

In the aftermath of war and conflict, things are often rescued by survivors or the families of victims, inherited, retrieved by forensic experts, or looted from war graves. The importance of material culture is that it "allows for a documentation of crimes, including those that have been subject to covering over and erasure".[27] Those objects that are discovered and become classified as items which belonged to persons who disappeared in an atrocity await a rocky and uncertain journey. Many objects that are found in isolation, and especially those that are exhumed with the remains of the deceased who remain unidentified, are in a state of limbo. In Rwanda,[28] just as in Bosnia and Herzegovina,[29] Kosovo,[30] and other places, forensics experts, activists, or simply neighbours search areas suspected of being the site of an atrocity as they seek corpses, body remains, bones, and any personal objects that could help bring about the identification of the victims. Apart from corporal remains, they carefully set aside any personal items and every scrap of clothing they recover in the hope that

27 Dziuban and Stańczyk, "Introduction," 383.

28 Many forensic experts, such as forensic anthropologist Melissa Connor, worked in Rwanda on the identification process which relies on items that people carried with themselves.

29 In 2005, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) published a third *Book of Belongings* regarding missing persons from the Republika Srpska, the Serbian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and containing 930 photographs of clothing and personal objects found with the mortal remains of some 350 people. Until the development of DNA analysis, and its first mass implementation in Srebrenica, all identifications were based on a comparison of ante-mortem and post-mortem data and objects on the bodies. In the first few years, this was also the case for Srebrenica.

30 Cooperation between the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the ICRC in Kosovo in 2001 led to efforts to ascertain the fate of persons reported missing in connection with the ethnic violence and the conflict in Kosovo. The OSCE has published a *Book of Belongings* for Kosovo, containing 750 photos of clothing and personal effects that were found on some 200 bodies recovered during the year 2000.

some survivors are able to identify the remains of their loved ones. These are then packed, and stored and classified as evidence, and photographed in the hope of being recognised by the victims' families.

Yet, paradoxically, throughout the process of their discovery, when these bodies are unravelled, and the remnants of soft flesh, clothing, personal possessions, and bones are separated from each other, skeletal structures are fully disarticulated and the bones pooled into a vast collective. Often, this actually results in the loss of their identity,[31] beyond DNA identification. This, an almost surgical attempt to preserve the remains, both the skeletal parts and the personal objects, is followed by the sterilising procedures that preserve human remains as a means of revealing their identities and potentially tracing their cause of death. Major[32] convincingly points out that these procedures are also done in order to preserve the items as valid evidence in court, where the once-again tortured bodies, subsumed to bare bones, magnifies the emotional importance of the discovered objects. In the absence of a tangible body of flesh and bones (as opposed to only sporadic bones), the personal items discovered become, for the relatives, the major point of emotional encounter that possesses material agency.[33]

Before, and if, they ever reach the relatives of the victims, the items become classified and deposited in dedicated facility units. A good example is the Podrinje Identification Project mortuary, founded in 1999 and built as a facility for the systematic examination and identification of recovered mortal remains. There, 3,500 body bags containing the remains of the victims of the Srebrenica massacre, together with numerous personal items, give a sense of the devastating magnitude of the atrocity.[34] The Podrinje Identification Project mortuary, located in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, provides a valuable insight into the standardised practices of the storage of such personal items.[35] For one, we see that these artefacts tend not to be displayed but are, instead, neatly stored in brown paper bags, and the thought of their presence alongside the human remains is enough to evoke strong emotional responses. Those storage units are generally not opened for the audience but, mostly, for the relatives who are invited to come and to try to identify the objects. Occasionally, the forensic anthropologists provide a tour of the mortuary to the participants of various summer schools, international volunteers, or those involved in peace-building projects.

Yet, those objects are still not on public display. Many, if not most of them, even after being discovered and collected from the scenes of atrocities, will stay reposing in the darkness of those cold storage units, dispersed either amongst dedicated mortuaries and forensic collection facilities, or in the court evidence rooms. And, though the importance of obtaining personal items is widely recognised when it comes to the grieving process of the victims' families and their friends, the future for most of them is gloomy. Due to various circumstances, the majority of the personal items

31 Laura Major, "Unearthing, Untangling and Re-Articulating Genocide Corpses in Rwanda: Déterrer, démêler et réarticuler les corps du génocide au Rwanda," *Critical African Studies* 7, no. 2 (4 May 2015): 164–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2015.1028206.

32 Major, "Unearthing, Untangling and Re-Articulating."

33 Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris, *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* (Berlin: Springer, 2008).

34 Admir Jugo, "Artefacts and Personal Effects from Mass Graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Symbols of Persons, Forensic Evidence or Public Relics?" *Les Cahiers Irice* 19, no. 2 (2017): 21. https://doi.org/10.3917/lcsi.019.0021.

35 Christopher Bobyn, "If Bones Could Talk: Reassembling the Remains of Srebrenica," Balkanist, 11 July 2016, https://balkanist.net/if-bones-could-talk-srebrenica/.

will not find their way into the hands and homes of the families of those who were killed. Even worse than that, a large amount of the personal items will be intentionally destroyed.[36]

Desire Objects on the Private Circuit — 'Did my Son Ever Exist?'

Some desire objects are sent back to the private homes of the people who were killed. Though there is no meaning inherent in things themselves but, rather, the meaning of things derives from human relationships,[37] the desire objects are qualitatively different from other objects as they possess the inseparable attribute of innate violence. Looking, touching, or smelling a desire object becomes instantly linked to an act of violence: there is a guilty part, someone committed an act of violence intentionally, hence the death itself is tightly connected to violence and injustice. For the grieving party, both the family members of the killed/missing and the wider community, those desire objects represent their hope for claiming some sort of justice, because those survived objects oblige those who survived to never forget the person they have lost and the events surrounding their death – and oblige them to learn from what happened.[38]

The innate character of violence associated with desire objects produces a wide variety of emotions. Raw emotions of deep sadness and loss are usually accompanied with the discovery of desire objects. In fact, those emotions shape and engrave various desires into the surviving objects. When Huso Halilović, a Bosniak survivor, recognised the remains of his father Bajro in a mass grave in Kamenica, near Zvornik, he found Bajro's watch and comb, which instantly became Huso's most precious possessions: "When I see these items, I'm flooded with tears; I remember how his watch was always on his hand and he was combing his hair every morning. Those are the only mementos I have."[39]

Desire objects create their own sensory habitat, both physically, through constructing a material world with its own set of sensory properties, and culturally, through emphasising and valuing certain types of sense impressions over others.[40] Objects give a physicality to the memories. Containing the smell, touch, and emotions of the dead, they hold memories of the landscapes in which those killed were executed. They contain the smells of the mountains and forests, in particular the soil and flora, of suffocating mouldy prison cells or places where the executed were detained, of journeys that victims were forced to take before they were killed, and of other real and imaginary destinations on the victims' last journeys to death. Watches, wallets, shoes, or glasses, they all possess a distinct texture and smell – whether a yellowing paper, smudged pencil, indentations on objects, dirt, rust, mud, or blood – they all capture the material of the absent and the imaginary potential to express desires around the sudden, violent, and unjust death. Regardless of whether we are

36 More than 1,000 artefacts, including forensic evidence and personal items found in 1996 and 1997 in mass graves with the remains of the victims of Srebrenica, were purposefully destroyed in 2005 and 2006 in The Hague by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). A quarter have yet to be identified.

37 Komter, "Heirlooms, Nikes and Bribes."

38 Jugo, "Artefacts and Personal Effects from Mass Graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina."

39 Midhat Poturovic, "Srebrenica Victims' Personal Items Help Keep Memories Alive," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 February 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/srebrenica-massacre-victims-personal-items-help-keep-memories-alive/30416483.html.

40 Gosden and Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects."

talking about World War Two, the Holocaust, genocide in Rwanda or Bosnia and Herzegovina, or a terrorist attack such as 9/11, small items such as wallets, photographs, coins, postcards, diaries, and letters were, in many instances, the only material things left for bereaved relatives and, as such, became substitutes for the absent body.[41]

The importance of sensory stimuli in triggering emotions is apparent in the stories of survivors. For example, Djulka Jusupović carefully handles a tobacco box made out of cans of United Nations-delivered food, along with a piece of flint used to make fire during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[42] She keeps the items in several plastic bags. They are still as dirty as they were when found on her husband, Himzo, when his body was excavated from a mass grave.[43] But for her, these objects carry an emotional burden too heavy to face. She rarely looks at the objects as, each time she takes them out, she instantly remembers the words too painful to process – the words forensic experts told her when they handed the objects to her: "Himzo, after being shot, may have been still alive when buried."[44] In the same way that the narratives of their deaths have become part of the story of their lives, the acquired attributes of desired objects – soil, rust, dirt, blood stains, smells they carry – as well as their changed physicality – missing parts, indentations, scratches – become a significant part of their post-mortem-reimagined identity.

The massive importance of desire objects is clearly seen in their absence. Take, for example, Munira Subašić, but also many others who were in her position. It was only in 2013 that Subašić could finally bury the remains of her son Nermin, one of 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys who were killed in 1995 when Bosnian Serb forces captured the United Nations-protected enclave of Srebrenica. The remains were two bone fragments found in grave sites twenty-five kilometres apart. Until then, Subašić had lived an ongoing nightmare for more than twenty years:

> [a]ll signs of Munira Subasic's 20 years of child-rearing have disappeared. There are no old photographs of her missing son, Nermin; no letters, no furniture, no old clothes, no remains. Her years as a mother could have been a dream. In fact, she can't prove her son ever existed.[45]

The totality of the destruction often causes this unbearable feeling of inability to distinguish what is reality and what is imagination. Objects may be absent yet present all at the same time in a state akin to ambiguous loss, an unresolved state of grief felt by individuals towards a loved one who has disappeared and whose fate remains uncertain.[46] Desire objects create this fragile link between sanity and insanity, between the real and the imagined, between life and death. Ahmed Hrustanović, in his struggle to keep alive the memory of his dead father, reflects on this fragility of being "in-between": "[s]ometimes a man, in these fears and emotions, asks himself, 'Did I really have a father?' But then, when I see a letter, when I see a photo, I feel relieved."[47]

41 Luckins, "Collecting Women's Memories."

42 After three years of the Serbian siege, the population ran out of lighters or matches and improvised, just as cavemen did. "Someone would make fire with this in his garden in the morning, then everybody would come with a piece of wood to light it and take it home to make a fire", Jusupović said, describing life in a town that was on the brink of starvation before the bloodletting began.

43 Aida Cerkez, "Srebrenica Women Tell Tale of Loss through Objects of Memory," AP News, 9 July 2015, https://apnews.com/article/f46c3715e175403a964bf1147f1b9daa.

44 Cerkez, "Srebrenica Women Tell Tale of Loss through Objects of Memory."

45 Kristin Deasy and Dzenana Halimovic, "Srebrenica Survivors Feel Pain after Evidence Destroyed," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 3 September 2009, https://www.rferl.org/a/1814205.html.

46 Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

47 Deasy and Halimovic, "Srebrenica Survivors Feel Pain after Evidence Destroyed."

Donating Desire Objects — a New Life on the Horizon

Some desire objects, after peripeteia and various unforeseen trajectories, do end up in the hands of the grieving relatives. These objects are much needed and desired, but they simultaneously produce diagonally opposite feelings. Scattered newspaper articles and blogs contain testimonials of the family members of the deceased and report two ways in which the families of the killed/missing form relationships with the desire objects.[48] On the one hand, having the objects brings about immense happiness. To be able to see, touch, and smell probably the last thing that had a direct connection to the deceased automatically brings back memories and an assurance that they really existed. Often, the eraser of the physical evidence of a life is so profound that those who survived wonder if they had really existed. Having tangible proof that they were not just a figment of the imagination brings back a certain level of security and continuation. Being able to situate and focus their memories on the surviving objects that have an ability to instigate memories and connect the dispersed pieces of a past life into a relatively coherent life narrative is of the utmost importance for the meaning-making processes that take place after atrocities. On the other hand, palpable evidence also buries the hope that, in some miraculous way, those who perished will suddenly reappear and be truly alive, and not just alive in dreams and nightmares. The return of the desire object resembles the end of the frantic search for signs of life, for hopes that none of this really happened but, instead, that the very presence of the objects univocally says that those who suddenly vanished are gone forever.

Therefore, for those who spent days, months, and years in search of those who disappeared without a trace, the encounter with the desire objects produces an intense emotional impact. All their sleepless nights and tears, their pre-atrocity memories – always selectively shaped to create a vision of a happy life – together with their hopes and desires for the future, they all come together, succinct and intense, when faced with the desire object. To the uninformed observer, a broken watch, a muddy shoe, a torn t-shirt, or dusty marbles might seem like just any other used or disposable object when, in fact, it could not be further from the truth. Desire objects concentrate and draw upon an astonishing amount of emotional energy that, as we will see, has the potential to alter realities.

Testimonials show that, once reunited, the family members of the deceased will keep the objects in the most tender and caring manner, placing them in cupboards or hanging them on the walls to display them, or hiding them in drawers, cabinets, or another private place, far from the eyes of others. Desire objects almost instantly become sacred possessions for the relatives of the deceased. They are the link between the dead and the living. But if that is the case, how and why do the families of survivors or victims decide to part from these objects? What is the rationale for such a decision? What are the visions of the future they inscribe onto desire objects and what do they hope to achieve?

48 Cerkez, "Srebrenica Women Tell Tale of Loss through Objects of Memory"; Deasy and Halimovic, "Srebrenica Survivors Feel Pain after Evidence Destroyed"; Lamija Grebo, "Cipele 'Mrtvare': otisak vremena i svjedočenje o Srebrenici," Detektor, 22 June 2021, https://detektor.ba/2021/06/22/cipele-mrtvare-otisak-vremena-i-svjedocenje-o-srebrenici/; Jugo, "Artefacts and Personal Effects from Mass Graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina"; Medison Horne, "9/11 Lost and Found: The Items Left Behind," The National 9/11 Memorial & Museum, 10 September 2018, https://www.history.com/.amp/news/9-11-artifacts-ground-zero-photos; Poturovic, "Srebrenica Victims' Personal Items Help Keep Memories Alive"; Vesna Besic and Talka Ozturk, "Srebrenica Genocide Victims' Belongings to Be Shown as Lesson," Anadolu Agency, 8 February 2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/srebrenica-genocide-victims-belongings-to-be-shown-as-lesson/1728124.

Desire objects, once displaced from the private realm, begin to act as witnesses or testimonials, meaning that they replace the absence of the dead with the presence of the object. Ahmed Hrustanović, a Bosnian genocide survivor, in his struggles to keep alive the memory of his dead father, painfully reckons: "I decided to donate these letters and some of the photos to the museum. I have already given some originals and I will give some copies [of others]."[49] Similarly, Hajra Ćatić never found her younger son, who was aged only twenty when he was killed. More than two decades since his death, she is still searching for him. "I have his wallet, I have his vehicle registration certificate. In his wallet was an ID, meaning a card from my son that I couldn't find. Well, I only have those things, I have nothing more. I'll donate everything to the museum. It is of great importance that everything is collected in one place, that means a lot."[50] Amra Begić Fazlić, who lost her father Resid during the genocide, said that they did not know how to protect her father's belongings. "I donated my father's last letter, wristwatch, and glasses that he sent us via Red Cross vehicles."[51]

The objects become agents of authenticity – a valid authority and a reliable "witness" to what took place in the given atrocity – which makes them extremely emotionally powerful.[52] However, while the emotional charge is heightened for those who are directly connected to the desire objects, in line with the theoretical model of Randal Collins' Interaction Ritual Chains,[53] once the desire objects are displaced to public displays, their emotional potential significantly decreases, and they need to be supplemented with other means to increase their emotional input for a wider audience.

Public Display and the Circulation of Knowledge

Indeed, once the desire objects from dark storage chambers and private homes go on public display, such as in museum collections or artistic exhibitions, they need to be re-narrated. The desire objects reach those public spaces after already having acquired their initial value of authenticity – as objects that are embedded in an innate feature of violence, death, and destruction, potent with emotional energy and perceived through particular biographies. Through those features, desire objects gain their social value which goes beyond the singular significance they possess for the family of the deceased, becoming artefacts of worth for a wider community. This is because, once they become displaced and re-placed as artefacts of public importance, their perceived value alters, from an emotional and bereavement value for those who see in the desire object a direct link to their missing ones, to objects that transcend those immediate and private linkages and are compelling enough to relate to wider audiences. This transformation comes about as a result of what is perceived as their biggest virtue both for the wider audience and the expert community – because they are engraved with violence, they carry the virtue of authenticity, which is highly valued and appreciated. Authenticity, broadly understood as "reliable, accurate representation",[54] is a vastly important feature as an evidentiary authority to the

49 Poturovic, "Srebrenica Victims' Personal Items Help Keep Memories Alive."
50 Deasy and Halimovic, "Srebrenica Survivors Feel Pain after Evidence Destroyed."
51 Besic and Ozturk, "Srebrenica Genocide Victims' Belongings to Be Shown as Lesson."
52 Jugo, "Artefacts and Personal Effects from Mass Graves in Bosnia and Herzegovina."
53 Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*.
54 Somogy Varga and Charles Guignon, "Authenticity, " Inquiry and the Craft of Argument, 14 March 2017, https://rampages.us/newmusicmachine/2017/03/14/35/; Somogy Varga and Charles Guignon, "Authenticity," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 20 February 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/authenticity/.

given event. Hence, the desire objects that carry traces of places, actions, and the temporal dimensions of violence, immediately become associated and tightly linked with the notion of "authenticity".

Once those glass marbles, muddy shoes, bloody garments, broken watches, rusty necklaces, mouldy letters, or any other desire object, (re)enter public spaces, their authenticity becomes recognised as an authority and, hence, this has value for the broader public. As they carry the value of authenticity, desire objects become singled out as artefacts that transcend their simple materiality. Authenticity embedded in the desire objects acts as the nexus between the spatial and temporal dimensions and provides a rare window into being simultaneously both "here" and "there", "now" and "then".

However, simultaneously with the growing value of the desire objects, they also change their initial emotional energy potential. Once removed and displaced from the private realm – cabinets, drawers, walls – the desire objects enter the sterile spaces of museums and galleries. There, while being presented for their "authenticity value", they lose their contextual surrounding. Hence, the transition from private to public requires additional manipulation to bring to the fore their narrative potential. This is because, if left alone, without further contextual tools, they are in danger of fading away and becoming ossified artefacts that are no more than another dead thing.[55]

Memorial museums and, in particular, museums that focus on the Holocaust, genocides and human rights, create spaces that aspire to provoke social change and ideological messaging and to empower human rights. Such museums rely on desire objects. Therefore, their placement is carefully calculated to instigate a very particular reaction from visitors. As the goal of desire objects is to create an emotional reaction that would ideally lead to the production of knowledge and a discursive reflection aligned with the norms and values of human rights, desire objects need to be re-contextualised and their value amplified. This is done because the manner of presentation and interpretation of the objects is meant to have a significant impact on the visitor, otherwise the desire objects will stay still and emotionless, unable to provoke a desired emotional input. Their re-imagination reflects and extends to how the visitors engage physically, mentally, and emotionally with the items on display, how the visitors sense the venue and the location itself, and how the interpretative tools and systems are used.[56]

Museums, and particularly those ones associated with places of death, violence, and massive human rights abuses, differ from traditional history museums in several key ways, but most notably in their dual mission to impose a moral framework for, and contextual explanations of, a violent event. Therefore, the techniques used to amplify the discursive message are vast and include the use of strong imagery and graphic material, the extensive use of photo documentation, video and audio projections, recorded or written personal stories, artefacts and the (re)-creation of authentic spaces, or other technological or interpretive solutions and multimedia. Museums spend hours of staff time and large amounts of money designing special events that will

55 It is important to stress, however, that in many places, such as Rwanda and Cambodia, personal items are exhibited without narration. They are left to speak for themselves, yet they are not positioned as the main feature of the exhibition.

56 Kirsten M. Bedigan, "Developing Emotions: Perceptions of Emotional Responses in Museum Visitors," *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 16, no. 5 (30 March 2016), 87–95. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.204969.

appeal to the visitor's need to have "something going on",[57] in a struggle to combine both education and entertainment. Often a variety of experts are employed to create the "ultimate" experience, including historians, anthropologists, sociologists, curators, artists, architects, creatives, and marketing advisors, to best relate the visitor experience and evoke strong visitor responses. As visitors to museums are a demanding audience, and as they ask for constant stimulation (not just cognitive input), the fear of them remaining as passive observers pushes the creators of museum and artistic exhibitions to employ a wide variety of technological, educational, performative, theatrical, and other tools (and tricks) to propel emotional labour and harness emotional energy that can be translated into discursive and normative change.[58]

To reach that goal, everything has to be planned to the tiniest detail. There is careful consideration of where the desire objects will be placed, how thick or thin the glass cover should be, and what the font size and style of the text should be when narrating the objects' existence. Even the choices of colours, the lighting, how motion and stillness are contrasted, what parts of the desire objects should be exposed and/or obscured, where each object is placed, have to be tailored and managed. The purpose of these is to enhance the "communication" between the artefacts and the ultimate flow between different spatial sections, to connect the divided sections in the staged environment, and to best create strong emotional engagement. Hence, everything has to be calculated because it should simultaneously attract visitors and give them a worthy, emotional experience, potent of a transformative effect. The child's glass marbles, the muddy shoe, the stained garment – most often none of these can stand alone, because, contrary to what is often claimed, none of them tells a story solely by virtue of their existence.

Therefore, each desire object, once displayed, needs additional elements to provoke an emotional response. The objects, if left alone, lose their narrative force, and they must therefore be accompanied by text that narrates their story: what the object is in the display, to whom it belonged and how that person died, where it was found, who donated it … Cognitively connecting the visual with the story has greater potential to create an emotional response. Furthermore, adding to it photos of the place in which the object was found, such as a factory, a forest, a field, or a mass grave, links and testifies to the authenticity of the object. If available, also putting a photo of a person – ideally wearing the garment or the shoes – or a child playing with the marbles, brings to the fore a complete narrative sequence.

Emotions play a key role in the encounter between visitors[59] and desire objects. Because desire objects are embedded in the act of violence, they have a tendency to unsettle visitors, triggering shock and anger, but also wonder and excitement. Most places of death, disaster, and atrocity negotiate painful pasts, ethically problematic situations, politically oriented discourses on memory and heritage,[60] and strong emotional and affective reactions such as pain, fear, empathy, and even catharsis.

Once the link to the immediate knowledge and lived experience of the object is broken, it is necessary to "add and edit" the story behind the object-person relationship in order to enhance the emotional energy in the encounter between the desire

57 Thomas A. Woods, "Getting beyond the Criticism of History Museums: A Model for Interpretation," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 3 (1 July 1990): 77–90. https://doi.org/10.2307/3378200.

58 Bedigan, "Developing Emotions."

59 Visitors' motivation to go to museums varies significantly: from educational or heritage purposes to entertainment and emotional experiences. This, however, will not be discussed here due to a lack of space.

60 Nataliia Godis and Jan Henrik Nilsson, "Memory Tourism in a Contested Landscape: Exploring Identity Discourses in Lviv, Ukraine," *Current Issues in Tourism* 21, no. 15 (13 October 2018): 1690–1709. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2016.1216529.

object and strangers. Strangers, when encountering the desire object in displays, often have in mind only a very blurred context of the atrocity to which the desire object belongs. They also lack the intimate knowledge of the life of the deceased – and those gaps must be further narrated in order to trigger emotional energy. Once the desire objects become displaced from the victims' home, they linger in a void that has to be re-contextualised with additional tools, such as the positioning of the object in the space, photos of the killed, precise lighting, and audio, video, or textual testimonials. The effectiveness of the desire object to induce an emotional charge to the visitors depends on the capacity of the simulacrum to create an "authentic replica", not necessarily of the event per se, but of the absence and void that followed the event. In other words, visitors are invited into a space which has been designed to elicit an emotional response from the viewer.[61]

The more emotional energy is created, the higher that the value of the desire object will be, as more people will acquire an emotional bond with the object. What matters is the cumulative process of the emotional energy which includes the hundreds and thousands of people who face the object. Here, the value of the object is directly connected with the plurality and synchronisation of emotional energy. Hence, what we can see is that, while both the emotional energy and the value of the object are at their peak in the private sphere, once they are moved to a public sphere the singular emotional energy drops but the collective emotional energy increases. Consequently, the value follows the growth of collective emotional energy which keeps adding to the value.

Yet, the emotional charge experienced by the visitors does not come as a tabula rasa. While the desire objects – such as broken glasses, bent watches, muddy shoes, blood-stained garments, worn out wallets, or torn IDs – may have similar (yet unique) biographical trajectories, their agency may differ significantly. To grasp this difference in their agency, we need now to focus our attention on the distinct existing pre-knowledge of each of the objects within their own category. While desire objects and their meanings originate in a specific context and are linked to a specific atrocity, the model I propose here suggests that – regardless of the given atrocity in which the desire object appears – there are overlapping trajectories that point to the significance of the circulated knowledge around the object itself, which is crucial for objects to "elevate" to the status of a widely recognisable symbol. To clarify this point, I will briefly use an example of the shoe of a victim.

'A Victim's Shoe' – Ascribing Agency to a Desire Object

The biographies and agency of desire objects operate on both spatial and temporal axes. Yet, while the biographies of desire objects mark the linear movement of a specific object from one circuit to another, the agency of desire objects is determined by the frequency of their circulation. In other words, a watch, discovered in a forest where people were executed, may go from a storage facility to a courtroom, then to the home of the deceased, and possibly to a museum or other public space to be publicly displayed. There is a certain linearity to this movement – often not predictable, but still traceable. The journey a desire object makes, from its inscription to its final destination, is distinctive and unique to each object's biography. Agency, on the

61 Elizabeth Ellsworth, *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge, 2005). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203020920.

other hand, works differently as it is not linked to one particular object, but to a bigger category of objects: it is no longer about the trajectory of one particular shoe, but about the entire category of victims' shoes found in the places where the atrocity took place. From the onset, the desire objects possess agency because of their instant impact on individuals. However, for this agency to become significant, the given object has to become culturally, politically, and socially encoded as "meaningful" beyond the singularity of the object's biography. If that is the case, how do certain categories of objects become "meaningful"? Why do some objects become culturally, politically, and socially resonant while many others may be impactful but yet are short-lived, isolated islands whose emotional energy is likely to evaporate?

As mentioned previously, agency is directly linked to the repetition and circulation of both the object itself and its images and replicas. This process happens over time, and it is not a linear process but operates in a circular, wave-like manner. It does not follow the chain pattern of moving from one destination to another in a direct way. Though the physical object itself, found in the place where an atrocity has taken place, may also travel from one exhibition to another, one museum to another, one city to another, one country to another, its physical travel is fairly limited. However, the circulation of the visual and narrated images, which takes place simultaneously, is more profound. It points to the ways in which memories travel both spatially and temporally. This is how an object manages to transcend its bare materiality to become encoded with particular meanings.

The documentaries that replicate the images of the object, the movies, photos, or novels that narrate the emotional engagement with the object, the history textbooks, newspaper articles, academic publications, museum and exhibition catalogues and flyers, the oral testimonials – they all pave the way for the cultural, political, and social encoding of the desire objects. The more the image of the object is circulated and charged with a unified connotation, the more significant it becomes. Or, to put it bluntly: one victim's shoe is just an isolated island, even a pile of shoes acts as just an archipelago, but once the images of victims' shoes become replicated and circulated via different media and educational projects, only then does their meaning become culturally, politically, and socially fixated and accepted (to some extent) globally. A single victim's shoe is nothing more than an individual story of an unjust lost life in an atrocity; a pile of shoes is the testimony of mass-scale life destruction during the course of a particular atrocity. It is not only their specific texture, their smell, their histories, but also the images of the victims' shoes that become widely distributed and which elevate the shoe to a level of abstraction resembling a general sense of loss, death, and destruction.

We see, for example, how the enormous piles of shoes, after the liberation of concentration camps, had a profound impact, in terms of the scale of the horror, when it comes to what transpired during the Holocaust. An eyewitness report of Majdanek after its liberation, by one of the thirty-four Western correspondents brought to the camp through the efforts of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, describes this storehouse: "[i]t was full of shoes. A sea of shoes. I walked across them unsteadily. They were piled, like pieces of coal in a bin, halfway up the walls …"[62, 63] The empty shoes of the victims of the Holocaust, as seen at the extermination camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau, bear silent witness to the systematic attempt by the

62 Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 55.
63 Richard Lauterbach, "Murder, INC.," *Time*, 11 September 1944.

Germans and their collaborators to exterminate the Jews of Europe, as well as other groups the Nazis deemed threatening or inferior.[64]

Once the testimonials started to surface, the horrific trajectories of the shoes became known. Their biographies, the distinct ways in which they were collected, categorised, and distributed, show the dark side of human beings' capacity for destruction, when shoes become the thin line between life and survival, between death and disappearance. Similar stories about the piles of shoes started to appear. The chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto from 1943 provides detailed testimonials on the shoe economy.[65] A number of survivors, such as Abraham Bomba and Abraham Sutzkever, wrote about the arrival of the shoes in the ghetto following the disappearance of the people who wore them.[66, 67] Zinovii Tolkatchev, a Belarusian-born artist, created, during an intense thirty-five days, approximately thirty works depicting the horrors he saw and learned about at the Majdanek camp – the first account of the Nazi atrocities. In these works, shoes immediately became recognisable as visual symbols depicting the Holocaust.[68] His "Preparations for the Massacre", part of his Auschwitz series of 1945, stresses their fate: camp uniforms are placed beside the pile of shoes. The painting depicts similar scenes, such as a pile of human skulls or heaps of shoes, of which some 800,000 pairs were found in the camp.[69] In his Survival in Auschwitz, Primo Levi describes it concisely: "[d]eath begins with the shoes: for most of us, they show themselves to be instruments of torture".[70] Shoes are the actual object that made human life disposable. The Nazis regarded the slave not as "a capital investment but as a commodity to be discarded and easily replaced".[71] Shoes became a synonym for the systematic plunder that accompanied systematic slaughter.[72]

The level of shock amongst the public regarding what transpired in the ghettos and concentration camps became clear as more evidence was brought to light. The works had wide audiences, and they paved the way for numerous artists to further elaborate on this topic. Marc Klionsky's 1962 "Pile of Shoes", for example, shows the desolation of shoes set before a barbed-wire fence, alluding to the fate of the imprisoned. From 1985 to 1989, an Austrian survivor, Elsa Pollak, made her famous work, a ceramic sculpture of a pile of old shoes from men, women, and children, entitled "All That Remained", echoing the already globally well-known images of the piles of shoes, at that time displayed in a number of Holocaust museums. A decade later, in 1998, the documentary "The Last Days", directed by James Moll and produced by June Beallor, Kenneth Lipper, and Steven Spielberg, told the stories of five Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. It shows piles of abandoned, empty shoes and signals to the viewer the enormity of the loss by metonymically materialising what had been rendered immaterial.[73]

64 Ellen Carol Jones, "Empty Shoes," in *Footnotes: On Shoes*, eds. Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 197.
65 Jones, "Empty Shoes," 204.
66 Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 568.
67 Abraham Sutzkever, untitled poem.
68 Mirijam Rajner, "From the Shtetl to the Flowers of Auschwitz and Back: The Creation, Reception and Destiny of Zinovii Tolkatchev's Art," in *Images of Rupture between East and West: The Perception of Auschwitz and Hiroshima in Eastern European Arts and Media*, eds. Urs Heftrich et al. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016), 155–185.
69 Rajner, "From the Shtetl."
70 Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz,* trans. Stuart Woolf (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace, 2013[1958]), 34.
71 Michael Berenbaum and Arnold Kramer, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 108.
72 Jones, "Empty Shoes."
73 Jones, "Empty Shoes."

These are just scattered examples of the generative process through which "a victim's shoe" became a recognisable trope of death, suffering, and destruction. The process coincides with the global reception of the Holocaust on a cosmopolitan scale,[74] although with varying connotations in the United States, Germany and Israel.[75] Documentaries, photo exhibitions, artistic works, literature, movies, commemorations, the establishment of Holocaust museums, survivors' testimonies, oral history projects and history textbooks – they all vastly contributed to the almost global recognition of the iconic Holocaust images of the "Holocaust victim shoe" and the "piles of shoes". The Holocaust shoes received, over time, multiple meanings and functions acting as remnants, metonyms, and monuments, all of which became a recognisable *lieux de mémoire*.[76] The wide circulation of the victim's shoe as a reference point was enabled by the amassing of artefacts (shoes) from the sites of destruction and concentration camps, where museums repeat the conventions of metonymical displacement. The recognisable trope of the victim's shoe functions as a historical trace, as a simulation of the past and its irretrievable loss, in an over-determination of history and memory.[77]

The victims' shoes, as a reference point to death, loss, and destruction, and as a resource to communicate past atrocities, continue to be greatly exploited as the most potent tool to mark both the Holocaust and other past atrocities and historical injustices. There are many examples and, in recent years, we have seen this usage of the victims' shoe trope continuing and growing. In 2005, on the banks of the Danube River in Budapest, not far from the Hungarian Parliament building, the "Shoes on the Danube Promenade" memorial was erected, and it contains sixty pairs of old-fashioned shoes. In 2014, on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and due to the seventieth anniversary of the liquidation of the Majdanek camp, the exhibition "Shoes of the Dead" was opened in Dresden. Hence, the motive of a victim/s shoe/s has been repeated as a refrain in many exhibitions, artistic installations, and museum displays. In a similar way to "Footsteps of Those Who Did (Not) Cross", the 2021 exhibition at the Srebrenica Memorial Centre or the "Mrtvare" (The Dead Things) photo exhibition at the Art Gallery of Bosnia, the 9/11 Memorial Museum was announced as a "Home to the Shoes of Survivors". The Kigali Genocide Memorial, as well as other memorials across Rwanda, display victims' shoes, and in 2021 the Tuol Sleng museum launched a moving new exhibition of victims' clothes, including their footwear. Having said that, this article cannot adequately address all the differences and significant nuances in the ways in which these exhibitions often reproduce the perpetrators' gaze and de-individualise the victims[78] and, in various

74 Starting with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (1946), and continuing with the Nuremberg Trials (1947), the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel (1949), the establishment of the Yad Vashem Museum (1953), the Eichmann trial in Israel (1960), the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt (1963), the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (1961), the broadcast of the TV series *Holocaust* at the end of the 1970s (a major turning point in the media representation and the "Americanisation" of the Holocaust), the establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (1980), and Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), we see a rapid growth in Holocaust memorialisation, first in Europe and Israel, and then, in the decades to come, across the globe.

75 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 2002): 87–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431002005001002.

76 Sharon B. Oster, "Holocaust Shoes: Metonymy, Matter, Memory," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture*, eds. Victoria Aarons and Phyllis Lassner (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 761–784. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33428-4_41.

77 Jones, "Empty Shoes," 215.

78 Williams, *Memorial Museums*.

contexts, create very different political and emotional work and performances of memorial script.[79]

Yet, to understand why a victim's shoe is potent enough to produce an emotional charge almost universally, we need to account for the shoe as an object category. What makes shoes different from many other objects is their multiple and well-established meanings through popular culture, literature, art, music, movies, and sport. Shoes, as a category, operate on multiple levels of recognition and are associated with numerous activities and emotions. We use shoes to walk, to hike, to run, to dance, to jump. We wear them, buy them, dispose them, keep them, and collect them. They are tightly connected to gender and erotica, social status, rituals, consumption, lifestyle, habits, and much more. However, whatever associative linkages we make with our encounters with shoes in day-to-day life, they are always connected to life and livelihood. Hence, what happens in an encounter with an empty shoe – a victim's shoe – is the immediate clash between images associated with life and joy and those of death and void. This emotional contrast explains why other objects are less potent in ascribing agency to desire objects: suitcases, for example, are associated with travel, displacement, and home; watches with time; and wallets with monetary transactions. What we see here is that the scope of the contrast decreases and with it also the potential emotional charge.

Political Action

So, how can the agency ascribed to objects initiate political action? We have palpable evidence clearly showing that objects, when ascribed agency, become an integrated language of political action. They have the potential to communicate both our past grievances and our visions of the future. Because our focus is not on objects as we often regard them – as a prop or an ornament – we fail to see how human-object relationships shape political action.

Even a brief (and unsystematic) look at some recent actions sheds light on the role that the agency of objects can have in forming our political actions. During the very first few weeks of the Ukrainian-Russian war, people started bringing their shoes to the Danube promenade in Budapest as an anti-war protest. Similarly, activists put shoes outside Georgia's parliament to remember children who had died in Ukraine. The same political protest took place in Belgrade and in many other places across the globe, with shoes being piled up. These political actions clearly ascribed agency to shoes in order to communicate resentment regarding the ongoing war. Shoes, contextualised as a symbol of death, void, and destruction, offered a clear and widely recognisable vocabulary to express particular moral claims. This silent communication was possible due to the repetition and embedding of "victims' shoes" as being already grounded in a symbolic meaning of death and destruction. It was also possible due to the repeated use of shoes in political actions across the globe. For example, in 1994, a "Silent March" took place, collecting and displaying 40,000 pairs of shoes, symbolising the number of Americans killed by guns in one year. In 2008, in San Francisco, 1,558 pairs of shoes were displayed to represent those who had jumped to their deaths from the Golden Gate Bridge. In 2010, Serbian activists placed hun-

79 Susan Henderson, "'Clogs, Boots and Shoes Built to the Sky': Initial Findings from a Sociomaterial Analysis of Education at Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," in Identities and Citizenship Education: Controversy, Crisis and Challenges, ed. Peter Cunningham (London: Children's Identity and Citizenship European Association, 2013), 678–689.

dreds of pairs of shoes in solidarity with the Srebrenica genocide victims. In 2012, to commemorate the victims of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, 8,372 shoes were displayed in a square in Ankara. In 2012, the Australian Road Safety Foundation's Fatality campaign gathered fourteen hundred pairs of shoes, representing the average number of people killed on Australian roads each year. In 2015, huge demonstrations were held in Paris, collecting 10,000 pairs of shoes to warn of the effects of climate change. In Mexico, in 2016, shoes were gathered to honour the victims of drug cartels. That same year, Croatians protested for better jobs by placing their shoes in Zagreb, representing the people who were forced to leave the country in search of work. In 2018, 4,500 pairs of shoes were displayed in front of the Council of the European Union in Brussels to represent every person killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the last decade. That same year, 7,000 pairs of shoes were laid on the lawn outside of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., to remember children killed by gun violence. Also in 2018, a Dallas theatre company asked the public to donate their shoes to honour victims of gun violence. In 2018, Israelis protested against violence towards women by placing women's shoes on the main square in Tel Aviv. In 2020, 440 pairs of women's shoes were hung on one of the city walls in Istanbul. In 2020, one hundred and sixty-four pairs of nurses' shoes were placed on the lawn of the Capitol: a vigil for colleagues who had died from Covid-19 was held in Washington, D.C., with one shoe for every nurse who had died. In 2021, "Eyes Wide Open: The Human Cost of War in Iraq" created an exhibit of 800 sets of combat boots bearing the names of American soldiers killed in Iraq. In 2021, shoes and notes were left outside the Spokane Public Schools building in the United States in protest at the state vaccine mandate.

The fact that these cases differ greatly from each other, in their intent, context, and political and social circumstances, demonstrates exactly the importance of this model: with the movement from one circuit to another, desire objects change their value and their meanings. With each additional movement, some objects lose their relevance while a few gain additional meanings and applications. Only a small number of objects – not specific objects but objects as a category – will be incorporated into a widely recognisable vocabulary of political action. But not a watch, nor a wallet, nor marbles, as they all belong to categories of objects that have limited pre-established social and cultural meanings: though they tie us associatively to some aspect of life, none of these objects is crucial for life itself. Shoes, on the other hand, cannot be separated from life and liveliness, nor can we, regardless of our cultural or religious backgrounds, social status, age, or gender, imagine modern life without shoes in some shape or form.

A victim's shoe has become a widely identifiable trope that transcends national boundaries and specific historical events. However, although it serves as a common transnational vocabulary, it expresses various claims and sentiments. While what is common to all of the political actions mentioned is the close linkage between empty shoes and death, the moral claims and sentiments attached to them differ significantly. They include strikingly different moral claims: from the "right" claims and expressions of solidarity, grievances, and injustice for a variety of victims (such as victims of war, gun violence, traffic accidents, domestic abuse, pandemics, or terrorist attacks), to the demand for accountability and government action (job cuts, climate change). Interestingly, the range of the vocabulary extends to separate temporalities, addressing both past and future events. The vocabulary of human-object relations is both backward- and forward-looking, with both of these perspectives providing a much needed transnational communication channel and the global language of action.

The range of moral claims in which shoes are symbolically used to promote a certain agenda still needs much deciphering. What meanings do people ascribe to shoes when protesting? What does this vocabulary of political action tell us about ideological frameworks that inspire and what inspires them? In other words, how do the various trajectories of a desire object cement meanings and how do they shape – and how are they shaped by – ideological thinking, most notably by that of human rights and nationalism?

Conclusion

Desire objects are like no other objects: they are personal items that link individuals and their unjust and sudden death. Above all, they are *personal.* They bear both a literal and figurative DNA of the deceased. Hence, desire objects are potent in bridging the gap between individual and collective grievances as they can point to what transpired during an atrocity. However, both the desire object's value, and the emotional energy that it produces, changes and decreases once the object moves from the private to the public realms.

The main focus of this ongoing research is understanding how human-object relations affect political action. Not all objects will have agency. On the contrary. In fact, only an exceedingly small number of objects will be able to provoke political action. Now, the main question to pose is: under what circumstances do objects manage to transcend their materiality and functionality to shape meaningful human-object relations? I claim here that desire objects, as personal items found in places where atrocities have taken place, are a good place to start this enquiry, as they are immediately associated with death, violence, destruction, and injustice, all of which draw strong emotional reactions. The emotional energy desire objects ignite, and their changing value that develops via their biographical trajectories, are fundamental for objects to be ascribed with agency. Yet, even then, only a few will rise to become included into what seems to be a universal vocabulary of political action. To gain this status of an embedded recognisable language, their meaning must be both widely circulated and vernacularised, but it must also be in stark contrast to their mundane purpose. Hence, "a victim's shoe" is a fitting example of how, when something is widely circulated, there can be a clash with the mundane meaning of that object.

Many questions remain unresolved. What is the impact of political actions propelled by human-object relations? How does this vocabulary shape distinct and unpredictable moral claims? How do those moral claims feed into different ideological views? What can they tell us about remembering atrocities? And, most importantly, what visions of the past and the future do they carry? Or, to put it figuratively, what is the void that we wish to fill in those empty shoes?

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Mathias Lichtenwagner/Philipp Rohrbach

Orte und Opfer der NS-Militärgerichtsbarkeit in Wien

Simon Wiesenthal, Deserteure und deren Rehabilitierung: Bericht über einen Stadtrundgang mit Podiumsdiskussion

Abstract

Am 21. Oktober 2009 beschloss der Nationalrat mit den Stimmen von Grünen, ÖVP und SPÖ ein Gesetz, mit dem Wehrmachtsdeserteure und andere Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz pauschal rehabilitiert wurden. Dafür waren gesellschaftliche und politische Debatten ausschlaggebend, die in den späten 1990er-Jahren ihren Ausgang nahmen, eine umfassende gesellschaftliche Diskussion über die NS-Militärgerichtsbarkeit und ihre Opfer anregten und neben der Rehabilitierung auch in der 2014 erfolgten Errichtung des Denkmals für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz am Wiener Ballhausplatz mündeten.
Bei einem gemeinsam organisierten Stadtrundgang wollten sich das Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien (VWI) und das Personenkomitee „Gerechtigkeit für die Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz" (PK) den Orten nationalsozialistischer Militärgerichtsbarkeit in Wien widmen: Wo waren die Orte der Verfolgung, wo wurden Todesurteile und Folterungen angeordnet, wie wird vor Ort daran erinnert? Des Weiteren wollten die Organisatoren im Rahmen des Rundgangs der Frage nachgehen, wie Simon Wiesenthal, der zeitlebens einen Blick auf ‚andere' Opfergruppen abseits politischer und rassistischer Verfolgung hatte, zu Deserteuren und deren Rehabilitierung stand.
Tour: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B66UE1xhO0g,
Panel discussion: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgYgHpSbaNc

Zur Idee

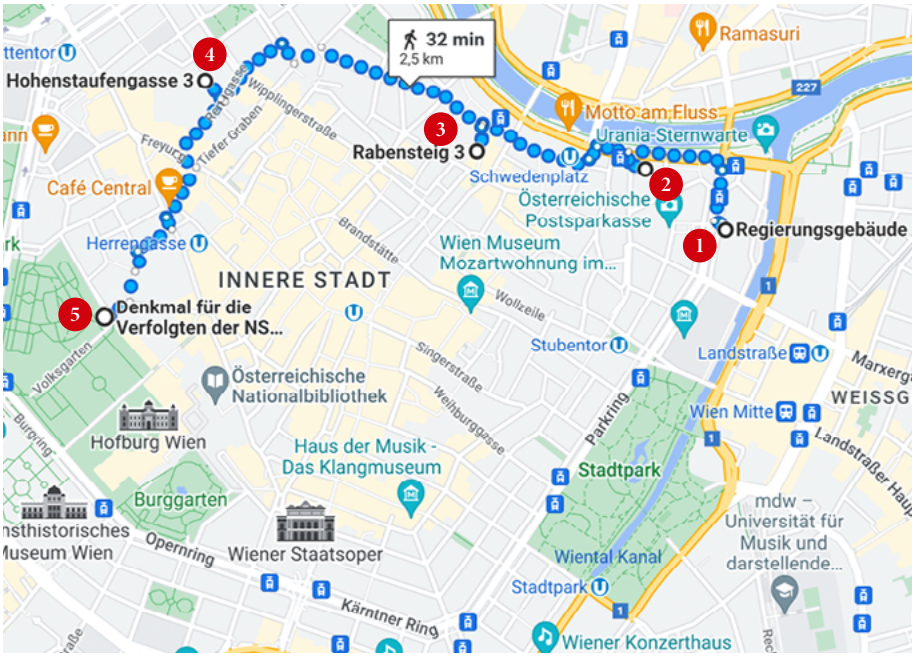
Im Zentrum der Veranstaltung standen neben dem Rundgang zwei Fragen-Komplexe:

Zum Ersten: Wie stand Wiesenthal zu Wehrmachtsdeserteuren? Wie war seine Haltung zur Desertion im Verhältnis zu seiner umstrittenen Position zur Wehrmacht und Waldheim zu sehen und wie verhielt er sich politisch zur Anfang der 2000er-Jahre aufkommenden Frage der Rehabilitierung der Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz?

Zum Zweiten: Wie steht es im Jahr 2022 rund um die Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz? Hat die gesellschaftliche und justizielle Rehabilitierung funktioniert? Wie wird das Denkmal am Ballhausplatz für Vermittlung und Auseinandersetzung angenommen? Und gibt es offene politische Forderungen oder wissenschaftliche Defizite?

Der von Philipp Rohrbach für das VWI und Mathias Lichtenwagner für das PK konzipierte Rundgang setzte sich an fünf Stationen – drei davon ehemalige Militärgerichte, mit der jeweiligen Ortsgeschichte und den oben skizzierten Fragen auseinander. Offene politische Forderungen sowie noch zu erforschende Aspekte der NS-Militärjustiz waren in der anschließenden Podiumsdiskussion Gesprächsgegenstand.

https://doi.org/10.23777/sn.0222 | www.vwi.ac.at



1. 1., Stubenring 1, Regierungsgebäude (Sitz mehrerer Ministerien)
2. 1., Franz-Joseph-Kai/Ecke Dominikanerbastei (Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung)
3. 1., Rabensteig 3, Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien (VWI)
4. 1., Hohenstaufengasse 3, Bundesministerium
5. 1., Ballhausplatz 2, Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz

Station 1: Regierungsgebäude am Stubenring

Adresse: Stubenring 1, 1010 Wien
Nutzung heute: Regierungsgebäude (Sitz mehrerer Ministerien)
Nutzung Wehrmachtsjustiz: Zentrum der Wehrmachtsjustiz
Begrüßung zum Rundgang: Terezija Stoisits
Einführung und Vorstellung Konzept zum Rundgang: Philipp Rohrbach
Referat: *Das heutige Regierungsgebäude als Zentrum der Wiener Wehrmachtsjustiz vom ‚Anschluß' 1938 bis zur Befreiung 1945* (Mathias Lichtenwagner)

Die erste Station war auch die längste, da hier die Besucher:innen von den Veranstalter:innen begrüßt, über die Entstehungsgeschichte des Rundgangs sowie in die Geschichte des Gebäudes und dessen Verwendung durch die NS-Militärjustiz informiert wurden.

Terezija Stoisits begrüßte die Teilnehmer:innen in ihrer Funktion als VWI-Vorstandsvorsitzende, aber auch als ehemalige Politikerin, deren Beschäftigung mit dem Themenkomplex Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz nun schon mehre Jahrzehnte umfasst. Durch den Rundgang und die anschließende Podiumsdiskussion – so Stoisits – „schließe sich nur ein Kreis", der mit ihrer Beschäftigung als Nationalratsabgeordnete Anfang der 1990er-Jahre begonnen und nun auch zu der – vom VWI mitgetragenen – Veranstaltung geführt habe. Stoisits war es ein Anliegen, erneut auf die wichtige Rolle des politischen Aktivisten und ehemaligen Deserteurs Richard

Terezija Stoisits, Mathias Lichtenwagner und Philipp Rohrbach bei der Eröffnung des Rundgangs am Stubenring 1.

Wadani (1922–2020) hinzuweisen, dessen Engagement einen wichtigen „Motor" für die rechtliche und gesellschaftliche Rehabilitierung von österreichischen Wehrmachtsdeserteuren darstellt. Weiters freute sie sich darüber, unter den Teilneher:innen auch Richard Wadanis Witwe, Linde Wadani, zu begrüßen.

Philipp Rohrbach, wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am VWI, gab einen kurzen Überblick über die Entstehung und den Ablauf der Veranstaltung. Die Idee zum Rundgang war Anfang 2020 im Rahmen eines Gesprächs mit Mathias Lichtenwagner zur Thematik aktueller Fragen und noch offener Forderungen des Personenkomitees „Gerechtigkeit für die Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz" entstanden. Dabei stellte sich heraus, dass seit der gesetzlichen Rehabilitierung im Jahr 2009 und der Errichtung des Denkmals am Ballhausplatz 2014 nur wenige neue Akzente gesetzt worden waren, aber sehr wohl noch einige zentrale Forderungen offen seien: Sie betreffen unter anderem den Bereich der Vermittlung, die Zurverfügungstellung von Forschungsergebnissen, die aus einem Projekt, das der Rehabilitierung vorangegangen war, stammen, sowie die Anbringung von Gedenktafeln/-zeichen an Orten der Verfolgung in Wien. Diese Überlegungen stellten die Basis für die Entwicklung des Rundgangs dar, der eigentlich schon 2020 hätte stattfinden sollen, dann aber – durch die Corona-Pandemie bedingt – erst 2022 realisiert werden konnte.

Rohrbach wies in seiner Einführung darauf hin, dass Simon Wiesenthal sich in seiner jahrzehntelangen Arbeit nicht nur mit der Shoah und der Verfolgung von NS-Täter:innen beschäftigt, sondern sich schon früh und emphatisch anderen Opfern der NS-Verfolgung, wie zum Beispiel Lesben und Schwulen, durch die Nazis ermordeten sogenannten ‚psychisch Kranken' oder auch Rom:nja und Sinti:zze zugewandt hat. Es sei die Aufgabe des VWI, diesen Zugang und dieses Vermächtnis weiterzutragen und sich auch noch weiteren Opfergruppen zuzuwenden. In diesem Zusammenhang sei auch das Zustandekommen des Rundgangs zu verstehen, im Rahmen dessen unter anderem der Frage nachgegangen werden soll, wie Wiesenthal zur Frage der Desertion aus der Wehrmacht gestanden ist.

Im ersten – konkret auf einen Ort der NS-Militärjustiz Bezug nehmenden – Beitrag, gab Mathias Lichtenwagner einen Überblick über die Gebäudegeschichte am Stubenring 1 und erläuterte in diesem Zusammenhang auch grundsätzlich die

Struktur und Entwicklung der NS-Militärjustiz in Wien. Das Gebäude wurde ab 1909 errichtet und 1913 als k.u.k. Reichskriegsministerium eröffnet. Das alte Reichskriegsministerium Am Hof war zu klein geworden, die Armeeführung der Monarchie forderte nachdrücklich ein modernes Bürogebäude und bekam dieses auch. Das neue Haus, innen modern, außen konservativ gehalten, bot auf etwa 10.000 Quadratmetern rund 2.000 Mitarbeiter:innen Platz. Das Radetzky-Reiterstandbild wurde vom alten Standort an den neuen verlegt und befindet sich bis heute am Stubenring. Hier begann der Rundgang.

Die im Gebäude untergebrachten hohen Stellen der Armee standen während des Ersten Weltkriegs im Zentrum der Kriegsführung. Nach der Ausrufung der Republik gab es folgende Änderungen: Im Haus war zunächst das liquidierende Kriegsministerium mit der Auflösung der k.u.k. Armee betraut, danach das Staatsamt für Heereswesen mit dem Aufbau des Bundesheeres der Ersten Republik. Noch eine Änderung brachten das Kriegsende, die Gründung der Republik und der Frieden: Die Militärgerichtsbarkeit wurde in der Ersten Republik abgeschafft. Soldaten des Bundesheeres werden seither einem zivilen Gericht zugewiesen. Die zahlreichen Gerichts- und Haftgebäude der Militärjustiz wurden anderen Verwendungen zugeführt – so etwa wurde das Militär-Gerichtsgebäude mit angeschlossenem Gefangenenhaus am Hernalser Gürtel zum Straflandesgericht II (heute das Polizeianhaltezentrum). Schrittweise zogen auch nicht-militärische Ministerien ins Gebäude ein, 1924 wurde Österreichs erster Radiosender (RAVAG) am und im Haus installiert, was die Relevanz des Gebäudes für die Politik und den politischen Machterhalt noch steigerte, nicht zuletzt für das austrofaschistische Regime ab 1933. Nach dem ‚Anschluß' im März 1938 war das Gebäude am Stubenring unter den ersten, die im Zuge der Machtübernahme besetzt wurden, vermutlich noch direkt am 12. März. Am Stubenring zogen Zentralstellen der Wehrmacht ein, darunter auch jene, die in den nächsten sieben Jahren den Aufbau der NS-Militärjustiz betreiben sollten. Dazu zählten vor allem das Gericht des XVII. Armeekorps, die Wehrkreisverwaltung und der Oberstkriegsgerichtsrat des Dienstaufsichtsbezirks 4. Im weiteren Verlauf, vor allem ab Kriegsbeginn im September 1939, traten noch weitere Funktionen und Stellen hinzu, vor allem, das Gericht der Division 177, der Sitz des Sachbearbeiters für den Reichkriegsanwalts und Korps- bzw. Divisions-Stab und -Kommandantur und damit der Sitz der Gerichtsherren. Die NS-Militärjustiz hatte kaum Strukturen, auf die sie aufbauen konnte, und stand unter großem Druck, in kürzester Zeit ein funktionierendes System aufzubauen. „[Die] Blut-, Opfer- und Schicksalsgemeinschaft [muss] im Ernstfall die geistige und schlagkräftige Waffe des Staates [sein], die die Widerstandskraft der Truppe und der Bevölkerung überhaupt erhält und steigert, frei von allen Fehlern, die sich psychologisch ungünstig auswirken könnten" stellte dazu der Militärjurist Helmut Dietz 1933 fest – wobei dafür in Österreich nur 18 Monate zur Verfügung standen.[1] Vom Stubenring aus wurden die notwendigen Haftgebäude, Gerichtsstandorte und Hinrichtungsstätten identifiziert und akquiriert, fähige Richter und Illegale, Zivilrichter und Offiziere gesucht und das effiziente Zusammenspiel zwischen Gerichtsherren, Richtern und Verfolgungsbehörden geprobt. Das hieß, so eine einschlägige Dienstanweisung, „Nebensächlichkeiten sind zu vernachlässigen, das Wälzen juristischer Probleme ist zu unterlassen. Notwendig ist das Eindringen in alle für den Kriegsfall notwendigen

1 Helmut Dietz, „Das Strafrecht der Wehrmacht im neuen Reich. Zur Neuordnung der Militärgerichtsbarkeit," in: *Deutsches Recht, 1933,* 163–172, zit. n. Manfred Messerschmidt: „Der „Zersetzer" und sein Denunziant. Urteil des Zentralgerichts des Heeres in Wien", in *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, Hg. Wolfram Wette (München/Zürich: 1992), 255–278, hier 255.

Vorschriften."[2] Nach dem Überfall auf Polen – und somit dem Kriegsbeginn – veränderte sich die Lage: Die Divisionsgerichte verließen die Stadt, zurück blieb das Feldkriegsgericht der Division Nr. 177 als Hinterlandgericht. Seinen ersten Standort hatte dieses am Stubenring, bis 1945 kamen noch zwei Standorte in Wien hinzu (darüber hinaus etwa in Brno). Im Vortrag ging Lichtenwagner dann noch einmal speziell auf die Rolle der Gerichtsherren ein, die im Gebäude ihren Sitz hatten und zu deren Aufgaben es gehörte, Urteile ab einer bestimmten Strafhöhe, und damit auch alle Todesurteile, abzuzeichnen.

Zur Aufarbeitung und zum Gedenken wurde angemerkt, dass die Aufarbeitung des Wirkens der Wehrmachtsjustiz in Österreich bis in die 1990er-Jahre ganz allgemein nicht stattgefunden hatte, und somit auch bezogen auf das Haus nicht erfolgt ist. Die zeitgeschichtliche und militärhistorische Forschung hat sich in Ansätzen dem pro-österreichischen Widerstand von Offizieren, die unter andrem im Stubenring wirkten, zugewandt, aber nicht deren Involvierung in die Militärjustiz. Auch existieren zahlreiche Arbeiten zum Gebäude und zum Gebäudeschmuck (Adler, Soldatenköpfe, Putten oder Reiterstandbild), nicht aber zur Wehrmacht oder Wehrmachtsjustiz. Gedenken an die hier Verfolgten und Verurteilten und die Funktion während des Nationalsozialismus gibt es in Bezug auf das Gebäude bis heute keines.

Station 2: Zentralgericht des Heeres

Adresse: Franz-Josefs-Kai 7-9, 1010 Wien
Nutzung heute: Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung
Nutzung Wehrmachtsjustiz: Zentralgericht des Heeres Wien und Wehrmachtsstreife
Referat: *Zentralgericht des Heeres Wien: Verfolgungspraxis – Wehrkraftzersetzung – Denunziation* (Ela Hornung-Ichikawa)[3]

Das Gebäude Franz-Josefs-Kai 7–9 wurde 1907 fertiggestellt und war in Wien weithin als „Industriepalast" bekannt. Eine Vielzahl an Speditionen, Reisebüros, Großhandelsfirmen, Verlage und ähnliche Unternehmen waren in dem relativ modernen Geschäftsgebäude angesiedelt. Nach dem ‚Anschluß' 1938 wurden die jüdischen Besitzer:innen enteignet, das Haus ‚arisiert'. Verschiedene Ministerien des Dritten Reichs zogen in die Liegenschaft ein und das Gebäude wurde für den Bürobetrieb adaptiert, indem etwa Lifte eingebaut wurden. Schlussendlich übernahm die Wehrmacht das Gebäude. Auf zeitgenössischen Fotografien sind zwei Reichkriegsflaggen auf dem Dach zu sehen. Die Lage des Gebäudes war vorteilhaft: Zum Stubenring waren es nur wenige hundert Meter, aber auch andere Verfolgungsorte der Nazis und der Militärjustiz lagen in unmittelbarer Nähe. Am Franz-Josefs-Kai 7–9 waren zwei Stellen der Wehrmachtsjustiz untergebracht: Erstens die Kommandantur der Wehrmachtsstreife, zweitens das Zentralgericht des Heeres – Außenstelle Wien (ZdH). Die Aufgabe der Wehrmachtsstreife in Wien war die Überwachung jener Soldaten, die nicht an der Front waren – also etwa während der Aufstellung und Ausbildung, sowie während des Heimaturlaubs und der Genesung. Die „Kettenhunde", wie die Streife-Soldaten wegen ihrer um den Hals getragenen besonderen Kennzeichnung genannt wurden, hatten dabei insbesondere den öffentlichen Raum

2 Zit. n. Michael Eberlein, et al.: *Militärjustiz im Nationalsozialismus. Das Marburger Militärgericht.* Marburg, 1994, 39–40.
3 Ela Hornung, *Denunziation als soziale Praxis. Fälle aus der NS-Militärjustiz* (Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2010).

und Verkehrsknoten wie etwa Bahnhöfe im Blick. Zur Überwachung des gesamten Stadtraums unterhielt die Streife in der Stadt Wien viele kleinere Wachposten, ihre Zentrale samt Folterkeller war in der Rossauerkaserne und eine Kommandantur am Franz-Josefs-Kai 7–9. Die Streife arbeitete dabei eng mit anderen Stellen der Verfolgung und Überwachung zusammen, vor allem mit der Gestapo.

Das Zentralgericht des Heeres war innerhalb der Wehrmachtsjustiz ein Gericht mit besonderer Zuständigkeit, jedoch kein Höchstgericht, allein weil es keine Instanzenzüge gab. Die längste Zeit, 1938 bis 1944, firmierte das Gericht unter dem Namen Gericht der Wehrmachtskommandantur Berlin, was dazu beitrug, dass die Funktion dieses Gerichts bis heute verkannt wird. Das Gericht – unter der früheren und späteren Bezeichnung – hatte eine sehr große Außenstelle in Wien, die im Gebäude Franz-Josefs-Kai 7–9 untergebracht war. Die zwei größten Standorte des Zentralgerichtes des Heeres (ZdH) waren Berlin und Wien. Bis zu 100 Richter arbeiteten an diesem Gericht, das bis Kriegsende bis zu 46.000 Verfahren führte – was es zum größten Gericht der Militärjustiz machte. Das ZdH hatte eine besondere Zuständigkeit für bestimmte Deliktgruppen, u. a. war es zuständig für Homosexualität, politische Straftaten, bestimmte Korruptionsdelikte, Wehrkraftzersetzung mit Ausnahme von Selbstverstümmelung, Verstößen gegen das Heimtückegesetz sowie Fahnenflüchtige, die nach drei Monaten Fahndung nicht gestellt worden waren. Abseits der inhaltlichen Zuständigkeit gab es keine territorialen Einschränkungen. Soldaten landeten wegen Tathandlungen in Frankreich, Norwegen oder Rumänien vor diesem Wiener Gericht, sofern sie Teil des Heeres waren, also nicht der Luftwaffe oder Marine angehörten.

Nach der Befreiung Wiens im April 1945 fiel das Gebäude – weil im Besitz des Deutschen Reichs – an die Republik Österreich. Dass es zuvor enteignet worden war, blieb 1945 vorerst unbeachtet. Sofort zogen militärische Stellen in das Gebäude ein, erst das Heeresamt, dann das Verteidigungsministerium. 1955 wurde das Gebäude doch noch an die Nachkomm:innen zurückgestellt, denen es 1938 geraubt worden war. Im Endeffekt einigte man sich auf einen Rückkauf. In der Aufarbeitung und Darstellung fehlt all dies. Weder die ‚Arisierung' noch die die Funktion als eines der größten Gerichte der Wehrmacht finden darin Erwähnung.

Ela Hornung-Ichikawa gab in ihrem Beitrag einen Einblick in die Verfolgungspraxis des Zentralgerichtes des Heeres: Wer wurde angezeigt und verfolgt, wer wurde denunziert und warum? Basis ihrer Untersuchungen waren ein geschlossener Bestand an Anklageschriften des Zentralgerichts des Heeres im Staatsarchiv, den sie für ihre Habilitationsschrift untersuchen konnte. Ein Großteil dieser Anklagen betraf das Delikt der Wehrkraftzersetzung und wiederum ein großer Anteil dieser Verfahren basierte auf Denunziation. Für ihre Forschung hat sich Hornung-Ichikawa mit beiden Seiten beschäftigt, den Denunzianten und den Denunzierten, und hat ist verschiedenen Verhältnissen, Gründen und Geschichten nachgespürt. Die Akten sind dabei sehr umfangreich, umfassen Bewertungen der verschiedenen Stellen von Staat und Partei zu den Verfolgten, Strafregisterauszüge, Einvernahmen, usw. Aus den Akten, so berichtete Hornung-Ichikawa, wird nochmal ersichtlich, dass Angeklagte in den Verfahren vor den Militärgerichten keinerlei Rechte hatten. So konnten Pflichtverteidiger kaum Schritte zur deren Verteidigung setzen und hatten kaum Möglichkeiten zum Beeinspruchen der Urteile. Anträge auf Begnadigung nach dem Urteil existierten nur vereinzelt. Im Beitrag wurden die am häufigsten vor dem Zentralgericht des Heeres verhandelten Delikte aufgezählt, wie Zersetzung der Wehrkraft, Heimtücke, Entfernung von der Truppe und Fahnenflucht, erläutert und Einblick in die Auslegung der entsprechenden Gesetze gegeben.

Ela Hornung-Ichikawas spricht vor dem ehemaligen Zentralgericht des Heeres über Denunziation im NS-Staat.

Zur Denunziation – die im Zentrum von Hornung-Ichikawas Ausführungen stand – hielt sie fest, dass der NS-Staat diese durchaus ambivalent sah. So wurde die Bevölkerung einerseits zur Denunziation von verbotenem oder verpöntem Verhalten aufgefordert, gleichzeitig aber auch ungerechtfertigte, vor allem privat motivierte Denunziationen als negatives menschliches und dysfunktionales Verhalten bewertet. Die von Hornung-Ichikawa untersuchten Fallgeschichten zeigen, dass ein Gros durch persönliche Differenzen und Konflikte, Konkurrenz und Neid, Aggression zwischen Männern und Frauen bzw. Soldaten und Zivilist:innen bedingt war. Oftmals wurden private Differenzen auf das politische Feld übertragen, keineswegs war der ‚typische' Denunziant, wie in der Literatur oft angenommen wird, überzeugter Nationalsozialist oder männlich: Männer und Frauen denunzierten gleichermaßen, und auch musste die Person dafür nicht wirklich politisch oder ideologisch gefestigt sein. Als häufige Konfliktfelder und Themen der Auseinandersetzung wurden etwa politisch-ideologische Differenzen, die Einschätzung des nationalsozialistischen Regimes, der Wehrmacht, des Kriegsverlaufs, der sozialen und nationalen Differenzen sowie der Macht-, Klassen- und Gruppenunterschiede genannt.

Der Beitrag endete mit einigen Fallbeispielen, die das zuvor Gehörte sehr eindrücklich illustrierten und Opfer wie auch Denunziant:innen etwas greifbarer machten. Daraus ein Ausschnitt:[4] Anfang September 1943 erzählte die Bäuerin Katharina Hell dem Ortsgruppenleiter ihres Heimatortes von einem Viehhirten, mit dem sie beruflich zu tun hatte, der bei gemeinsamen Arbeiten zweimal politische Witze erzählte. Einer der Witze lautete: Einem Mann wurde eine Kuh gestohlen, der Mann ging zum [Gendarm] und meldete es. (…) Der Gendarm sagte, das können wir machen, aber Sie müssen mir eine Beschreibung geben, wie die Kuh ausgesehen hat. Der Mann sagte: „Braun wie der Hitler, dick wie der Göring, hatschert wie der Goeb-

4 Ela Hornung, *Denunziation als soziale Praxis. Fälle aus der NS-Militärjustiz*, 195.

bels, und blöd schaut sie drein wie ein Illegaler, der einrücken muss."[5] Hornung-Ichikawa bemerkt dazu, dass in diesem Witz verschiedene Themen bearbeitet wurden, so neben der Beleidigung von NS-Größen etwa auch die Bevorzugung von illegalen Nationalsozialist:innen. Der Viehhirte wurde kurze Zeit später zur Wehrmacht eingezogen, von einer Streife verhaftet und im Wehrmachtsuntersuchungsgefängnis Favoriten inhaftiert. Ihm wurde im Februar 1944 vor dem Zentralgericht des Heeres der Prozess gemacht und er wurde wegen Wehrkraftzersetzung verurteilt.

Station 3: Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien (VWI)

Adresse: Rabensteig 3, 1010 Wien
Nutzung heute: Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien (VWI)
Referat: *Simon Wiesenthals Haltung zu Desertion. Eine Spurensuche im Archiv des VWI* (Philipp Rohrbach)

Im Archiv des Wiener Wiesenthal Instituts für Holocaust-Studien (VWI) am Rabensteig 3 befindet sich heute neben den holocaustrelevanten Beständen des Archivs der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde (IKG) auch das Archiv Simon Wiesenthals. Das Material kann dort von interessierten Forscher:innen eingesehen und auf verschieden Fragestellungen hin beforscht werden.

In seinen Ausführungen beschäftigte sich VWI-Mitarbeiter Philipp Rohrbach mit Simon Wiesenthals Haltung zu Desertion, die er anhand hauseigener Archiv-Quellen zu rekonstruieren versuchte. Auch wenn eine Suche im VWI-Archiv nach Korrespondenzen Simon Wiesenthals mit dem Personenkomitee „Gerechtigkeit für die Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz" (PK) zu keinem Treffer geführt hatte, aus der sich eine klare Haltung Wiesenthals zu den vom Personenkomitee im Vorfeld und rund

Philipp Rohrbach rekonstruiert anhand von drei Fallgeschichten Simon Wiesenthals Haltung zu Desertion.

5 Ebd.

um die Rehabilitierung der Wehrmachtsdeserteure vertretenen Forderungen herauslesen lies und eine Recherche im Archiv des Personenkomitees, das sich seit 2016 im Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes befindet, ebenso ergebnislos verlief, ist es Rohrbach in Zusammenarbeit mit der Archivarin des Simon Wiesenthal Archivs, Sandra Weiss, gelungen drei aussagekräftige Dossiers zu finden, aus welchen die Haltung Wiesenthals zu Frage der Desertion bzw. NS-Militärjustiz hervorgeht. Die drei Fallgeschichten geben einen Einblick in Wiesenthals Denken und Agieren zwischen den 1960er- und 1980er-Jahren und führen von ihrem Ursprungsgeschehen her in das von der Wehrmacht besetzte Polen, in die Sowjetunion und in die Niederlande.

Fallgeschichte Nummer 1: Feldwebel Anton Schmid

Anton Schmid wurde am 9. Jänner 1900 als Sohn eines Bäckergehilfen in Wien geboren. Über seine Kindheit ist nicht viel bekannt. Schmid wurde während des Ersten Weltkriegs zu einem k.u.k. Schützenregiment an die italienische Front eingezogen und betrieb in der Zwischenkriegszeit im 20. Wiener Gemeindebezirk ein Elektrowaren-, Radio- und Fotogeschäft, in dem er auch zwei jüdische Mitarbeiter beschäftigte. Er war verheiratet und hatte eine Tochter.

Im Jahr 1941 wurde Anton Schmid, der in den Rang eines Feldwebels gehoben worden war, im Rahmen seines Militärdienstes im besetzten Vilnius stationiert. Vilnius gehörte in der Zwischenkriegszeit zu Polen, fiel aber nach dem Hitler-Stalin-Pakt an die Sowjetunion und wurde nach dem Überfall Hitler-Deutschlands auf die Sowjetunion Teil des Reichskommissariats Ostland. Vilnius hatte eine große jüdische Bevölkerung und eine reiche jüdische Geschichte, die durch die Nationalsozialisten fast gänzlich vernichtet wurde. Heute ist Vilnius die Hauptstadt von Litauen.

Nachdem Schmid in Vilnius stationiert worden war, wurde ihm dort das Kommando über eine Versprengten-Sammelstelle übergeben – das war eine Stelle, die Soldaten, die ihre ursprünglichen Einheiten verloren hatten, einer neuen Einheit zuteilte. Des Weiteren erhielt er auch das Kommando über eine Polsterfabrik und Schneiderei, in der jüdische und andere Zwangsarbeiter beschäftigt waren. Die Pogrome und brutalen Mordaktionen gegen die in Vilnius ghettoisierten Jüdinnen und Juden beobachtend, beschloss Schmidt zu helfen. Er tat das, indem er dafür die gesamte militärische Infrastruktur nutzte, die ihm seine Dienststelle bot. So stellte er in seinem Wehrmachtsbüro beispielsweise Jüdinnen und Juden ein, die gefälschte Papiere erhielten (aus Juden wurden Christen). Anderen Jüdinnen und Juden verschaffte er gefälschte Arbeitspapiere, die sie vor der Ermordung retteten. Schmid half dabei Essen ins Ghetto zu schmuggeln und fuhr – als die deutschen Besatzer und ihre litauischen Helfer die Mordaktionen in Vilnius erneut intensivierten – mit seinen Wehrmachtslastwägen sogar Jüdinnen und Juden in andere Städte, wo sie zumindest temporär sicherer waren. Weiters arbeitete er sogar offen mit dem jüdischen Widerstand zusammen.

Wer genau dafür verantwortlich war, dass Schmids Hilfsaktion aufflog, nachdem er knapp 300 Jüdinnen und Juden gerettet hatte, ist umstritten. Gesichert ist nur, dass Anton Schmid am 25. Februar 1942 vom Kriegsgericht der Wehrmachtsfeldkommandantur 814 in Vilnius wegen der Rettung von über 300 jüdischen Ghettogefangenen zum Tode verurteilt wurde. Das Urteil wurde am 13. April 1942 vollstreckt, wo Schmid im Militärgefängnis Stefanska erschossen wurde.

Im Abschiedsbrief, den er kurz vor seiner Hinrichtung seiner Frau Stefanie geschrieben hatte, betonte Schmid „Ich habe ja nur Menschen, obwohl Juden gerettet vor den, was mich ereilte, und das war der Tod. So wie ich im Leben immer alles für andere tat, so habe ich auch mein Alles für andere geopfert."[6]

Simon Wiesenthal wurde der Name Anton Schmid durch Erzählungen Überlebender rund um den Prozess gegen Franz Murer (den „Schlächter von Vilnius") ein Begriff. Wiesenthal setzte sich mit Schmids Familie in Verbindung und sammelte 1965 sogar Geld dafür, damit Schmids Frau und Tochter erstmalig das Grab des Ehemanns/Vaters besuchen konnten, da es – so Wiesenthal – „eine vornehme Pflicht der Juden sei, sich dankbar zu erweisen."[7]

Zur Reise und zum Grabbesuch kam es im November 1965, als Wiesenthal gemeinsam mit Schmids Ehefrau und Tochter nach Vilnius reiste.

Wiesenthal bemühte sich in den darauffolgenden Jahren auch darum, den Militärrichter ausfindig zu machen, der Schmid zu Tode verurteilt hatte, und er war auch maßgeblich daran beteiligt, Anton Schmid posthum auf Yad Vashems Liste der Gerechten unter den Völkern setzen zu lassen.

Generell blieb Wiesenthal dem Andenken und der Erinnerung an Anton Schmid zeitlebens verbunden. Das zeigte sich auch daran, dass er den niederösterreichischen Historiker Manfred Wieninger, der ihn 2000 bezüglich Recherchen zu Anton Schmid anschrieb, bei seiner Arbeit tatkräftig unterstützte. Wieninger veröffentlichte 2014 – neun Jahre nach Wiesenthals Tod – einen *Roman in Dokumenten* über Anton Schmid, der den Titel *Die Banalität des Guten* trägt.

Fallgeschichte Nummer 2: Wilhelm Köhn

In den 1960er- und 1970er-Jahren ermittelte die bundesdeutsche Justiz gegen den ehemaligen Marineoberstabsrichter Wilhelm Köhn, der 1945 die beiden deutschen Marineangehörigen Rainer Beck (1916–1945) und Bruno Dörfer (1925–1945) in den von der deutschen Besatzung befreiten Niederlanden wegen Fahnenflucht zum Tode verurteilt hatte. Beck und Dörfer waren in den deutsch besetzten Niederlanden stationiert, als sie unabhängig voneinander beschlossen zu desertieren.

Beck verlies seine Truppe im September 1944, da er kurz zuvor einen Marschbefehl nach Deutschland erhalten hatte. Da Beck Halbjude war, fürchtete er sich davor, nach Deutschland zurückzukehren. Er hatte Angst, dass diese bisher erfolgreich verborgene Tatsache dort ans Tageslicht kommen könnte und beschloss daher, sich von seiner Truppe zu entfernen und sich bei Freund:innen und Bekannten zu verstecken. Dörfer desertierte im März 1945 und tauchte bei Familienangehörigen in Amsterdam unter.

Die große Tragödie an dem Schicksal der beiden ist, dass Beck und Dörfer sowohl die Kapitulation der deutschen Streitkräfte in den Niederlanden am 5. Mai 1945 als auch die bedingungslose Kapitulation der deutschen Wehrmacht am 8. Mai 1945 aus ihren Verstecken heraus erlebten. Sie begaben sich erst aus ihrem Unterschlupf heraus, als kanadische Truppen Amsterdam befreiten. Was die beiden nicht wussten, war, dass die Kanadier außerhalb Amsterdams ein Lager eingerichtet hatten, das den Namen Lager Hembrook trug, in dem alle deutschen Marineangehörigen auf

6 VWI-SWA, I.1. Anton Schmid, Abschiedsschreiben von Anton Schmid an seine Frau Stefanie Schmid, 13. April 1942.

7 VWI-SWA, I.1. Anton Schmid, Spendenliste des Dokumentationszentrums des Bundes Jüdischer Verfolgter des Naziregimes, 2. September 1965.

Befehl des verantwortlichen kanadischen Offiziers, Major Oliver Mace, zusammengefasst wurden. Die dortigen Gefangenen wurden nicht als Kriegsgefangene, sondern als bewaffnetes Personal im Übergang, als kapitulierte Truppen betrachtet. Zwar war es so, dass die Mannschaften im Lager entwaffnet wurden, den Offizieren wurden jedoch ihre Pistolen belassen und sie übten auch weiterhin die volle Befehls- und Disziplinargewalt über ihre Einheiten aus.

Nach der bedingungslosen Kapitulation der Wehrmacht beschlossen Beck und Dörfer sich bei kanadischen Dienststellen zu melden. Sie wurden von den Kanadiern am 12. Mai in das Lager Hembrook überstellt. Im Lager selbst wurden sie als Deserteure festgenommen; am 13. Mai wurde ein Kriegsgerichtsverfahren gegen sie eröffnet. Die Anklage lautete auf Fahnenflucht vor dem Feinde und wurde verlesen. Beide Angeklagten hatten Gelegenheit zu der Anschuldigung Stellung zu beziehen. Nach kurzer, ca. fünfminütiger Beratung des Gerichts wurde den Beschuldigten durch Marineoberstabsrichter Wilhelm Köhn das Urteil verkündet: Es lautete auf Tod durch Erschießung wegen Fahnenflucht gem. § 70 MStGB.

Da die deutschen Truppen entwaffnet waren, baten sie die Kanadier um Waffen und Munition. Die Kanadier statteten ein deutsches Erschießungskommando mit Karabinern und Munition aus. Weiters erhielten die Deutschen von den Kanadiern sogar einen Jeep und ein LKW, mit dem sie das Erschießungskommando und die Delinquenten zu einem holländischen Schießstand bringen konnten, wo Beck und Dörfer nach Verlesung des Urteilsspruchs am 13. Mai 1945 erschossen und verscharrt wurden. Es ist sehr wahrscheinlich, dass es sich bei Beck um Dörfer um die letzten beiden vollstreckten Urteile der NS-Militärjustiz handelt.

Wie in vielen anderen Fällen führen die Ermittlungen gegen Wilhem Kühn, der auch in den Nachkriegsjahren in Köln weiterhin Karriere als Jurist gemacht hatte, nicht weit. Es wurde zwar ein Verfahren gegen ihn eingeleitet, das aber 1973 eingestellt wurde. Simon Wiesenthal äußerte sich einige Male zum Fall Beck und Dörfer. So heißt es beispielsweise in einem Schreiben zu der Sache: „In der Vergangenheit haben wir ja besonders bei der Marine in den skandinavischen Ländern ähnliches gehabt, aber kein Fall war derart krass und ist mit aktiver alliierter Hilfe vor sich gegangen, wie der Fall Beck."[8]

Über die alliierte Hilfe in diesem Zusammenhang erzürnt, überlegte Wiesenthal, der ganzen Geschichte auch von kanadischer Seite her nachzugehen, „eine heiße Kartoffel", wie er in einem Schreiben an einen bekannten Rechtsanwalt aus dem Jahr 1984 festhielt, was darauf hindeutet, dass er mit seinen Bemühungen bedauerlicherweise nicht so weit kam, wie er wollte.[9]

Fallgeschichte Nummer 3: Norbert Gottschling

Im Jahr 1979 wandte sich ein gewisser Ernst F. Regius aus Hamburg an Simon Wiesenthal. Ernst Regius war Teil einer SS-Infanterie-Brigade, die in Polen und in der Sowjetunion eingesetzt worden war und dort auch Massaker an Juden und Jüdinnen sowie an Zivilist:innen durchgeführt hatte.[10] Als Regius befohlen wurde, sich im Rahmen des Einsatzes ebenfalls an den Mordaktionen zu beteiligen, desertierte er. Seine Geschichte war kompliziert. Er floh und gelangte auf einer wundersa-

8 VWI-SWA, I.1. Wilhelm Köhn, Schreiben von Simon Wiesenthal an Karl Heinz Lehmann, 31. August 1984.
9 Ebd.
10 Siehe VWI-SWA, I.1. Norbert Gottschling.

men Odyssee nach Ungarn und dann nach Berlin, wo er von der Gestapo und SS verfolgt und schließlich auch verhaftet wurde. Regius überlebte seine Haft und den Krieg und bemühte sich nach 1945 darum, sich als NS-Opfer bzw. NS-Verfolgter anerkennen zu lassen, was ihm allerdings nicht gelang. Er wurde daher weder als Nazi-Opfer noch vom Lastenausgleichsfonds als hilfsberechtigt anerkannt, was bedeutete, dass er auch keine Rente erhielt. Eines Tages traf Regius einen ehemaligen Vorgesetzten zufällig wieder, der ihn in der Einheit kommandiert hatte, an den Massakern beteiligt war und der aufgrund seines Einsatzes und seiner Erlebnisse eine Kriegsbeschädigtenrente erhielt. Dies ärgerte Regius der – wie bereits erwähnt – leer ausgegangen war. Er fand das unfair und wandte sich deshalb an Wiesenthal. Einerseits um ihm den Namen von Nobert Gottschling, der an Erschießungen beteiligt war, zu übermitteln, andererseits um Wiesenthal sein Leid zu klagen. Wiesenthal bemühte sich darum, Ermittlungen gegen Gottschling in die Wege zu leiten und er zeigte auch Anteilnahme an Regius' Situation, indem er versuchte ihn zumindest ein wenig bei der Überprüfung seiner Rentenansprüche zu unterstützen.

Insgesamt lässt sich feststellen, dass in Vorbereitung zum Rundgang kein Statement von Simon Wiesenthal gefunden werden konnte, aus dem hervorgeht, wie Wiesenthal zu den vom Personenkomitee vertretenen Forderungen hinsichtlich der Rehabilitierung der Wehrmachtsdeserteure stand. Ein Blick auf Wiesenthals Wirken und die Spuren, die sein Engagement in seinem Archiv hinterlassen hat, zeigt allerdings, dass er in mindestens drei Fällen mit Personen zu tun gehabt hat, bei denen Desertion, NS-Militärjustiz bzw. deren Opfer eine Rolle gespielt haben, wo er sich über Sprüche von NS-Richtern brüskierte, das Schicksal und die Verurteilung von Delinquenten bedauerte und sogar das Verhalten der Alliierten in ihrer Kollaboration anprangerte. Ob Simon Wiesenthal Wehrmachtsdeserteure und andere Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz als ein Kollektiv gesehen hat, das eine eigene Opfergruppe konstituierte, ist unklar. Aber wie die skizzierten Beispiele zeigen, dachte Simon Wiesenthal auch nicht in kollektiven Kategorien, sondern neigte immer dazu, Menschen an ihren Taten zu messen. Das war auch ausschlaggebend dafür, wie er sich – welchen Verbänden und Organisationen sie auch immer angehört hatten – ihnen gegenüber positionierte. Das individuelle Verhalten war auch einer der Gründe, warum Wiesenthal ein Gegner der Kollektivschuldthese war. All das zusammengenommen legt hier die Schlussfolgerung nahe, dass Wiesenthal die Forderungen des Personenkomitees unterstützt haben muss, wie sich zumindest einige der älteren Mitglieder des Komitees zu erinnern vermeinen.

Station 4: Gericht der Division 177

Adresse: Hohenstaufengasse 3, 1010 Wien
Nutzung heute: Amtsgebäude Bundesministerium für Kunst, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport
Nutzung Wehrmachtsjustiz: Gericht der Division 177, Zentralgericht des Heeres[11]
Referat: *Jäger der verlorenen Mannszucht – Karl Everts' ‚Selbstverstümmler'-Abteilung in der Hohenstaufengasse 3* (Thomas Geldmacher)

11 Alle Infos zur Gebäudegeschichte vgl. Mathias Lichtenwagner, *Leerstellen. Zur Topografie der Wehrmachtsjustiz in Wien vor und nach 1945* (Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2021), 96 ff, zum Gedenken vor Ort außerdem Lichtenwagner, „Belasteter Beton. Formen der Erinnerung an Orten der NS-Militärjustiz in Wien", in „*Verliehen für die Flucht vor den Fahnen*". *Das Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz in Wien*, Hg. Juliane Alton et al (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag), 104–125, hier 112.

Das Divisionsgericht in der Hohenstaufengasse war eines der wichtigsten und bekanntesten Gerichte der Wehrmacht in Wien. Die hier massenweise gesprochenen Todesurteile gegen Soldaten wegen Desertion, unerlaubter Entfernung und vor allem ‚Selbstverstümmelung' führten dazu, dass das Gericht, das Haus und seine Richter schon früh in den Fokus von Forschung und Auseinandersetzung rückten.

Das Gebäude wurde 1882–1884 für die Zentraleuropäische Länderbank errichtet, Architekt war Otto Wagner. Bis heute dominiert der ehemalige Kassensaal (der nach wie vor für Veranstaltungen genutzt wird – so auch für die Podiumsdiskussion im Anschluss an den Rundgang) das Gebäude. Im ehemaligen Tresorraum im Keller lagern Akten und Möbel.

Recht früh nach dem ‚Anschluß' 1938 kaufte das Deutsche Reich das Gebäude. Einige Modernisierungen wurden durchgeführt und verschiedene Ministerien und Stellen der Wehrmacht bezogen das Haus. Die Militärjustiz zog erst spät, vermutlich Ende 1943, ins Gebäude ein – das Gebäude wurde zum dritten Standort des Feldkriegsgerichtes der Division 177 in Wien. Geografisch durchaus praktisch lag das Gericht in der Nähe gleich mehrerer für die Verfolgung relevanter Orte: das Gestapo-Hauptquartier und das Zentralgericht des Heeres am Donaukanal und die Wehrmachtsstreife in der Rossauer Kaserne waren jeweils nur wenige Gehminuten entfernt. Das Haus verfügte über größere Räume, die für Verhandlungen und Einvernahmen verwendet wurden. Im Zentrum der Verfolgungstätigkeit dieses Standorts standen die ‚Selbstverstümmler' – also jene Soldaten, die sich durch absichtliche Zufügung von Verletzungen, Ansteckungen, Infektionen und dergleichen dem Kriegsdienst zu entziehen versuchten. Methoden waren Injektion von Petroleum oder Benzin, Zertrümmerung von Händen oder Beinen und Ansteckung mit Geschlechtskrankheiten wie Tripper (Gonorrhoe) – der ‚Kreativität' waren aber keine Grenzen gesetzt und eine gewisse Varianz war sicherlich auch dienlich, um eben nicht aufzufallen (aus den Akten sind nur jene bekannt, die aufgeflogen sind oder verraten wurden). Manche Richter am Feldkriegsgericht der Division 177 (wie Karl Everts, siehe unten) entwickelten eine bemerkenswerte Besessenheit, was die ‚Wiener Selbstverstümmlerseuche' anbelangte. Diese führte nicht nur eine hohe Zahl an Verfolgten, Verurteilten und Hingerichteten, sondern involvierte teils auch persönliche Anwesenheit bei Razzien, Festnahmen oder Folterungen.

Ein Jahr nach dem Einzug des Feldkriegsgerichts der Division 177, zum Jahreswechsel 1944/45, bezog auch das Zentralgericht des Heeres (ZdH) mit einer Abteilung das Gebäude. Dadurch erweiterte sich die Bandbreite der hier verhandelten Fälle noch einmal, da das ZdH keine geografische, sondern inhaltliche Zuständigkeit für bestimmte Delikte hatte, egal ob in Frankreich oder Griechenland vollzogen. Durch den raschen Vormarsch der Alliierten konnte dieser Standort aber nicht mehr wirklich Fuß fassen, Anfang April 1945 war Wien befreit.

Die Richter in der Hohenstaufengasse hielten den ‚Betrieb' bis zuletzt aufrecht, in den Akten finden sich noch Meldungen von Anfang April 1945, wo die Rote Armee die Stadt längst umfasst hatte und das Kriegsende absehbar war. Kurz vor der Befreiung der Stadt setzten sich die Richter nach Oberösterreich ab.

Nach 1945 bezogen militärische Stellen das Haus – darunter solche, die bei der Demobilisierung der Wehrmacht helfen und Offiziere registrieren sollten, welche, insgeheim und vor den Alliierten versteckt am Aufbau eines Bundesheeres arbeiteten – aber auch etwa das Zentralbüro des European Recovery Program (ERP), vulgo Marshallplan. Das Gebäude gehört heute der Republik, seit 1994 nutzt das Bundeskanzleramt das Haus, seit dem letzten Regierungswechsel die Sektion III (Öffentli-

Thomas Geldmacher spricht in der Hohenstafengasse 3 über Karl Everts' „Selbstverstümmler"-Abteilung.

cher Dienst und Verwaltungsinnovation) des BMKÖS. Zeichen der Erinnerung oder Formen des Gedenkens gibt es derzeit weder am noch im Gebäude. Da die Auseinandersetzung mit der Rolle des Gebäudes während des Nationalsozialismus' bereits in den 1980er-Jahren begann, ist diese lange Zeit des Ignorierens und Wegschauens durchaus bemerkenswert. Das könnte sich aber vielleicht bald ändern: Im November 2022 wurden die Rundgang-Organisatoren kontaktiert, um Möglichkeiten zu besprechen ein dauerhaftes Andenken an die hier verfolgten und verurteilten Personen zu schaffen.

Im Zuge seines Referats *Jäger der verlorenen Mannszucht – Karl Everts' ‚Selbstverstümmler'-Abteilung in der Hohenstaufengasse 3* stellte Thomas Geldmacher den bereits genannten Richter Karl Everts ins Zentrum. Er erläuterte, warum 1944 die Einrichtung eines dritten Standorts wegen der wachsenden Fallzahlen notwendig war und wie Karl Everts, frisch zum Divisionsrichter ernannt, diesen Umstand dazu nützte die Selbstverstümmler ins Visier zu nehmen. Im Referat wurden nochmal auf die verschiedenen Formen der Selbstverstümmlung eingegangen und nicht zuletzt die ‚Simmeringer Methode' (Sprung auf das gestreckte, auf einen Stuhl aufgelegte Bein aus mittlerer Höhe) eindrücklich den Teilnehmer:innen geschildert. Exemplarisch wurde auf einen großen Massenprozess im Herbst 1944 gegen mehr als vierzig Soldaten eingegangen, und betont, welche Rolle der von Streife und Gericht beauftragte Spitzel und die in der Rossauerkaserne durch Folter fabrizierten Geständnisse daran hatten. Geldmacher schloss seinen Redebeitrag mit dem Hinweis auf eine Wiener Besonderheit, die auch einen Bogen zur Suche nach Tätern und somit zu Wiesenthal zulässt: Gegen Karl Everts wurde nach der Befreiung 1945 ermittelt. Wohl nur pro forma, denn man suchte den Richter nur in Österreich, dieser war aber längst nach Köln zurückgekehrt. Auf die Idee in der Stadtverwaltung des Geburtsorts und Wohnorts seiner Familie nach dem „Flüchtigen" zu fragen, kam man seitens der Ermittler nicht, das Verfahren wurde eingestellt. Untergetaucht war er nicht – ganz im Gegenteil: Er wurde Bürgermeister, dann Richter. Das Referat schloss mit der Thematisierung der fehlenden Erinnerung vor Ort.

Peter Pirker spricht am Ballhausplatz vor dem Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz über deren Rehabilitierung und über Erinnerungskultur.

Station 5: Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz

Adresse: Ballhausplatz, 1010 Wien
Referat: *Deserteure in der politischen Debatte – der Weg zur Rehabilitierung und zum Denkmal* (Peter Pirker)

Die letzte Station des Rundgangs widmete sich dem Thema der juristischen und gesellschaftlichen Rehabilitierung der Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz und der mit der Debatte um die Denkmalerrichtung einhergehende Frage von Erinnerungskultur und -politik. Um die Prozesse, die zur Errichtung des Denkmals geführt haben, nennt Peter Pirker in seiner Einleitung einige „verpasste Gelegenheiten" in der Geschichte der Republik. So zog im Mai 1945 im Zuge der Feiern zur Befreiung Österreichs und zum Kriegsende das 1. Österreichische Freiheitsbataillon feierlich am Heldenplatz ein. Es war die einzige militärische Einheit von Österreicher:innen, die gegen den Nationalsozialismus gekämpft hat. Verabsäumt wurde, diese Würdigung zu verstetigen und diesen Widerstand in das Bewusstsein der jungen Republik einzubauen, konkret etwas mit Raumnahme beim Heldendenkmal, das leicht um Deserteure oder Antifaschisten zu ergänzen gewesen wäre. Als zweites Versäumnis nannte Pirker die fehlende Institutionalisierung der 1946 im Wiener Künstlerhaus eröffneten Ausstellung *Niemals vergessen!* Erst 15 Jahre später sollte diese Lücke durch die Gründung des Dokumentationsarchivs des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW) im Sinne einer dauerhaften antifaschistischen Aufklärung gefüllt werden. In dieser Zeit, 1945 bis ca. 1965, verschwand die Erinnerung an Desertion und Widerstand zu einem Gutteil in der öffentlichen Debatte, die Pflichterfüllung in der Wehrmacht war damit für die Mehrheit die Norm. Das hatte diverse Folgen, nicht nur was die Erinnerungskultur anbelangt, sondern auch im Bereich des Sozialrechts. So wurden Anträge nach dem Opferfürsorgegesetz (OFG) von Deserteuren zum großen Teil abgelehnt, wobei es dabei regionale Unterschiede bei der Auslegung gab. Schwierigkeit bereitete die Pflicht der Antragsteller, dass ihre Desertion das Ziel

hatte danach „mit der Waffe in der Hand" für die Republik zu kämpfen. Außerdem wurden die Urteile der Militärgerichte nicht per se als Unrecht oder ungültig betrachtet, vor allem wenn sie auf Basis des Militärstrafgesetzbuch und nicht auf Basis der einschlägigen Verordnungen basierten. Die Wende in dieser Debatte brachten erst die 1990er-Jahre, wie Pirker ausführte. Zwar war es in den 1980er-Jahren gelungen, einige Kontrapunkte zu setzen: So hatten anti-militaristische Gruppen die Wehrmachts-Apologetik in Österreich kritisiert und etwa den Heldenplatz im Zuge einer Aktion der Arge Wehrdienstverweigerung in „Platz des Ungehorsams" umbenannt, was aber ohne breite gesellschaftliche Wirkung blieb. Erst die 1990er brachten ein Umdenken in Hinblick auf den Dienst in der Wehrmacht (hier vor allem durch die Waldheim-Debatte), die Schuld oder Mitschuld, österreichische Täter:innen und „vergessene NS-Opfer". Die Einrichtung des Nationalfonds der Republik Österreich für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus und die Einsetzung der Historikerkommission waren Folgen. Für die Deserteure bedeutete es zunächst keine Änderung: Sie blieben weiterhin außerhalb der Opferfürsorge und galten nicht als Opfer/Verfolgte. Erst die in Deutschland einsetzenden Debatten um Anerkennung und Rehabilitierung ermöglichten es in Österreich Ende der 1990-Jahre, die Deserteure und Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz noch einmal zu thematisieren, wobei der Ausgangspunkt hier die Wissenschaft (bzw. Lehre) war. Die Folge war der Beschluss eines ersten Aufarbeitungsprojekts im Jahr 1999 durch das Wissenschaftsministerium. 2003 wurde der Bericht in Form eines Buchs durch Walter Manoschek vorgelegt, wobei er und sein Team über 3.000 Verfolgte der NS-Militärjustiz bearbeiten konnten.[12] Zahlreiche Leerstellen konnten damit ausgeräumt und viele Mythen wiederlegt werden, die schlussendlich und schrittweise auch zur Anerkennung der Opfer in der Opferfürsorge und durch den Nationalfonds führten. Auf legistischer Ebene gab es in den folgenden zehn Jahren zwei große Wegmarken: der Beschluss des Anerkennungsgesetzes 2005,[13] dem aber noch der Makel anhängt, dass es Deserteure nicht namentlich nennt, obwohl es diese rehabilitierte und die Probleme bei Opferfürsorge und Pension ausräumte;[14] Der Beschluss des Aufhebungs- und Rehabilitationsgesetzes[15] schloss die letzten Lücken und sprach erstmals der Opfergruppe Dank, Anerkennung und Achtung aus. Das Gesetz war Folge der Ausstellung *„Was damals Recht war …" – Soldaten und Zivilisten vor Gerichten* der Wehrmacht der Berliner Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Jüdinnen und Juden Europas, die es vermochte, sehr viel Aufmerksamkeit, Reflexion und Druck in Medien, Religionsgemeinschaften, Opferverbänden, Parteien und Verwaltung aufzubauen. Abseits der legistischen Rehabilitierung stand die politische und vor allem gesellschaftliche Rehabilitierung auf der Agenda – wozu die Errichtung eines zentralen Denkmals für die Opfergruppe gehören sollte.

Die Forderung zur Errichtung eines Denkmals für diese Opfergruppe schaffte es 2010 ins Regierungsprogramm der Rot-Grünen Wiener Stadtregierung aufgenommen zu werden. Nach einem breiten und langen Prozess unter Einbindung von Verwaltung, Politik, Wissenschaft und Kunst entschied man sich für den Entwurf von Olaf Nicolai, der 2014 umgesetzt und eröffnet wurde. Wesentlich waren dabei der

12 Walter Manoschek (Hg.), *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz. Urteilspraxis – Strafvollzug – Entschädigungspolitik in Österreich* (Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2003).

13 BGBl. I Nr. 86/2005.

14 Zur Debatte: Hannes Metzler, „Nicht länger ehrlos. Die Rehabilitierung der Wehrmachtsdeserteure in Österreich," in *Wehrmachtsjustiz. Kontext – Praxis – Nachwirkungen*, Hg. Peter Pirker et al. (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller/New Academic Press, 2010), 251–269.

15 BGBl. I Nr. 110/2009.

Standort und die Form, wobei man sich bei der Wahl des Orts gegen Vorschläge in der Peripherie aber auch in zu großer Nähe zu soldatischem Gedenken (etwa bei/neben der Krypta beim Heldenplatz) entschieden hat. Was die Form anbelangt entschied man sich für ein nicht-klassisches Denkmal, das zwar einen Sockel besitzt, aber auf die Darstellung eines Heroen verzichtet. Durch die Aufforderung, das Denkmal selbst zu betreten und sich selbst auf den Sockel zu stellen, wird das Individuum und der/die Betrachter:in selbst in den Mittelpunkt gestellt und auch die historische Sphäre (Deutsche Wehrmacht) verlassen sowie grundsätzliche Fragen nach dem Verhalten des/der Einzelnen gegenüber Staat, Militär und Obrigkeit gestellt.

Der Rundgang endete mit der Einladung, die Diskussion und Beschäftigung mit der Gesamtthematik des Rundgangs bei der anschließenden Podiumsdiskussion fortzusetzen.

Podiumsdiskussion

Deserteure aus der Wehrmacht: Aufarbeitung, Rehabilitierung, Denkmal – alles erreicht?
Adresse: Hohenstaufengasse 3, 1010 Wien
Nutzung heute: Amtsgebäude Bundesministerium für Kunst, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport
Nutzung Wehrmachtsjustiz: Gericht der Division 177, Zentralgericht des Heeres[16]
Am Podium: Eva Blimlinger (Abgeordnete zum Nationalrat), Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider (Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands), Thomas Geldmacher (Personenkomitee „Gerechtigkeit für die Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz"), Peter Pirker (Universität Innsbruck), Moderation: Nina Horaczek (Falter Chefreporterin)

Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider, Peter Pirker, Nina Horaczek, Eva Blimlinger und Thomas Geldmacher bei der Podiumsdiskussion *Deserteure aus der Wehrmacht: Aufarbeitung, Rehabilitierung, Denkmal – alles erreicht?*

16 Alle Infos zur Gebäudegeschichte vgl. Lichtenwagner, *Leerstellen*, 96 ff, zum Gedenken vor Ort außerdem Lichtenwagner, „Belasteter Beton", 112.

Die Podiumsdiskussion fand im Veranstaltungssaal des BMKÖS, in der Hohenstaufengasse 3 statt. Von den Veranstaltern wurde das Gebäude ausgewählt, da es sich dabei selbst um einen Standort der NS-Militärjustiz gehandelt hatte (siehe dazu Station 4 des Rundgangs). Die Veranstaltung fand im früheren Kassensaal des ehemaligen Bankgebäudes statt, wurde aufgezeichnet und kann über den YouTube-Kanal des VWI nachgesehen werden.[17] Nina Horaczek wies eingangs darauf hin, dass sowohl die für Kunst und Kultur zuständige Staatssekretärin Andrea Mayer als auch die für Kultur und Wissenschaft zuständige Stadträtin Veronica Kaup-Hasler der Einladung zur Podiumsdiskussion nicht gefolgt seien.

Die erste Fragerunde betraf den Stand der Forschung. Hierzu meldeten sich vier Diskutant:innen zu Wort: Peter Pirker rief in Erinnerung, dass der Ausgangspunkt für Rehabilitierungsdebatte in Österreich das von Walter Manoschek geleitete Forschungsprojekt zu den österreichischen Opfern der NS-Militärjustiz und die Basis dafür vor allem die im Staatsarchiv Wien lagernden Militärjustizakten waren.[18] Bis heute verbaue der „nationale" Blickwinkel bei Beforschung, Aufarbeitung und Rehabilitierung jedoch manchen Sichtweisen, zumal die Wehrmacht eine vor allem „multinationale Truppe" war, wie Pirker nicht zuletzt anhand seiner aktuellen Forschungen ausführte. In diesen nähme er sich derzeit einen neuen Bestand in einem anderen regionalen Raum vor, nämlich das Gericht der Division 188 und 418. Beim Gericht der Division 188, dem für den Wehrkreis XVIII (v. a. Vorarlberg, Tirol, Salzburg, Steiermark mit manchen Ergänzungen) zuständigen Ersatztruppengericht, handelt es sich um das Äquivalent zum Gericht der Division 177 für den Wehrkreis XVII. Mit Verweis auf die in Freiburg im Breisgau lagernden Akten, vor allem die Todesurteillisten, hob Pirker den hohen Anteil der nicht-deutschen und nicht-österreichischen Deserteure und Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz hervor, welchen in der Forschung bisher eine untergeordnete Rolle zukam. Der zweite Punkt betraf den Umstand, dass er anhand rezenter Forschungen zu dem Schluss kam, dass nur rund die Hälfte der Fälle von Desertion über Militärjustiz-Akten greifbar seien, und darüber hinaus andere Quellen herangezogen und erschlossen werden müssten. Gleichzeitig wies er aber darauf hin, dass der im Staatsarchiv lagernde Bestand an Militärjustizakten noch immer nicht vollständig beforscht sei. Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider ging in ihrem Statement darauf ein, dass auch in der Beforschung der Täter noch vielen Fragen offen seien und zahlreiche blinde Flecken bestünden. Das betreffe die Heeresstreife gleichermaßen wie die Wehrmachtsrichter, wobei noch immer unklar sei, wie viele Verfahren es gegen diese gegeben habe. Im Redebeitrag erwähnte sie einen Fall, der ihr im Zuge ihrer Forschung als wissenschaftliche Co-Leiterin der Zentralen österreichische Forschungsstelle Nachkriegsjustiz im Auftrag des Bundesministeriums für Justiz bekannt geworden sei, in dem Anfang der 1970er-Jahre gegen Angehörige einer Gebirgsjägerdivision als NS-Täter vorgegangen wurde, weil sie in die Verfolgung und Erschießung von Deserteuren involviert waren. Auch wenn diese Ermittlungen zu keinen Urteilen geführt hätten, seien die Ermittlungs- und Verfahrensakten – so Kuretsidis-Haider – für die Forschung überaus wertvoll. Thomas Geldmacher verwies als Obmann des Personenkomitees „Gerechtigkeit für die Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz" (PK) darauf, dass zwar die wesentlichen Ziele des Vereins erfüllt, jedoch noch etliche Forderungen offen seien. So fehlen beispielsweise an vielen zentralen Standorten der NS-Militärjustiz in Wien Erinnerungszeichen, darüber hinaus vermisse er eine Auseinandersetzung der diese Gebäude heute nut-

17 Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgYgHpSbaNc.
18 Manoschek (Hg.), *Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz.*

zenden Personen und Institutionen mit der Geschichte des Gebäudes. Sichtbare Zeichen, sowohl der Aufarbeitung als auch der Reflexion, so Geldmacher, wären wünschenswert. Weiters kritisierte er, dass zwar Forschung passiere, aber nicht sichtbar sei. So seien die Namen von 3.000 österreichischen Verfolgten aus dem Manoschek-Projekt[19] und die eingangs von Peter Pirker genannte Datenbank mit den Namen von 1.900 Verfolgten im Wehrkreis XVIII zwar noch existent, aber nicht öffentlich zugänglich. Geldmacher weihte die Zuhörer:innen auch noch in eine virulente Debatte zur Benennung eines Gemeindebaus in Simmering nach dem ehemaligen Wehrmachtsdeserteur und 2020 verstorbenen Ehrenobmann des PK Richard Wadani ein: Der Benennung stehe im Weg, dass sich im Gebäude auch das Lokal der FPÖ-Simmering befinde und die für die Benennung zuständige Stelle lediglich eine Stiege des Gemeindebaus, nicht aber den gesamten Gemeindebau, nach Wadani benennen wolle. Mit Verweis darauf, dass die Stadt Wien bereits einen Gemeindebau besitzt, der nach einem Deserteur benannt sei,[20] äußerte er die Hoffnung, dass dieser Konflikt bald beigelegt sein werde. Eva Blimlinger, Sprecherin für Gedenkpolitik des Grünen Parlamentsklubs, wurde von der Moderatorin gefragt, ob und wann die Gedenktafeln an den angesprochenen und im Zuge des Rundgangs besuchten Orten angebracht werden würden, zumal es sich zum Teil um Ministerien „grüner Minister:innen" handle. Die Befragte führte aus, dass sich für Stubenring und Hohenstaufengasse recht schnell („bis Ende des Jahres") Gedenktafeln anbringen lassen sollten und sprach sich für einen „Gleichklang bei Layout und Textierung" in Hinblick auf die schon bestehenden Gedenktafeln in Wien aus. Betreffend das Gebäude des Bundesheeres, in dem sich das Zentralgericht des Heeres befand, würde sie wenig Chancen auf rasche Umsetzung sehen – und verwies auf den Stillstand bei der Umbenennung der Windisch-Kaserne.[21] Blimlinger äußerte sich zur Öffnung der weiter oben angesprochenen Datenbanken positiv. Die angesprochenen Daten, so Blimlinger, müssten öffentlich zugänglich gemacht werden, ähnlich der Opfer-Datenbank des Dokumentationsarchivs des österreichischen Widerstandes.[22] Für die datenschutzrechtlichen Probleme würden sich politische Lösungen finden lassen, auch für den Umstand, dass die noch bestehenden Datenbanken aus Datenschutzgründen ursprünglich hätten vernichtet werden müssen. Vermittlungskonzepte das Denkmal an Ballhausplatz betreffend müssten endlich umgesetzt und die bereits gedruckten Broschüren zum Denkmal müssten endlich vor Ort entnehmbar sein.[23] Blimlinger schloss mit der langjährigen Forderung,[24] den Zaun zum Volksgarten hinter dem Deserteursdenkmal zu öffnen und durch Zurverfügungstellung einer Vorrichtung allen Menschen den Zutritt zum Denkmal zu ermöglichen.

19 Vgl. Walter Manoschek, „Die Arbeit zweier Jahre – eine Einleitung", *in Opfer der NS-Militärjustiz*, 2–14, hier 4.

20 2012 wurde ein Gemeindebau in Wien-Ottakring nach Hubert Pfoch benannt. Pfoch war im Widerstand gegen Austrofaschismus und Nationalsozialismus, er desertierte zu Kriegsende und wurde später Vizebürgermeister der Stadt Wien.

21 Die ehem. Jäger-Kaserne in Klagenfurt/Celovec wurde 1967 in Windisch-Kaserne umbenannt. Alois Windisch war hoher Offizier der Wehrmacht, u. a. am Überfall auf Norwegen beteiligt. Nach 1945 wurde er wegen Kriegsverbrechen festgenommen und wegen dieser in Jugoslawien zum Tode verurteilt, wobei das Urteil aber nicht vollstreckt wurde.

22 In der Opferdatenbank des Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW) lassen sich in verschiedenen Kategorien (Gestapo-Opfer, Shoah-Opfer, Politisch Verfolgte, Totenbuch Spiegelgrund) die Basisdaten zu vielen Verfolgten suchen, vgl. www.doew.at/personensuche.

23 Das Faltblatt „Das Denkmal für die Verfolgten der NS-Militärjustiz in Wien" wurde aus öffentlichen Mitteln finanziert, wurde zehntausendfach auf Deutsch und Englisch gedruckt aber nie verteilt. Das PDF davon findet sich auf der Vermittlungs-Homepage zum Denkmal: https://deserteursdenkmal.at/wordpress/materialien/.

24 Dabei handelt es sich um eine Forderung von Olaf Nicolai, dem Künstler des Deserteursdenkmals, vgl. dazu Juliane Alton: „Bevor es verwahrlost, muss man es wegräumen" – Olaf Nicolai im Interview mit Juliane Alton, in *Verliehen für die Flucht vor den Fahnen*, 242–253, hier 244–245.

In einer anschließenden Fragerunde warf Horaczek die Frage auf, ob das Konzept des Denkmals aufgegangen sei, oder es Probleme gebe, was die Nutzung betrifft. Konkret wurde die Debatte auf Coronaleugner:innen und Funktionär:innen rechter Parteien, die das Denkmal bei Kundgebungen als Bühne verwenden, auf dem Denkmal jausnende oder dieses für sportliche Aktivitäten nutzende Personen sowie Staatsgäste und Exekutive, deren Fahrzeuge zum Teil auf der Fläche neben dem Denkmal abstellen, gelenkt. Thomas Geldmacher stellte klar, dass das Denkmal vom Künstler genau so intendiert war und er kein Problem mit der Nutzung hätte, es „begangen und benützt werden" solle. Wenn Personengruppen das Denkmal nützen würden, die sich mit der Opfergruppe nicht identifizieren, müsse das dem Wesen der Demokratie entsprechend hingenommen werden. Als Mängel ließ er gelten, dass die Erläuterungstafeln neben dem Denkmal wenig sichtbar seien und das begleitende Vermittlungsprogramm fehle. Peter Pirker wies auf den paradoxen Zustand hin, dass das Denkmal zwar auf einem zentralen Ort der Republik errichtet worden sei, es innerhalb des gewählten Platzes jedoch in der Peripherie stehe, was durch die vor Kurzem durchgeführte Veränderung des Straßenverlaufs noch prägnanter geworden wäre, weswegen eine Öffnung des Volksgartenzauns wünschenswert wäre, um die Lage „im Winkel" zu beenden. Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider merkte zur erlaubten und gewünschten Nutzung des Denkmals an, dass es dazu nicht nur unterschiedliche Zugänge gäbe, sondern sich diese auch stark generationell voneinander unterscheiden würden. Nicht zuletzt die Generation der Widerstandskämpfer:innen und Verfolgten habe andersartige Vorstellungen von und einen anderen Zugang zu Denkmälern. In der Praxis sehe sie Probleme in der Vermittlung, da das Denkmal nicht „selbsterklärend" sei. Vermittlung vor Ort oder Begleitung durch Guides seien daher notwendig, um dessen Kontext und Bedeutung verstehen zu können. Die Vermittlung sei zwar partiell durch die Tafeln und in einem stärkeren Ausmaß durch die Homepage gegeben (www.deserteursdenkmal.at). Vor Ort benötige es aber noch mehr Material. Kuretsidis-Haider schloss ihren Redebeitrag mit der gewinnbringenden Bemerkung, dass sich das Deserteursdenkmal in Hinblick auf Krieg und Desertion heute für pädagogische Vermittlung und politische Bildung eigne. Damit kam gegen Ende der Podiumsdiskussion der Angriffskrieg der russischen Föderation auf die Ukraine zur Sprache, und es wurden vor allem Fragen von Flucht, Desertion und Asyl mit dem Publikum diskutiert.

Nachtrag

Zum Zeitpunkt der Abfassung des vorliegenden Beitrags war manches, das in der Podiumsdiskussion diskutiert wurde, bereits obsolet, andere Forderungen waren schon fast erfüllt bzw. auf Schiene: Am 11. Oktober 2022 wurde in Simmering, in der Kaiser-Ebersdorfer-Straße 12–18, ein ganzer Gemeindebau nach Richard Wadani benannt und feierlich eröffnet.[25] Mitte Oktober trat das Bundesministerium für Justiz an das VWI heran und gab bekannt, gemeinsam mit dem Personenkomitee und dem Wiener Wiesenthal Institut eine Lösung finden zu wollen, um die Datenbank mit den Namen von 3.001 Verfolgter der NS-Militärjustiz, die 2003 durch das Manoschek-Projekt gesammelt wurden, der Forschung zugänglich zu machen. Ge-

25 Vgl. APA-OTS: Gaál/Steinhart/Kunrath: Simmeringer Gemeindebau nach Richard Wadani benannt. Unter: https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20221012_OTS0026/galsteinhartkunrath-simmeringer-gemeindebau-nach-richard-wadani-benannt, 12. Oktober 2022.

spräche dazu stehen im Jänner 2023 an. Das Personenkomittee teilte mit, dass Ende Jänner 2023 eine Gedenktafel am Gebäude am Stubenring enthüllt werden soll. Weiters erklärten auch Vertreter:innen des BMKÖS/BKA, dass auch sie ein Interesse an der Anbringung einer Gedenktafel am Gebäude des ehemaligen Militärgerichtes in der Hohenstaufengasse hätten, die im ersten Halbjahr 2023 stattfinden soll.

So viel Bewegung in nur einem halben Jahr deutet darauf hin, dass die Debatte rund um die Deserteure wohl doch noch nicht abgeschlossen war und durch den Rundgang, die Podiumsdiskussion im Mai sowie nachfolgende Diskussionen einen weiteren wichtigen Impuls erhalten hatte.

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