

JEW, POLES, AND SLOVAKS: A STORY OF ENCOUNTERS, 1944-48

by

Anna Cichopek-Gajraj

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Todd M. Endelman, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Brian A. Porter-Szűcs, Co-Chair
Professor Zvi Y. Gitelman
Professor Piotr J. Wróbel, University of Toronto

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents and Ari

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The literature on the history of Polish Jews between 1944 and 1948 portrays this period as a time of transition between the end of the war and emigration to the West or to Israel. The narrative is that as Jewish survivors returned after liberation, the local population “welcomed” them with antisemitism and violence. As a result, rebuilding Jewish life in Poland was impossible and emigration was inevitable. The titles like *Le Massacre des Survivants: En Pologne après l'Holocauste, 1945-1947* (The Massacre of Survivors) and *Żydzi w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej: Akcja Kalumni i Zabójstw* (Jews in Poland after the Second World War: Operation of Slanders and Murders) reflect this understanding of postwar Polish Jewish history.¹ Even the works that deal with issues

¹¹ Marc Hillel, *Le Massacre des Survivants: En Pologne après l'Holocauste, 1945-1947* (Paris: Plon, 1985); Yisrael Gutman, "Żydzi w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej: Akcja Kalumni i Zabójstw," *Przegląd Prasy Zagranicznej* 2, no. 3-4 (1986). Other works on antisemitism in postwar Poland include Paul Lendvai, *Antisemitism without Jews* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971); Krystyna Kersten, "Kielce – 4 Lipca 1946," *Tygodnik Solidarność* 36, (December, 1981); Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 Lipca 1946* (Warszawa: Bellona, 1992); Marian Mushkat, *Philosemitic and Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Post-Holocaust Poland* (Levistone, 1992); Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona, ed., *Antyżydowskie Wydarzenia Kieleckie 4 Lipca 1946: Dokumenty i Materiały* (Kielce: Urząd Miasta Kielce, 1992); Tadeusz Wiącek, *Zabić Żyda: Kulisy i Tajemnice Pogromu Kieleckiego 1946* (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Temax, 1992); *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, "Anatomia Pogromu: Rzeszów 1919, Kielce 1946," no. 4 (1996); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna Dekada: Trzy Eseje o Stereotypach na Temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i Komunistów, 1939-1948* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998); Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 Sierpnia 1945 Roku* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000); Jerzy Daniel, *Żyd w Zielonym Kapeluszu: Rzecz o Kieleckim Pogromie 4 Lipca 1946* (Kielce: Scriptum, 1996); Joshua D. Zimmerman, ed., *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

other than antisemitism, like Natalia Aleksiu's study of Zionism in postwar Poland, stress violence and emigration as the defining factors of postwar Jewish experience.²

The most notable example of this approach is the recently published *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, in which Jan Tomasz Gross seeks to explain anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland, in general, and the Kielce pogrom, in particular.³ In his attempt to pinpoint the main cause, Gross shifts attention from the power of stereotypes to the power of "everyday experience," like the fear of losing property. He shows that tangible individual interests were the central incentive for anti-Jewish violence. Although seemingly *reductionist* in its emphasis on a single cause, Gross' argument is a powerful intervention into the field. Gross succeeded to prompt a rethinking of postwar antisemitism and gave rise to another nationwide debate in Poland. Yet, as original as his book is, it remains within the limits of the

² Natalia Aleksiu, *Dokąd Dalej? Ruch Syjonistyczny w Polsce 1944-1950* (Warszawa: Trio, 2002); Natalia Aleksiu, "Jewish Responses to Antisemitism in Poland, 1944-1947," in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); August Grabski, *Działalność Komunistów Wśród Żydów w Polsce 1944-1949* (Warszawa: Trio, 2004). There are, however, a few studies which escape this easy classification, including Michał Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986); Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1986); Józef Adelson, "W Polsce Zwanej Ludową," in *Najnowsze Dzieje Żydów w Polsce w Zarysie do 1950 Roku*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993). Also microhistory allows an analysis beyond a mega-narrative of postwar antisemitism. See Szyja Bronsztejn, *Z Dziejów Ludności Żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II Wojnie Światowej*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 1542 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993); Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na Tle Polityki Wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945-1968*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 2171 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999); Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 2257 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000); Janusz Mieczkowski, *Żydzi, Niemcy i Ukraińcy na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Latach 1945-1956: Liczba, Położenie i Działalność Polityczna, Rozprawy i Studia*, 175 (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 1994); Janusz Mieczkowski, "Życie Religijne Mniejszości Narodowych na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Latach 1945-1956," *Przegląd Zachodniopomorski* 10, no. 1 (1995); Julian Kwiek, *Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy w Województwie Krakowskim w Latach 1945-1949/50* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1998).

³ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

described historiography. It perpetuates the understanding of postwar Jewish history in Poland as the story of antisemitism and emigration.

This dissertation is a response to such an understanding of the postwar history of Jews in Poland. While I appreciate the significance of violence, I believe that focusing on antisemitism alone not only diverts scholarly attention from other aspects of Jewish experience, but also distorts the overall picture of postwar conditions. Thus I suggest shifting the focus. In the following chapters, I seek to show this historical moment not as a short, harsh prelude to an inevitable emigration, but rather as a time of complex Jewish encounters with state and society in which the exodus was not presupposed. By “complex encounters” I mean the broad range of experiences generated through the interactions between Jews and non-Jews on the street and in the public office. These experiences included travelling back home, struggling to repossess property and retaining citizenship, rebuilding normal lives by marrying, having children, finding a job, engaging in political and cultural life, and finally, yes, experiencing violence – an enormously important but not necessarily defining mark of ethnic interaction.

I suggest thinking of these experiences as a part of the postwar social, political, and cultural environment, and not just as a manifestation of inevitable, timeless Jewish victimization. Such an approach will firmly ground the analysis in a historical context, and thus illuminate the nuances and subtleties of ethnic coexistence. Consequently, I will present a narrative in which Jews are full-fledged historical actors and active participants in interethnic relations and not merely inert objects of somebody else’s will. Thus, I will not solely describe non-Jewish attitudes toward Jews. Rather, I will seek to explain the attitudes and behavior of Jews and non-Jews toward each other in a historically specific

setting. Similarly, writing on anti-Jewish violence should not preclude presenting Jews as active participants in the events, rather than just the helpless objects of aggression.

To illuminate these issues, I will investigate everyday lives in 1944-48. It is not my intention, however, to present a story of private life. Instead, I wish to set the stage for an analysis of the borderline between the private and the public, and possibly there, in the middle ground, pin down the most illuminating moments of ethnic relations, the analysis of which will allow me to describe and explain a multifaceted profile of ethnic interaction in its broadest social and cultural dimensions. I define the “middle ground” as a space where politics and private lives intersect. To better understand the concept of “borderline,” I will pay particular attention to the interaction between contemporary state policies and the attitudes and behavior of different population groups toward each other.

This dual relationship – to society and state – is central to my thesis. For example, I discuss the return as a process of adjustment not only to persistent antisemitism on the street, but above all to the radically transformed social and political conditions. The governments formulated new requirements for entry into their national communities by changing the criteria for citizenship. I explore how this change affected the position of Jewish returnees in the two states and societies. I also examine the everyday communal and personal experiences of returning Jews in the context of their relationships with non-Jews and strive to present these relationships as complex and fluid encounters affected by the state-revised categories of inclusion and exclusion. In short, by focusing on this dual relationship, I investigate the limits of belonging to society and state in Eastern Europe after the Holocaust.

To offer this new perspective and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of postwar Jewish history in Poland, I turned to comparative study with Slovakia. While aware of the difficulty that a comparative work presents, I nevertheless strongly believe in its analytical value. I agree with Todd M. Endelman and Maud Mandel, who argue that

[C]omparing Jewish communities across time and/or space or comparing Jews with non-Jews in the same place or in different national context “transcends the borders of Jewish historiography” both by revealing what is “individual, specific, and unique as much as what is more general.”⁴

Comparing two specific national contexts highlights the more general trends in the dynamics of interaction among ethnic groups after crisis. The comparative analysis provides a framework for understanding what mechanisms generate similar phenomena in divergent political, social, and cultural milieus.

For comparison, I chose Poland and Slovakia, because, in the preliminary stages of my research, I noticed that pogroms and other antisemitic incidents – attacks in streets and on trains, among others – occurred mainly in these two countries, more than elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Yet, both countries had significantly different historical backgrounds, ethnic compositions, and political frameworks. I found this context to be a particularly interesting comparative vantage point. On the one hand, the distinctiveness of the Polish and Slovak settings and, on the other hand, the similarity in the dynamics of local events, the patterns of behavior, and the frequency of the incidents, provided a perfect laboratory for analysis of the general and the particular in ethnic interaction.

⁴ Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 6. Mandel based her argument on Todd M. Endelman’s analysis in Todd M. Endelman, “Introduction: Comparing Jewish Societies,” in *Comparing Jewish Societies*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

In the most general terms, the majority of Poles and Slovaks adhered to Catholicism, had been exposed to fascist propaganda for five years of the war (although to varying degrees), were troubled by postwar economic problems, and were eventually taken over by the Soviets. The Warszawa and the Slovak uprisings of August 1944 both evoked Polish and Slovak nationalism and caused tremendous bloodshed. The subsequent repression of the two uprisings led not only to great human losses but also extensive material destruction. In this respect, Poland and Slovakia suffered more than the Czech lands, which sustained relatively minor damage.

What marked the major distinction between the two histories was the wartime relationship with the Third Reich. Although, to a large degree, the fascist Slovak State was a Nazi puppet, nonetheless it enjoyed enough autonomy to shape its own domestic policies, including the treatment of the Jews. In wartime Poland, the power framework was radically different. The Polish government was in exile and the country was under total Nazi occupation. Except for the resistance movement, there was no source of Polish authority which could affect Jewish policies in the country.

After the war, relations with the Soviet Union also distinguished the two states. Soviet pressure guided domestic politics in Poland more than in Czechoslovakia. From the first conference in Teheran in 1943, through the Warszawa uprising, and the subsequent imposition of governments, the Kremlin openly pushed towards gaining full control over Polish domestic and foreign affairs. Being one of Stalin's top priorities, the Polish state remained under constant surveillance from Moscow. The NKVD and the Red Army served as tools in the process of subjugating and intimidating the Polish political elite and ordinary citizens. The constant Soviet military presence in Poland greatly

affected the dynamics of political and social life by instilling fear and hopelessness in society. In Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, weaker Soviet influence and the early exit of the Red Army in December 1945 created an environment in which the domestic centers of authority enjoyed a greater level of autonomy.

Moreover, differences in the historical relationship with Russia or the Soviet Union distinguished Polish and Czechoslovak attitudes toward the eastern power. Polish leaders had been traditionally russophobic, while the Czechoslovak president, Edvard Beneš, voluntarily signed a treaty of friendship with the USSR during the war. These disparate attitudes to the Soviet Union shaped the general psychological framework and political discourse in the two countries. On the one hand, in Poland, the common attitude combined a fear of the USSR with the will to resist the Soviets. On the other hand, in Czechoslovakia, the positive attitude to the USSR reflected people's hope for a better future in alliance with the friendly Soviet Union. Regardless of the varying attitudes, both societies ended up tragically disillusioned by the beginning of 1948; in apathy and hopelessness (Poland) and shock and disappointment (Czechoslovakia).

A much more pronounced opposition to the Soviet Union translated into civil war in Poland in 1945-48, not paralleled in Czechoslovakia. Forest warfare affected not only the village communities and the regions where the military operations occurred but also the entire society, which constantly heard of, witnessed, or was personally affected by the bloodshed. Ongoing violence in Poland had also profound consequences for Polish Jews. Fear for life was omnipresent among Jews in central and eastern Poland between the beginning of 1945 and the summer of 1946. In contrast, the absence of civil war in Slovakia calmed Slovak Jews. Only the inhabitants of northeastern territories experienced

some perils of civil war when Ukrainian militants (*Banderovcy*) crossed the northern borders with Poland in 1947.

During the Polish civil war, Jews were targeted not only as Jews but also as “Soviet stooges” and Judeo-Bolsheviks. The disparate attitudes to the Soviet Union determined the ways in which Jews were perceived in the two countries. Accusations against Jews for collaboration with communists were much more common in Poland than Slovakia. Slovaks cared less about the alleged Bolshevism of Jews than about Jewish “magyarization” of the Slovak nation. The Slovak public historically identified Jews as agents of “magyarism,” accusing the Jews of “magyarizing” the country. Thus, postwar antisemitism in Poland and Slovakia can not be understood outside anti-Soviet and anti-Hungarian sentiments respectively. Investing the idea of a Jew with threatening features of a respective enemy posed a particular threat to security of Jewish communities in the two countries.

An important distinction also stemmed from varying classification of Jews. The Slovak government, unlike its Polish counterpart, did not recognize Jews as a distinct minority, thus opening the door for flexible categorization and treatment of Jews. As a result, Jews were legally classified as Slovaks, Czechs, Magyars, and Germans, mainly in accordance with language and with disregard of other criteria of ethnicity. I speculate that there were two main reasons for this. First, language had been a traditional marker of nationality in Czechoslovakia even before the war when the government used language as the criterion of nationality in censuses. Second, the Slovak government had to cope with the wartime legacy of the Slovak State that it replaced. The government walked a fine line between political continuity and discontinuity. It had to consider the interests of

those who “legally” profited from the policies of the wartime regime while positioning itself as an anti-fascist, democratic government. Singling out Jews as “special victims of the war” would disturb this balance. The postwar Polish government had no such legacy to cope with, and thus found it politically unproblematic to emphasize Jewish particularity, condemn the wartime persecution of Jews, and pledge the restoration of Jewish life.

In my opinion, the nature of wartime collaboration with the Nazi regime had a paramount impact on popular attitudes towards the Jews after the war in the two countries. In Slovakia, the Slovak authorities, not external forces, implemented the anti-Jewish laws, whereas in Poland the Nazi regime alone had the power to enact such laws. Those Slovaks who participated in the persecution of Jews had the sanction of the quasi-independent Slovak State, and thus acted “legally.” Those Poles who participated in the persecution of Jews lacked such sanction, collaborating with the occupier. I speculate that this wartime dynamics caused more guilt in Poland than in Slovakia, and thus more hatred toward the Jewish returnees. The absence of death camps in the physical and mental landscape of Slovakia and their strong presence in the lives of Poles, who witnessed genocide “in their backyards,” only added to the growing sense of guilt.⁵

The examination of these sentiments is among the most methodologically challenging tasks in this project; how to assess which attitudes were typical in the two countries and which were not? Probability is one method: if of sixty-five available

⁵ Psychologist John J. Hartman argued that experiencing a “paranoid process of massive trauma” left society burdened with the guilt, shame, and horror of witnessing the death of millions. Postwar anti-Jewish aggression was a side effect of, what Hartman calls, the “failure to mourn.” John J. Hartman and Jacek Krochmal, *I Remember Every Day: The Fates of the Jews of Przemyśl during World War II* (Przemyśl: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu, 2002). On the proximity of death camps and its role in shaping postwar attitudes to Jews, see Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

testimonies, sixty overlap in their representation of a phenomenon, the phenomenon was probably common. However, memoirs – playgrounds of memory – are extremely problematic as representative voices in a historical analysis. While I use extensively published and unpublished testimonies, I am fully aware of the challenge they present. The authors of published memoirs, for example, constitute a particular group of the most articulate, the best educated, and ultimately the most successful Holocaust survivors. Recorded (unpublished) testimonies represent a broader demographic range of survivors who had been selected for interviews regardless of their postwar life choices. Notwithstanding these differences, all memoirs from the war and its aftermath are necessarily shaped by life experiences which followed the described events.

That said, personal testimonies reveal more than they obscure. First, personal testimonies highlight the most common threads of daily experience. Having read dozens of personal accounts collected in the archives in Poland and the United States, I was able to identify numerous recurrent images and representations, which seemed to signify common elements of the immediate postwar experience.⁶ An examination of the most representative and insightful testimonies illuminates general trends in the postwar return of Jewish survivors to Poland and Slovakia. Second, placing personal accounts at the core of a narrative gives a voice to ordinary people. Bringing these voices back restores their historical agency and hence makes room for a historical narrative which recognizes the potency of individual experience in a representation of the past. Finally, cautiously employed individual representations can provide insights into the larger historical processes. For the period after liberation, returnees' accounts expose features of ethnic

⁶ The Jewish Historical Institute in Warszawa, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and the Library of Yale University in New Haven.

dynamics – its contingencies and changeability – otherwise lost in historical data. Initial requests for aid, the first encounters with neighbors, and negotiations of one’s place in a community – these experiences are illegible without memoirs.

Apart from published and unpublished memoirs and testimonies, I base my analysis on an extensive collection of primary sources from archives in Poland, Slovakia, the United States, Israel, and the Czech Republic. These sources include records of the central and local administration in Poland and Slovakia, files of central and local Jewish communities and organizations, the press, and reports of American Jewish relief organizations, among others. In addition, my work is firmly grounded in the secondary sources at the intersection of several bodies of literature, including the history of Polish-Jewish and Slovak-Jewish relations in the twentieth century, the history of antisemitism, and the postwar history of Eastern Europe.

I also base my analysis in theoretical work on ethnicity. Although the concept of nation dominates the vocabulary of my primary sources and the modern nation-state constitutes the context of the described events, I do not use it as a category organizing my analysis. National concepts are not the most suitable to describe the web of mutual relations and the perceptions of self and others since they rarely acknowledge the flexibility of identities. Jeremy King’s definition of ethnicity as “a web of vague and multivalent relationships, as a seemingly permanent but actually plastic set of social attributes, and as a populist and thus modern mode of political cognition” better fits my conceptual framework.⁷ His approach creates space for all shades of identity rather than the mere conception of Jews and non-Jews as mutually exclusive. Contingent and fluid

⁷ Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

identity is a useful category of historical analysis particularly when applied to periods following total destruction. When war (or a similar catastrophe) materially and emotionally shatters old structures, survivors have to rebuild not only their shelters but also their sense of self.

This dissertation is arranged thematically since the entire story covers only three years and chronology seems of secondary importance. The story begins in the summer of 1944 during the Soviet liberation of eastern Poland and ends at the end of 1948. I chose 1948 as the end date because in Poland and Slovakia this year brought the final establishment of the communist regime and hence the end of the transition stage. The ultimate installation of the regime stabilized structures previously in flux, final consolidation of central power and its security forces, radicalization of official ideology, and intimidation in the public sphere. This radical shift in politics after 1948 generated concerns, motivations, and fears of a different character than those in the pre-1948 period. Therefore, a historical study of post-1948 Polish and Slovak societies requires different analytical categories than a pre-1948 investigation.

Chapter 2 offers a general historical context in comparative perspective. Chapter 3 describes Soviet liberation of the two countries, the survivors' first days of freedom, the journey home, and the ultimate failure of homecoming. Chapter 4 describes problems in the implementation of Jewish property restitution and its critical role in shaping Jewish and non-Jewish relations after the war. Chapter 5 offers a comparative narrative of anti-Jewish violence in Poland and Slovakia in a broader social and political context. Chapter 6 discusses the revised definitions of citizenship and new criteria of inclusion and exclusion and traces their consequences for the position of Jews in both societies. Chapter

7 describes the return to normality involving building families, finding jobs, and belonging to communities with or without non-Jewish neighbors.

CHAPTER 2

OUTLINE OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this chapter, I will present a brief outline of the histories of Jews in Poland and Slovakia before 1945. I will also introduce the social and political processes which affected ethnic dynamics in the two countries after 1945. The postwar history of Jews and their relations with non-Jewish populations unfolded against a backdrop of social and political transformation on international and domestic levels. The events on the Polish and Slovak streets are incomprehensible outside this context. The context, however, was not predetermined by the international power struggle and the ultimate Soviet conquest as older historical texts claimed.¹ Indeed, in hindsight, from the perspective of 1948, the first three years after the war seemed like a gloomy road toward inevitable Soviet rule. But that was not entirely true. Between 1945 and 1947, nobody was certain of what the future might bring. While some hoped for a national road to socialism, others prayed for a Third World War. Everywhere, in Poland and Czechoslovakia, there was a lot of excitement and hope surrounding the rebuilding efforts. Thousands of Jews would not have remained in these countries if not for that hope of rebuilding their lives there. They anticipated the opening of new possibilities in new social and political conditions.²

¹ As Hayden V. White said, all histories follow one of four universal plot lines – tragedy, comedy, romance, or satire. The history of postwar Poland is a tragic story. Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1973).

² For these remarks, I am thankful to Brian Porter-Szűcs.

As recent historiography showed, these were not merely the illusions of the naive. For example, Padraic Kenney demonstrated that workers were still organizing and going on strikes in the first years after the war.³ Public demonstrations for social and political causes were still possible. John Connelly found that universities were still engaging in scholarship that diverged from official Party lines.⁴ Between 1945 and 1947, the press remained relatively free, with a plurality of titles from Catholic to communist. In 1947, the Episcopate succeeded in publishing its own set of principles for the new constitution, which envisioned Catholicism as a state religion.⁵ *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly) included relatively open debates about basic political issues even in 1948. Despite the unleashing of terror, the arrests, and the crackdown on the military underground, Soviet norms did not yet dominate public life. In short, the main point of this chapter and this study is to demonstrate that the situation in 1945-48 was not one of terror and communist conquest only, but also one of hope, fear, and uncertainty.

Poland

Unlike Slovaks, Poles had their own polity for more than 700 years, until 1795 when the final partition of Poland occurred. In the sixteenth century, after forging a commonwealth with Lithuania (*Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów*), Poland became one of the largest and most influential powers in contemporary Europe. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was also one of the most ethnically diverse places at the time. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, only four million out of ten million residents of

³ Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴ John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁵ "Katolickie postulaty konstytucyjne," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 3, nr. 16 (April 20, 1947), 3.

Rzeczpospolita were Polish. The rest were Byelorussians, Germans, Gypsies, Jews, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and others. The ethnic heterogeneity of the Commonwealth and the literary production on the subject generated the myth of *Rzeczpospolita* as a polity of peaceful ethnic coexistence, religious toleration, and effective democracy. Although based on murky grounds (only ten percent of the population participated in the Polish-Lithuanian “democracy” and ethnic relations were anything but idyllic during the Chmielnicki massacres), the myth became one of the cornerstones of the Polish national self-image and set high ideals of ethnic tolerance for the future. The end of *Rzeczpospolita* marked the beginning of more than 120 years of statelessness and struggle for independence.

Since 1795, the governments of Russia, Austria, and Prussia (Germany) were to determine the policies of Poland for the entire nineteenth century. As a result, when Poland regained independence in the fall of 1918, the newly established Second Republic was composed of three dissimilar parts with different political, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. When the pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski became prime minister and formed a new government in January 1919, one of his first challenges was a legacy of the partitions and the need to unify the country. Divergent transportation systems, educational structures, economic infrastructures, and currencies, not to mention legal systems, had to be unified. The ethnic composition of the state was yet another disuniting factor.⁶ In the eastern – formerly Russian – partition, the majority of peasants were Byelorussian or Ukrainian, landlords were mostly Polish, while the urban population was

⁶ Twenty-seven million people resided in interwar Poland: seventy percent Poles, fourteen percent Ruthenians, eight percent Jews, four percent Byelorussians, four percent Germans, and the remaining peoples included Lithuanians, Russians, and Czechs. See R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the twentieth century* (London: New York, 1994).

Jewish. In the southeast, in Galicia – formerly Austro-Hungarian – ethnic divisions were similar to the Russian partition although peasants were predominantly Polish. Finally, in the western – formerly German – territories, the majority of peasants were Polish while the urban population was German and Jewish. Poles, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians made up rural populations whereas Jews and Germans (especially in the west) concentrated in urban areas. In this respect, Poland's ethnic and residential composition was similar to that of Slovakia.

Although tempered in the subsequent decades, differences generated during the partitions remained crucial in determining regional particularities throughout the twentieth century. For example, nineteenth century minority politics in Germany, Russia, and Austria permanently affected ethnic relations in Silesia (former Germany), in Mazowsze (former Russia), and Galicia (former Austria). In Germany, for instance, a highly centralized power prioritized efforts to unify all German provinces. In order to successfully merge the Polish-speaking peripheries with the German center, the government introduced extreme assimilationist measures, including the germanization of the Polish minority. The Polish resistance helped to preserve national culture but also generated extreme forms of Polish nationalism. Mostly assimilated German Jews were caught up in the middle of the German-Polish national conflict, being identified as German oppressors.

In today's Mazowsze – the former Russian partition – ethnic dynamics developed similar to Silesia. Although initially Russia was willing to grant Poles special privileges, soon russification efforts intensified and, by the mid-nineteenth century, Russia withdrew all prerogatives. Like in Germany, Russian discriminatory politics led to the rise of Polish

nationalism and military initiative. However, in contrast to German Jews, Jews in the Russian partition were never confused with the Russian oppression due to a low level of assimilation. Rather, the Jewish participation in the Polish uprisings against Russia bridged the gap between Jews and non-Jews if only temporarily. In a long run, the ambivalent position of Jews as “others” remained intact.

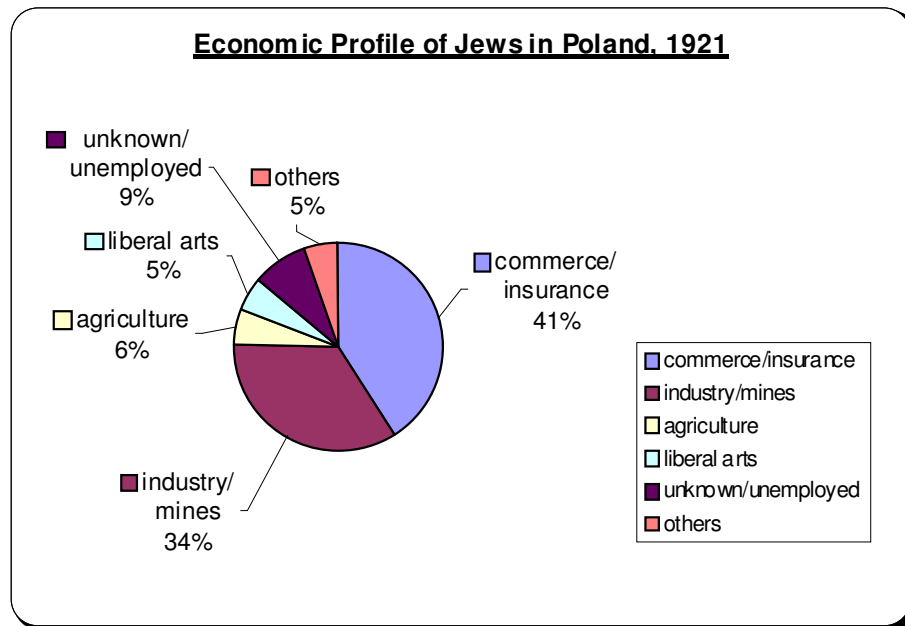
The Habsburg Empire was neither strongly centralized nor ethnically homogenous. Instead, it was a multinational polity which refrained from enforcement of homogeneity and granted power to a few privileged national groups. Although less privileged than Austrians and Hungarians, Poles enjoyed considerable autonomy including the right to use the Polish language and to maintain a system of Polish schools in Galicia. As a result, local Polish nationalism never reached the intensity of its counterparts in the Russian and German territories, slowing down the coming of modern antisemitism to the region. It should be noted, however, that political nationalistic agitation against Jews was not completely absent from the area.⁷

The Jewish population in interwar Poland was the second largest in Europe (after Russia). Three million Polish Jews – residing predominantly in the urban areas – constituted ten percent of the total population of the country. In 1931 eighty percent of all Jews in central Poland (Congress Poland) and seventy-five percent of all Jews in Galicia lived in towns, mainly *shtetlekh*. In the eastern Polish borderlands, sixty-one percent of Jews lived in towns.⁸ In the cities of Warszawa, Łódź, L’viv, Kraków, Vilnius, and Lublin – Jews constituted approximately thirty percent of the total population. In eastern

⁷ Brian Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

⁸ Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 24.

towns like Grodno, Brześć on Bug, Równe, Łuck, or Pińsk the percentages were even higher, reaching fifty to sixty percent of the total population. As for their occupational profile, the overwhelming majority of Polish Jews derived their income from commerce or industry. In 1921, forty-one percent of Polish Jews were employed in commerce and insurance, thirty-four percent in industry and mines, six percent in agriculture, and five



percent in the liberal professions.⁹ These numbers did not change drastically until the late 1930s, when the government introduced anti-Jewish legislation limiting access to certain professions including medicine and law.¹⁰

Although overwhelmingly urban, Polish Jewry was hardly uniform. The Jews of the Russian partition from central Poland, the Jews from the Polish borderlands (Kresy), from the old Habsburg Empire (Galicia), and from the formerly German occupied territories were all products of radically different political and social environments. In the

⁹ Antisemitic rhetoric considered as “overrepresentation” the fact that fifty-six percent of doctors, thirty-three percent of lawyers, and twenty-two percent of journalists and publishers were Jewish. *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

former Russian part, where fifty percent of all Polish Jews lived, the overwhelming majority was poor and orthodox (including Hassidim) while the minority was wealthy and acculturated. Further to the east, in the Polish borderlands, there were even fewer acculturated Jews, more likely russified than polonized. Overall, the Yiddish language dominated on the Jewish street in Kresy and Russian Haskalah and Jewish socialism captured people's minds. In the late 1930s, Zionism became one of the strongest political movements in the region. In the west, in the former German partition, the majority of Jews were highly assimilated into the German language and culture. Finally, in the former Austro-Hungarian part of Poland, where economic misery and lack of industrialization joined Franz Joseph's tradition of tolerance, modern Haskalah and traditional Hassidism competed for followers. Haskalah was particularly prolific, giving an impetus to the politics of assimilation and to Jewish nationalism.

Facing the ethnic, social, and political diversity of interwar Poland, the two main personalities of the time, Józef Piłsudski and Roman Dmowski, proposed their own visions of an "ideal Poland"; visions which competed against each other to define Polish ethnic politics for years to come. Marshal of the Polish Legions Józef Piłsudski returned to Poland in 1918 as a hero of the Great War. In his views on geopolitics, Russia was the primary enemy of Poland. Consequently, Poland needed a buffer zone in the east to protect the Polish heartland from Russian imperialism. Creation of a Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian federation would serve this purpose. In Piłsudski's vision, the federation would guarantee equality to all its citizens regardless of nationality. In his twenties, Piłsudski had been a socialist, but he later, in his own words, "alighted from the socialist tram-car

at the stop marked nationalism.”¹¹ Nevertheless socialist ideals greatly influenced his nationalism, which never became xenophobic or exclusive.

Roman Dmowski, on the other hand, had envisioned Poland based on ethnic exclusivity. Brian Porter-Szűcs, in his work on modernity and nationalism, convincingly demonstrated how Dmowski and his followers came to create the exclusionary boundaries around the imagined nation and, hence, developed an ideology of hatred.¹² By the 1920s, Dmowski had no doubts that Poland should be solely “for Poles.” In inflammatory, nationalistic rhetoric, he called for action against Jews and Germans as the primary enemies of the Polish nation. They needed to be fought against with all possible means, including economic boycotts and pressure to emigrate.¹³ Dmowski and his movement (*Endecja*) came to symbolize antisemitism in interwar Poland.¹⁴

Neither Piłsudski nor Dmowski could control the outbreak of ethnic violence immediately after the First World War. Major pogroms erupted in the eastern borderlands – in today’s western Ukraine and Lithuania. The first pogrom occurred in L’viv in November 1918, when Poles and Ukrainians fought over rights to the city. Another major riot took place in Vilnius in 1919, when the city was subject to Polish, Lithuanian, and Byelorussian claims. In both cases, Jews were caught in the line of fire, viewed as potential traitors by each side. Also, in Pińsk, Lida, and numerous other small towns of Galicia, anti-Jewish sentiments exploded. The situation worsened in 1920, during the

¹¹ Andrzej Garlicki and John Coutouvidis, *Józef Piłsudski: 1867-1935* (London: Brookfield, VT, 1995).

¹² Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*.

¹³ Porter showed that Dmowski did not shun from arguments for extermination of the Jews. He used colonial rhetoric to justify extermination. For example, Dmowski argued that killing of “the local wild population” would offer the potential for growth of a new civilization. *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁴ Abbreviation for the National Democratic Party (Narodowa Demokracja, ND) founded by Dmowski in 1928.

Polish-Russian war, when Poles identified Jews with Bolsheviks and thus the “natural” enemies of the Polish cause.

Overall, the 1920s was an era of ruptures and dramas. The decade commenced with ethnic violence in the borderlands, the war against Bolshevik Russia, and the assassination of Poland’s first elected president, Gabriel Narutowicz, by a nationalist extremist. Economic crisis followed political instability. In May 1923 inflation reached a new high: one US dollar bought six million Polish *złoty*.¹⁵ Social unrest and workers’ strikes further destabilized the political scene. Constant shifts of power, the absence of a strong coalition, and the governments’ dependency on swing-votes contributed to the inability of executive power to resolve pressing economic and social problems.

In 1926, Marshal Piłsudski staged a coup d’état, which became one of the most controversial moves in his career and one of the most dramatic moments in Polish interwar history. In the short run, the coup had positive effects on the economy and ethnic policies. Among the new initiatives, the government guaranteed equal treatment to all ethnic minorities and abandoned tactics to polonize them. However, in the long run, the change proved to be temporary and superficial at best. Like in the rest of Europe, the Great Depression brought an overall deterioration of the economy and political stability in Poland in the 1930s. When Piłsudski – the only guarantor of relative political stability – died in 1935, conditions deteriorated dramatically. The extreme right-wing nationalist groups took over politics in the capital and on the street. Dmowski’s idea of “Poland for the Poles” triumphed and Jew-baiting became a daily reality. The government officially approved economic boycotts and actively encouraged Jews to emigrate. Anti-Jewish

¹⁵ Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the twentieth century*.

violence erupted in dozens of Polish towns and villages including Przytyk, Mińsk Mazowiecki, and Brześć on Bug.¹⁶

Despite these handicaps, Polish Jews remained the most culturally diverse and religiously dynamic Jewish community in interwar Europe until the Second World War when the Nazi regime entirely wiped out this world. In search of *Lebensraum*, Nazi Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. After a month of regular war, the Polish Army surrendered and total occupation of the country began. In contrast to Slovakia, Hitler had never considered Poland as a potential satellite or puppet state with its own servile government. As early as October 1939, it was clear that the Germans would rule the country with an iron hand. The executions of members of the Polish intelligentsia started the process.

At the same time (late fall 1939) the Nazis introduced laws against Jews: the expropriation, the order to wear a Star of David, the ban on residing or working in certain districts, and the prohibition of relations with non-Jews.¹⁷ In 1940, in each town, the Jewish community councils were obliged to gather a particular quota of its residents for daily slave labor in the streets or industry. Meanwhile, the Nazi regime gradually confined Jews to ghettos established all over Poland. Soon, any contact with the outside world was forbidden and crossing borders of a ghetto meant immediate death. In the late

¹⁶ Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*. Mendelsohn cited Yankev Leshchinski's work. According to Leshchinski, during the years 1935 and 1936, 1,289 Jews were wounded in over 150 towns and villages in Poland. On pogroms in the 1930s, see Jolanta Żyndul, *Zajścia Antyżydowskie w Polsce w Latach 1935-1937* (Warszawa, 1994); Anna Landau-Czajka, *W Jednym Stali Domu: Koncepcje Rozwiązania Kwestii Żydowskiej w Publicystyce Polskiej Lat 1933-1939* (Warszawa: Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 1998); Wojciech Śleszyński, *Zajścia Antyżydowskie w Brześciu nad Bugiem 13 Maja 1937* (Białystok: Archiwum Państwowe w Białymstoku: Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 2004).

¹⁷ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961); Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986); Omer Bartov, *Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

fall of 1941, Nazis began experimenting with truck-engine gas killings in the forests of eastern Poland, in Chełmno. In March 1942, the first transports of Jews were sent to Bełżec death camp and, soon after, the program of mass killings operated at full capacity. Between spring 1942 and fall 1944, in the death camps of Bełżec, Birkenau, Chełmno, Majdanek, Sobibór, and Treblinka, Germans gassed and burnt millions of European Jews. When Russian troops liberated the camps in Poland in January 1945, the total number of Jewish victims of the Second World War was thought to be millions.¹⁸

As the German occupation of Poland unfolded, Stalin initiated a series of determined and ultimately successful efforts to establish a dependable government in Poland. Only a completely loyal Polish state could guarantee the establishment of a secure Soviet western border and a buffer zone against capitalistic Western Europe after the war. By the beginning of 1943, Stalin had activated Polish Communists to help him create *faits accomplis* in Polish politics. In February 1943 he authorized the creation of the Union of Polish Patriots (*Związek Patriotów Polskich*, ZPP), which was to play the role of a Soviet-backed government in occupied Poland. In April 1943 the USSR severed diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile after the Polish administration accused the Soviets of the Katyń massacre.¹⁹ At the end of 1943, at a conference in Teheran, Stalin and Churchill agreed on the future borders of Poland – the Curzon line on the east and the Oder-Neisse line on the west.²⁰ For Poland, this solution meant the

¹⁸ These estimates changed during the last half-century. The current scholarship on the Holocaust roughly estimates the number of victims at six million.

¹⁹ The Katyń massacre was a mass execution of more than 21,000 Polish citizens, mostly POW's and other prisoners, in March 1940. The members of the Soviet Politbiuro signed the order of execution, carried out by the NKVD. See Wojciech Materski, *Katyń: Dokumenty zbrodni* (TRIO, 1995).

²⁰ With some modifications, the Curzon line constituted the present day eastern border of Poland. Originally, it was a demarcation line proposed in 1919 by Lord Curzon (the British Foreign Secretary) as an armistice line in the Soviet-Polish war of 1919-20. Stalin also used the Curzon line to define the German-Soviet border in the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact in 1939.

surrender of vast eastern territories (including the cities of Vilnius and L'viv) to the USSR and the acquisition of Silesia and Pomerania from Germany in return.

The events of 1943 gave impetus to the forming of a Soviet-backed government in occupied Poland. At the beginning of 1944, preparations for the creation of the Polish National Committee (Polski Komitet Narodowy, PKN) – the base for the future government – were under way in Moscow when Stalin and the Polish Communists realized the need to widen the political spectrum of the new administration. Stalin and his comrades foresaw that a solely communist-based government – created on the back of the Red Army – would provoke enormous opposition and constant interference. For this reason, the work on the PKN continued with the participation of the wider spectrum including the communist-friendly Socialists, Democrats, and Agrarians. By late June 1944, “It was obvious that the Communists were preparing to take power in Poland.”²¹ Finally, in July 1944, when the Red Army entered today's eastern Poland, the Soviet-backed Polish government – the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN) – was established.

The PKWN – also known as the Lublin Committee (after the location of its first headquarters) – was organized in Moscow and fully controlled by the Soviet military.

The creation of the PKWN fundamentally changed Poland's situation. From that moment Stalin would no longer speak of the reconstruction of the government-in-exile in London but of expanding the PKWN by including politicians overseas and in Poland. The political structure created at that time, with minor modifications that did not undermine its foundations, was maintained over the next decades. Those foundations were the Communist Party's monopoly of power and Poland's close connection to Soviet policies.²²

²¹ Krystyna Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, trans. John Micgiel and Michael H. Bernhard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 61.

²² *Ibid.*, 64-65.

The Soviets ensured that the Communists dominated the PKWN, without having a majority, by holding the three crucial departments of public security, education, and information and propaganda. Edward Osóbka-Morawski from the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS) became prime minister.²³

Facing a gradual Soviet advance toward a complete takeover in occupied Poland, the leadership of the political and military underground, most notably the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK), made the decision to launch an anti-German uprising in Warszawa.²⁴ The uprising was supposed to create a situation in which Polish underground authorities could seize power in Warszawa before the Russians entered the city. In other words, the AK started the uprising as a final act of desperation aimed at hindering Soviet domination. The Warszawa uprising broke out on August 1, 1944 and ended two months later on October 2, 1944. Insufficient human and military resources of the underground, combined with the treachery of the Soviet military, led to the final disaster. When the AK fought the final battles against the Germans in the late summer of 1944, the Russian troops halted all military operations so that the Germans would not have to fight on two fronts and could use all their resources against Poles. The total surrender to the Germans ended the struggle, which ultimately caused over 200,000 deaths and the total destruction of the city of Warszawa. As a result of the annihilation of the military resistance and the subsequent repression of the AK, anti-Soviet opposition in

²³ Other members of the PKWN included the Polish Communists from the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) as well as members of the ZPP, the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe, SL), the Democratic Party (Stronnictwo Demokratyczne, SD), and the Workers' Party of Polish Socialists (Robotnicza Partia Polskich Socjalistów, RPPS). The RPPS originated in April 1943 as a result of a split in the Polish Socialists (Polscy Socjaliści, PS). Initially, the RPPS opposed any cooperation with the PPR and Communists in general.

²⁴ Andrzej Kunert, ed., *Kronika Powstania Warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Zysk i S-ka, 2004); Włodzimierz Borodziej, *The Warszawa Uprising of 1944* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

Poland was dramatically weakened. However, there were still political forces in the country which were determined to hamper the Soviet establishment of authority in Poland. Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the leader of the Polish Peasants' Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), was the most prominent example.²⁵

Mikołajczyk was still in London when he became a major negotiator of Polish affairs in the international arena. As prime minister of the government-in-exile between July 1943 and November 1944, Mikołajczyk traveled to Moscow, London, and Washington on numerous occasions to negotiate, among other matters, the composition of the future Polish government. However, negotiations with Washington or London had their limits since neither of the political centers was willing to challenge Soviet policy toward Poland. Both Great Britain and the United States needed the cooperation of the USSR to realize their own political aims. Also, Roosevelt rightly believed that the Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe was a *fait accompli* and nothing could be done except ameliorate its consequences.

At the conference held in Yalta in February 1945, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin declared their readiness to establish diplomatic relations with Poland as soon as “the new Polish provisional government of national unity” was democratically elected.²⁶ The signatories also agreed to approve the Curzon line as the eastern frontier of Poland. Taken at face value, the Yalta agreement seemed beneficial to Poland. It stated the need for a reorganization of the present provisional government “on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad” and

²⁵ Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *The Rape of Poland: Pattern of Soviet Aggression* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Stanisław Mikołajczyk czyli klęska realisty: Zarys biografii politycznej* (Warszawa: Agencja Omnipress, 1991).

²⁶ Gale Stokes, *From Stalinism to Pluralism: a Documentary History of Eastern Europe Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 16-17.

pledged to create a new administration with the holding of “free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot.”²⁷ However, the formulation of terms left much space for interpretations, thus allowing the Soviets to manipulate it.

In January 1945 the new provisional government (Rząd Tymczasowy RP) took over as the central executive in Poland after the PKWN. This government lasted until June 1945 when the Provisional Government of National Unity (Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej, TRJN) was formed in the final negotiations in Moscow. Theoretically, in accordance with the Yalta agreement, the new administration was to be organized on “a broader democratic basis” with participation of all legal political parties in Poland. In practice, however, “a broader democratic basis” meant the inclusion of representatives of the Polish Peasants’ Party (PSL) alone.²⁸ Osóbka-Morawski retained his post as prime minister in the new government. Mikołajczyk accepted the position of second deputy prime minister although originally he was supposed to head the administration. Overall, out of twenty-two ministers in the government, fourteen were Communists and former members of the Lublin Committee. The remaining eight members were either Socialists (who slowly gravitated toward the communist left, particularly after their most respected leaders were forced into exile), or members of the SD and SL, and thus too powerless to matter. The formation of the Provisional Government of National Unity closed the period of dual centers of power, in Poland and abroad. The government-in-exile ceased to have any factual meaning.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ In addition to the already present members of the PKWN: Polish Workers’ Party (PPR), Polish Socialist Party (PPS), Democratic Party (SD), and Peasant Party (SL).

In this new polity, the majority of the population was ethnically Polish.²⁹ The pre-war mosaic of nationalities ended due to several factors at play during and shortly after the war. First, as I described earlier, out of a vibrant community of more than three million Jews, only about 200,000 survived the genocide and returned to Poland. Second, the postwar shift of borders left the majority of Lithuanians, Byelorussians, and Ukrainians outside of the new Polish eastern frontier. Finally, the new Polish administration implemented national policies which academic literature on the subject termed “ethnic cleansing.”³⁰ In an effort to settle interethnic conflicts, the government forced the homogenization of society through expulsions and “resettlements” of “non-Poles” while pressuring ethnic Poles (for example, in the Soviet Union) to return to Poland. By and large, millions were relocated “voluntarily, by force, or under pressure” from their original place of residence after 1945.

The postwar fate of the German and Ukrainian minorities – the two largest minorities within the new Polish borders – was the most symptomatic. The treatment of Germans in Poland immediately after the war resembled that in other Eastern European countries. The principles in regard to the Germans were laid out at the Berlin (Potsdam) Conference in the summer of 1945,

The Three Governments, having considered the question in all its aspects, recognize that the transfer to Germany of German populations, or elements thereof, remaining in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, will have to be

²⁹ In 1950, out of the population of twenty-five million, 442,000 or 1.6 percent belonged to ethnic minorities in Poland. There were 121,500 Germans, 110,000 Byelorussians, 100,000 Ukrainians, 50,000 Jews (decrease from 200,000 resulted from mass emigration between 1946 and 1949), 30,000 Gypsies, 18,000 Slovaks, 10,000 Lithuanians, and 3,000 Czechs. Leszek Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003), 62.

³⁰ Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, ed., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

undertaken. They agree that any transfers that take place should be effected in an orderly and humane manner.³¹

In the final weeks of the war alone, five million Germans left in panic the newly annexed territories of western and northern Poland, fearing the advance of the Soviet military and subsequent reprisals of the local population.³² In June 1945 the Polish Army conducted a ruthless operation of immediate “resettlement” of approximately 200,000 Germans from the Polish-German borderlands.³³ The organized mass transfer of the remaining Polish Germans began in February 1946 and lasted until November 1947. Between February and June 1946, more than 700,000 Germans were forced out of the Polish territories (200,000 people in June 1946 alone). In the second half of 1946, another 700,000 Germans were transferred to the Soviet zone. Joseph B. Schechtman cited a total of 1.6 million Germans expelled from Poland in 1946 alone. In 1947, a total of 500,000 Germans were forced to leave the country.³⁴

Similar policies were implemented against Ukrainians between 1944 and 1948.

The resettlement started in the fall of 1944 in accordance with the agreement between

³¹ The Agreements at the Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, on July 17-August 2, 1945, *Orderly Transfers of German Population*. Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Od Poczdamu do Szklarskiej Poręby: Polska w stosunkach międzynarodowych 1945-1947* (Londyn: Aneks, 1990).

³² Joseph B. Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 193. This “voluntary” migration lasted throughout the spring of 1945. Although not organized by the state, this movement was voluntary only in name. It was not free will but territorial shifts and military defeats, which forced these people to march westwards.

³³ Bernadetta Nitschke, *Wysiedlenie czy Wypędzenie? Ludność Niemiecka w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2001). Also see Stanisław Jankowiak, ““Cleansing” Poland of Germans: The Province of Pomerania, 1945-1949,” in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

³⁴ Jan Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej* (Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, 1991). Between 1945 and 1947, the Soviet zone took almost two million Polish Germans. Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955*, 207; Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej*, 178-203.

Poland, Soviet Byelorussia, and Ukraine.³⁵ Despite resistance, approximately 360,000 Ukrainians were evacuated from Poland to the Soviet Ukraine between November 1944 and August 1945. By the end of 1946, the total of deported Ukrainians and Lemkos – “people classified as Ukrainians” – reached 480,000.³⁶ At the same time, approximately 700,000 people classified as Poles – Catholics and speakers of the Polish language – were forced to move to Poland.³⁷ In 1947, the Polish government organized Operation Vistula (*Akcja Wisła*) to remove the remaining Ukrainians from southeastern Poland (estimated at about 200,000).³⁸ Between April and July 1947, about 140,000 Ukrainians and Lemkos were brutally evicted from their homes in the provinces of Lublin, Rzeszów, Przemyśl, and Nowy Sącz and forced to move to the newly annexed territories in northern and western Poland. Vibrant multiethnic communities in the borderlands of Poland came to an end.

“Cleansing” southeastern Poland of Ukrainians aimed, in particular, at the ultimate destruction of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrayins’ka Povstans’ka Armiya,

³⁵ Poland and the Soviet Ukraine signed the agreement in Lublin on September 9, 1944. For postwar repatriation from and to Soviet Union, see Orest Subtelny, "Expulsion, Resettlement, Civil Strife: The Fate of Poland's Ukrainians, 1944-1947," in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 162.

³⁶ Lemkos are Greek Catholics (the minority of Lemkos are Orthodox Ukrainian) and speakers of the Lemko-Rusyn language. They are often perceived as Ukrainians or Rusyns and, in Slovakia, they are known as Ruthenians. For more details on Lemkos, see Julian Kwiek, *Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy w Województwie Krakowskim w Latach 1945-1949/50* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1998). Also see Grzegorz Motyka and Rafał Wnuk, *Pany i Reżuny: Współpraca AK-WiN i UPA, 1945-1947* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1997).

³⁷ Subtelny, "Expulsion, Resettlement, Civil Strife: The Fate of Poland's Ukrainians, 1944-1947," 167.

³⁸ On the Operation Vistula, see Eugeniusz Misilo, *Akcja "Wisła": Dokumenty* (Warszawa: Archiwum Ukraińskie, 1993); Motyka and Wnuk, *Pany i Reżuny: Współpraca AK-WiN i UPA, 1945-1947*; Grzegorz Motyka, *Tak Było w Bieszczadach: Walki Polsko-Ukraińskie 1943-1948* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1999); Marek Jasiak, "Overcoming Ukrainian Resistance: The Deportation of Ukrainians within Poland in 1947," in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003); Serhii Bohunov, ed., *Polacy i Ukraińcy Pomiedzy Dwoma Systemami Totalitarnymi 1942-1945* (Warszawa, Kijów: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005).

UPA).³⁹ The activity of the UPA in the eastern regions of Poland exacerbated long lasting Polish-Ukrainian animosities and led to a particularly destructive civil war between Poles and Ukrainians in the years 1943 and 1947. Beginning in March and April 1943, the UPA targeted Polish civilians in order to “cleanse” the region of the Polish-speaking Catholic population, appropriate their land, and take power. The murder of approximately 35,000 to 80,000 Poles in Volhynia (today’s western Ukraine) in the summer of 1943, carried out by the UPA, started the Polish-Ukrainian circle of violence which continued until the summer of 1947.⁴⁰

By mid 1943, violence targeting the Catholic population spread from Volhynia to Eastern Galicia (today’s Polish-Ukrainian borderland), and further west to Lublin, Zamość, Przemyśl, and Rzeszów (provinces in eastern Poland). As early as the beginning of 1943, the action of the UPA drew a reaction from the AK, leading to a guerilla war with thousands of casualties on both sides in military and civilian ranks. To further complicate the matter, the Nazis used the Polish-Ukrainian conflict for their own resettlement plans in the area beginning in 1943. In 1944 the situation turned even more complex as the Red Army advanced toward the west. After a short truce, caused by the progress of the Soviet military through the southeastern provinces of Poland, the Polish-Ukrainian confrontation continued. So did massacres of local Ukrainians in retaliation for Ukrainian crimes against the Polish population.

³⁹ The UPA was a Ukrainian guerilla group formed in 1942 to fight against the German Wehrmacht, the Soviet Red Army, and the Polish armed underground (AK) for independent Ukraine. Leaders were Roman Shukhevych and Stepan Bandera.

⁴⁰ For details on the Volhynian massacres, see Tadeusz Stegner, ed., *Polacy o Ukraińcach, Ukraińcy o Polakach: Materiały z Sesji Naukowej* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Granit, 1993); Ryszard Torzecki, *Polacy i Ukraińcy: Sprawa Ukraińska w Czasie II Wojny Światowej na Terenie II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993). For testimonies, see Bohunov, ed., *Polacy i Ukraińcy Pomiędzy Dwoma Systemami Totalitarnymi 1942-1945*, 555-56.

After the liberation of 1945, Polish-Ukrainian fighting did not subside. Regardless of ideological differences, the armed Polish underground (and the Polish Army) remained determined to settle scores with the UPA and Ukrainian civilians. Although shattered by the Warszawa uprising and the repression that followed, the armed underground did not dissolve but rather went deeper underground, continuing the fight not only against the UPA but, above all, against the Soviets. The AK became the dominant Polish resistance movement under German occupation. It officially disbanded in January 1945 but some of its units moved to the forests and continued guerilla warfare against the Soviet presence in Poland. The second leading underground organization was the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne, NSZ), created in 1942 as a part of the military resistance movement.⁴¹ In contrast to the AK, the NSZ considered the USSR the primary enemy as early as the beginning of 1943 (since the battle of Stalingrad). In fall 1944, facing a hopeless political situation, the leadership of the NSZ resolved to disband the troops. However, the units refused to dissolve and moved the warfare against the Soviets into the forests.

The AK and NSZ members who “went into the forests” did so for a number of reasons. Some were ideologically driven; militantly anticommunist, they aimed to reestablish the government-in-exile as the official government of Poland. Some were escaping from NKVD pacification actions and night arrests or from forced conscription.⁴² Stefan Korboński wrote in his dispatch to London,

⁴¹ On the history of the NSZ, see Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* (Londyn: Odnova, 1982); Leszek Żebrowski, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne: Dokumenty, struktury, personalia* (Warszawa: Burchard, 1994).

⁴² The Soviet roundups were particularly widespread in the eastern provinces of Poland (Lublin and Biała Podlaska).

We cannot control the spontaneous movements to the woods. The reason: on one side mass arrests and conscription into the army, and on the other – the mystical faith of the people, that the period we have lived through is transitional, that soon there will be a truly independent Poland. The youth want to wait that period out in the woods, at least until the winter.⁴³

Finally, there were those who simply found it difficult to make the transition to a “normal” existence or considered guerilla warfare their way of life and a means for personal profit. In any case, after liberation, the armed underground was scattered, unstructured, uncontrolled, and highly demoralized. By and large, about 35,000 partisans took to the marshes or the forests to fight the Soviets.⁴⁴

In spring 1945, as repression of the partisan units intensified, so did the NSZ’s campaign against the Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB), the Citizens’ Militia (Milicja Obywatelska, MO), and the PPR. In May 1945 tensions increased dramatically, causing the exile leaders and the Polish underground to issue a number of calming appeals.⁴⁵ Their appeals proved futile and the official government in Poland resolved to reestablish internal order with its own methods. In anticipation of the void caused by the withdrawal of the Soviet NKVD from Poland, the government formed special military units – the Internal Security Corps (Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, KBW). The KBW and the three infantry divisions deployed in Warszawa, Lublin, Białystok, and Rzeszów (mainly eastern Poland) took on the task of “handling” the insurgency.⁴⁶

Pacification of the countryside and gradual destruction of the forest units began. In June and July 1945, in the Lublin province alone, the Third Infantry Division carried out more

⁴³ Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, 140. Stefan Korboński, a politician and journalist, was the last Delegate of the Government-in-Exile at Home. He was an active member of the underground resistance movement under German occupation. See Stefan Korboński, *W Imieniu Kremla* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1956).

⁴⁴ Anita Prażmowska, *Civil war in Poland: 1942-1948* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁵ Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, 140.

⁴⁶ Prażmowska, *Civil war in Poland: 1942-1948*.

than seventy operations in 300 localities.⁴⁷ The most intense battles took place in the east but were not limited to this region: all over the country, partisans clashed with communist security forces and political police. Police repression, including pacification actions in the forests, increased in the winter of 1945/46 and spring of 1946, when whole villages were burnt. The fights lasted with lesser or greater intensity until 1948.

At the time, the government had 250,000 soldiers and militiamen to fight the underground.⁴⁸ The losses on both sides reflected the intensity of the violence. According to the official estimates (published by the Institute for the Party History of the Polish United Workers Party in 1970), more than 6,000 state officials and supporters alone, “whose deaths at the hands of illegal organizations could be confirmed,” were killed between September 1944 and December 1946.⁴⁹ Between fall 1944 and spring 1945, “the NKVD arrested 61,729 Poles in the military behind Soviet lines on grounds of having belonged to hostile organizations. Of those, only 10,751 remained in camps in Poland, but over 50,000 were transported to the Soviet Union.”⁵⁰ In the first months of 1946 alone, the NKVD reported that 1,400 people loyal to the regime were killed in almost 2,000 attacks organized by the opposition.⁵¹

Among the victims of civil war, there were also Jewish survivors. In principle, armed guerilla units were to target state officials and Soviet and Polish soldiers. However, many victims of the warfare happened to be accidental. Some of the attacks had nothing to do with political struggle. In December 1945, in the Poznań, Łódź, and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Tadeusz Kostewicz, "Terror i Represje," in *Polacy wobec Przemocy, 1944-1956*, ed. Barbara Otwinowska and Jan Żaryn (Warszawa: Editions Spotkania, 1996), 147.

⁴⁹ David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998). Also see John Coutouvidis and Jaime Reynolds, *Poland, 1939-1947* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986).

⁵⁰ Prażmowska, *Civil war in Poland: 1942-1948*, 130.

⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

Kraków districts the population was terrified of “bands,” which attacked and robbed random residents. In January 1946, the Italian ambassador to Poland, Eugenio Reale, said that “common and political banditry” was the major issue in Poland.⁵² Lawlessness was widespread, so was access to weaponry. Polish Jews fell victims to this violence not only as “random citizens” but also as a targeted ethnic group. The NSZ was particularly notorious for hunting Jews. The NSZ subscribed to a highly nationalistic and exclusivist vision of “Poland for the Poles”; they also believed that Jews were disloyal to Poland having ties with Bolshevism.

The belief in Judeo-communism (*żydokomuna*) – the idea that Jews were traditionally prone to this political ideology – was a common motif in public discourse in the late 1940s.⁵³ Interestingly, some Polish Jews shared the belief that “the number of Jewish officials is entirely out of proportion with the size of the Jewish population.”⁵⁴ In May 1949, a JOINT correspondent in Poland pondered the relationship between Jews and the government in Poland,

The question of why the Government is so lenient toward the Jews should also be answered. It is easy to answer that question. In a country where at least eighty percent of the population is against the Government and the ruling party, it is good to know that it can rely, at least on some part of the population, which wants to cooperate with the Government.... The Government knows that the Jews may

⁵² Eugenio Reale, *Raporty: Polska 1945-1946*, trans. Paweł Zdziechowski (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1968).

⁵³ On the belief in Judeo-communism in Poland, see Abel Kainer, “Żydzi a Komunizm,” *Krytyka*, no. 15 (1983); Michael Chęciński, *Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-semitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishers, 1982); Antony Polonsky and Norman Davies, *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Jaff Schatz, *The Generation: the Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Antony Polonsky, ed., *Poles, Jews, Socialists: the Failure of an Ideal*, vol. 9, *Polin* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna Dekada: Trzy Eseje o Stereotypach na Temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i Komunistów, 1939-1948* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998).

⁵⁴ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, American Jewish Committee (hereafter cited as AJC)-Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter cited as FAD), FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York (hereafter cited as YIVO).

be black-marketing, dealing in hard currency, illegally leaving Poland, etc., but there is one thing they are not guilty of – i.e. working and conspiring against the Government.⁵⁵

According to the estimates of the communist members of the Central Committee of Polish Jews (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, CKŻP) in January 1947, 5,500 Jews were members of the Communist Party (PPR) which apparently amounted to a hundred percent increase during the second half of 1946.⁵⁶ In Lower Silesia, according to the estimates of the communist members of the CKŻP, there were 745 Jews in the police reserves ORMO in the region in January 1947.⁵⁷ Considering that ORMO consisted of about 125,000 policemen in Poland, 700 Jewish policemen was hardly an overrepresentation.⁵⁸

Krystyna Kersten cited a note from President Bierut on the numbers of workers in the political police in November 1945. According to the note, out of approximately 25,600 employees of the Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB), 438 or 1.7 percent

⁵⁵ Report from Poland, May 1949, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

⁵⁶ Report on participation of the Jewish population in an electoral action (*akcja wyborcza*) to the Legislature, prepared by the Fraction PPR at the CKŻP, January 1947, Collection of the provincial Jewish committee in Kraków (Komitet Wojewódzki Żydów w Krakowie, hereafter cited as KWŻ), KWŻ-2, State Archives in Kraków (Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, hereafter cited as APKr).

⁵⁷ ORMO (Ochotniczna Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej) was a “volunteer” citizen reserve police force, formed in April 1946 to aid other police and military forces to fight the political opposition. Report on participation of the Jewish population in an electoral action to the Legislature, prepared by the Fraction PPR at the CKŻP, January 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, APKr.

⁵⁸ After the Kielce pogrom, “there was not the urgent haste which was present elsewhere” but, nonetheless, a third of the Lower Silesian Jews left. Of the population of 85,000 before the pogrom, 51,000 Jews still resided in the region in mid 1947. Among others, see “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the World Jewish Congress (hereafter cited as WJC), September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, Archives of the American JOINT Distribution Committee, New York (hereafter cited as JOINT Archives). Also see opinion of Chief Rabbi of Wrocław Trojstman in report of Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein to General Joseph T. McNarney in Germany, 2 August 1946 (report received on September 3, 1946), Collection 45/54, File 734, JOINT Archives and report from Lower Silesia, statistical data, the summer of 1947, Collection of Archives of Modern Records in Warszawa (Archiwum Akt Nowych, hereafter cited as AAN), Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of Jews in Poland, RG 15.003 M, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC (hereafter cited as USHMM).

were Jews.⁵⁹ Of 500 employees in posts of authority in the UB, sixty-seven, or thirteen percent, were Jews. The note did not specify the criteria according to which the Jewishness of the employees had been determined. More recently, another Polish historian, Andrzej Paczkowski, verified these numbers based on biographical notes of the 447 employees in managerial positions in the UB between 1944 and 1956.⁶⁰ In the years 1944-45, almost twenty-five percent of the employees answered “Jewish” (*żydowska*) to the question of “nationality” (*narodowość*).⁶¹ After 1945, the average percentage of Jews in the UB workforce was thirty. These data did not consider regional disproportions. In November 1945 the Jewish population of 100,000 made up only a miniscule percentage in a country of twenty-four million. Twenty-five or thirty percent in the higher echelons of the secret service was indeed an overrepresentation. However, in absolute numbers, the total “Jewish participation” was entirely negligible. As Kersten concluded, the myth of Judeo-communism was precisely that: a myth.

Waves of violence against the underground (and the Jews) usually coincided with major political events like the referendum and the elections. By winter 1945, the Communists had already decided to postpone the “free and unfettered” elections promised in the Yalta agreement. The decision stemmed from the PPR’s conviction that if the elections were conducted in the beginning of 1946, they would be the losers. The Polish Communists were aware that they lacked legitimacy and popular support. Their potential constituency in Poland could not be compared with, for example,

⁵⁹ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, 83-4.

⁶⁰ The biographies were compiled in 1978 – twenty to thirty years after the events – and were based on standard questionnaires that all employees of the UB were obliged to fill in between the 1940s and the 1980s. Andrzej Paczkowski, “Żydzi w UB: Próba Weryfikacji Stereotypu,” in *Komunizm: Ideologia, System, Ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warszawa: Neriton: Instytut Historii PAN, 2001).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Czechoslovakia, where they could count on actually winning the general elections. In contrast, considering the strength of the PSL, Mikołajczyk had good reason to push for the elections. In January 1946 the PSL was the largest political organization in Poland. Mikołajczyk himself was extremely popular too; upon his return from exile in June, crowds welcomed him enthusiastically in Kraków, Warszawa, Poznań, and elsewhere.

To delay the elections, to find a pretext to combat Mikołajczyk and the PSL, and to estimate how much support they could get, the Communists proposed the idea of a referendum, approved by the PSL. To get people to vote, the Communists asked questions on the least controversial or ambiguous issues, “Do you favor the abolition of the Senate? Do you want the adoption in the future Constitution of the economic system carried out by means of land reform and nationalization of basic national industries with the preservation of statutory rights for private initiative? Do you want the adoption of the western border of the Polish state on the Baltic Sea, the Oder and Neisse River?”⁶² In 1946 politicians imagined that a great segment of society not only approved of but also expected far-reaching social and economic transformation, including agricultural reform. Also, considering the loss of the prewar eastern regions of Poland, not many were expected to disapprove of the western acquisitions. Hence only the first question – the abolition of the Senate – could provide potential ground for a political battle.

A month before voting, the PSL decided on the responses “no” to the question on the abolition of the Senate and “yes” to the remaining two. Soon after, both parties unleashed an intense crusade to get people to vote; for the Communists “three times yes” (*trzy razy tak*) and for the PSL – one time “no.” Governmental propaganda reached an

⁶² Andrzej Paczkowski, *Referendum z 30 czerwca 1946 r: Przebieg i wyniki* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1993).

unprecedented scale. Psychological intimidation, physical abuse, and constant harassment of PSL members were part of the campaign. On Sunday, June 30, 1946, more than eighty percent of eligible voters went to the polls. According to the official results, seventy percent voted “yes” and thirty percent voted “no” to the “Senate question.” However, no one doubted that the PPR falsified the results. For example, in Kraków where the PSL safeguarded the voting, eighty-four percent voted “no” to the first question, fifty-nine percent voted “no” to the second question, and thirty percent voted “no” to the third question.⁶³

Four days after the referendum, on July 4, 1946, the anti-Jewish pogrom in Kielce broke out which claimed the lives of forty-two Jewish survivors. The Kielce pogrom became the central event in the narrative of postwar antisemitism in Poland. Polish scholars like Kersten and Szaynok suggested that the proximity in time between the referendum and the pogrom was not accidental.⁶⁴ They speculated that the power center may have been interested in inciting anti-Jewish violence to divert international attention from the falsification of the referendum results. More recently, Jan T. Gross rejected this interpretation as purely circumstantial and of limited value to the understanding of the social dynamics at the root of the pogrom.⁶⁵ Due to a lack of sufficient evidence, the question of whether there was governmental “provocation” behind the Kielce pogrom must remain open. Yet, it is fair to say that the referendum campaign and the atmosphere

⁶³ Kersten, *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943-1948*, 282.

⁶⁴ Krystyna Kersten, "Pogrom Kielecki: Znaki Zapytania," in *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, ed. Krystyna Kersten (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 Lipca 1946* (Warszawa: Bellona, 1992).

⁶⁵ Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

of heightened anxiety, fear, and anti-communist (thus anti-Jewish) anger made the pogrom more likely.

The referendum also made it clear that the great majority of the population opposed the current administration and that only repression and falsification could keep the Communists in power. A fair ballot box was no longer an option. Yet, Mikołajczyk remained determined to continue the political and legal fight. The referendum seemed to have proved his point that the PSL would certainly win the elections. The Communists, however, resolved to eliminate the PSL before the elections of January 1947. The election campaign was accompanied by scenes of brutal intimidation and repression, aiming to instill fear in society. Coercion became the primary method of the Communists and their allies. The PSL became the primary target of intimidation, raids on its headquarters, and arrests of its members.⁶⁶ In such atmosphere, the elections on January 19, 1947, became a farce which left Mikołajczyk and the PSL no illusion about a fair vote or hope of victory. According to the official results, the Democratic Bloc won eighty percent of the total vote while the PSL managed to secure only ten percent.⁶⁷ In the newly elected parliament, the communists took 394 seats while the PSL won twenty-eight seats.

The final defeat of the PSL and the general apathy in society created the circumstances in which the Communists could seriously consider a complete takeover of power. In February 1947, the parliament elected as president of the Polish Republic Bolesław Bierut, a devoted Soviet-style communist. Józef Cyrankiewicz – a trusted socialist – became prime minister in the newly formed government. On February 19, the

⁶⁶ Mikołajczyk, *The Rape of Poland: Pattern of Soviet Aggression*; Paczkowski, *Stanisław Mikołajczyk czyli kłeska realisty: Zarys biografii politycznej*.

⁶⁷ According to “real” results, the PSL secured about fifty percent of votes. See Andrzej Paczkowski, *Od sfalszowanego zwycięstwa do prawdziwej klęski: Szkice do portretu PRL* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999).

parliament approved changes in the March Constitution from 1921, which now functioned until 1952 when the Stalinist law was fully introduced. Although guerilla warfare continued in the forests and political resistance was not entirely muted, it became clear that only another world war would change the course of events in Poland. Governmental agencies and the secret police subjected Mikołajczyk and his followers to brutal intimidation. In October 1947, having been informed about his planned arrest, Mikołajczyk escaped from Poland and went into exile in Great Britain and then in the United States. Mikołajczyk's escape and the destruction of the PSL marked the end of legal resistance in Poland.

Meanwhile, the sovietization process – adoption of Soviet-like institutions, laws, customs, traditions, and the way of life, both on a national and local level – was only partially introduced and did not take effect on a large scale until the early 1950s. In the late 1940s, the Polish Communists still believed (as the Czechoslovak Communists did) in a national road to socialism. But, in contrast to their counterparts in other countries, in Poland, the Communists avoided confrontation with the small and middle peasantry by abandoning the collectivization of farming. Also, the Catholic Church enjoyed relative peace. Although the Communist Party treated the Catholic hierarchy cautiously and, by the end of 1947, had increased its attacks on the clergy, the church maintained its property as well as the right to teach religion in the schools until the early 1950s.

The year 1948 brought the final solidification of Communist power all over Eastern Europe. Mergers of the Socialist with the Communist parties – which usually marked the final stage of the full takeover of power – took place in Romania in February, and in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in June 1948. In Poland, the Socialists (PPS)

surrendered under pressure from the Communists in the beginning of the year. During the following purges, almost 82,000 PPS members were expelled from the party, including many outstanding activists like Bolesław Drobner in Kraków. At the Unification Congress in December 1948, the Communists announced a union with the PPS and the Jewish Socialists, and the creation of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR). The new political body dedicated itself to Marxist-Leninist principles and was to retain a power monopoly for the next forty years. The first secretary general of the PZPR, Bolesław Bierut, was also the president of Poland, thus aligning the interests of the Party with the interests of the state.

Slovakia

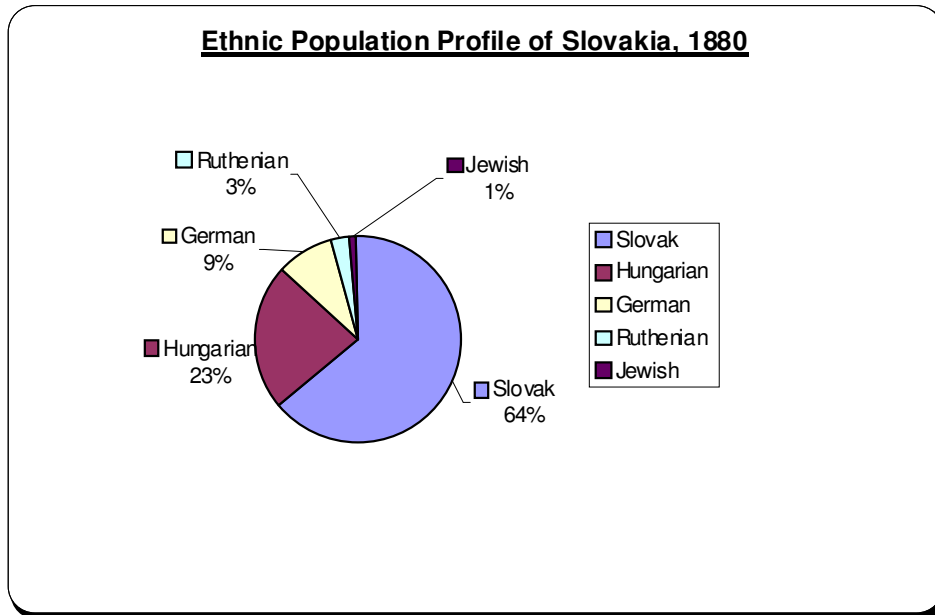
Slovakia did not have independent statehood until the twentieth century. The only autonomous Slovak polity can be traced to the ninth century – the Principality of Nitra in the Great Moravian Empire. After the collapse of the Moravian Empire in the early tenth century, Slovakia became a part of the Kingdom of Hungary and remained a part of the Hungarian territory until the end of the First World War in 1918. When the Hungarian Kingdom was ruled by the Habsburg dynasty, Bratislava became an important political center. Slovakia's political standing deteriorated in 1867 when the Austrian Monarchy and the Kingdom of Hungary signed the Compromise (*Ausgleich*). By granting Magyars status equal to the Austrian government based in Vienna, the Compromise undermined the Slovak position of power. While the Slovaks had never been politically equal to Magyars, now the discrepancy was much more marked. A deterioration of Magyar-Slovak relations became inevitable.

As in any national struggle, the main points of contention were education and language. In 1867, when the Habsburgs made Magyar an official language, the Slovaks were left with little leverage to oppose the pressures of magyarization. Before 1867, as Owen V. Johnson pointed out, Slovak as a cultural and national language grew slowly but steadily, culminating in the founding of three Slovak high schools and *Matica slovenská* in the 1860s.⁶⁸ After the *Ausgleich*, Hungarian authorities closed these institutions, eliminated Slovak from all schools, and introduced Hungarian as the compulsory language of education. Despite these efforts, magyarization policies, which were imposed with intensity on the Slovak-Hungarian borders, turned out to be only partially successful. Many Slovak graduates ended up as “unfinished Magyars” with fluent Slovak and resentment against Hungarians.⁶⁹ What the cultural anti-Slovak policy did succeed in was to exacerbate long-lasting Slovak-Hungarian tensions over Magyar political dominance. Also, paradoxically, the magyarization efforts became an incentive for both Slovak intellectual circles and the Hungarian government to publish more in the Slovak language. Since most of the existing Slovak publications (journals) had a liberal stance, the government became interested in using the Slovak language as a vehicle for disseminating conservative ideas. Consequently, before World War I, Slovak journalism blossomed and the number of periodicals grew steadily every year.⁷⁰ In short, in the Slovak-Hungarian struggle both sides had goals to pursue: the Hungarian authorities fought to enforce political and cultural domination over the Slovak region while the Slovak intelligentsia attempted to build a nation based on national language and national

⁶⁸ *Matica Slovenská* in Martin was a precursor of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Today, *Matica* is one of the major cultural and scientific institutions in Slovakia. Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938: Education and the Making of a Nation*, (New York: Boulder and Columbia University Press, 1985), 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.



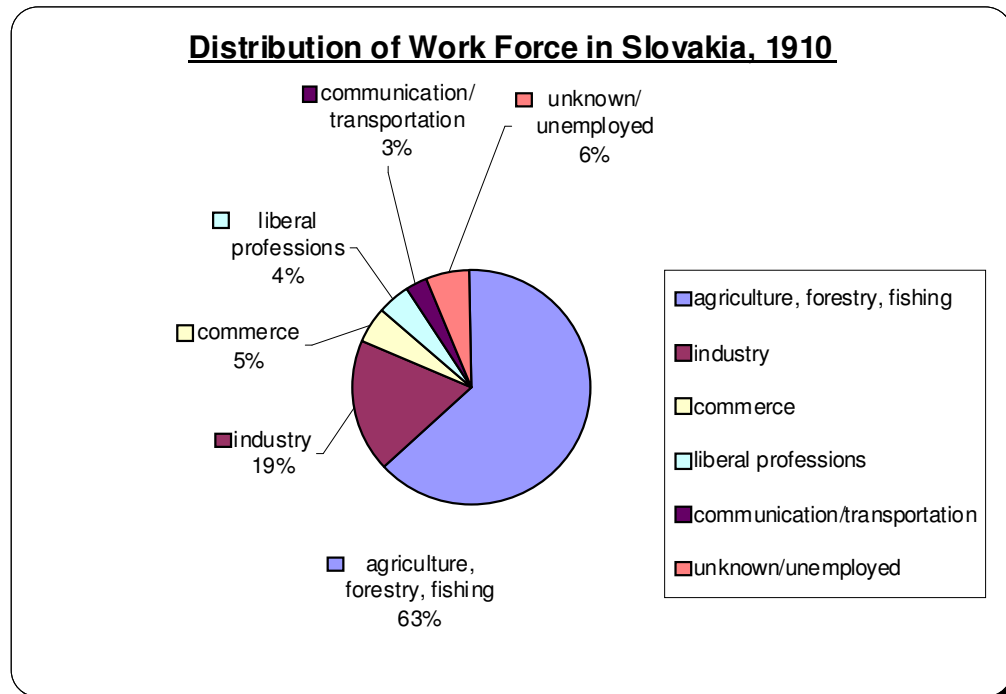
education. The Hungarians succeeded in the short run, holding on to their dominance until World War I; the Slovaks succeeded in the long run by creating a Slovak nation. Slovak Jews were the losers alone.

In 1880, according to the Hungarian census, in Slovakia, only one percent of the population was Jewish, while sixty-three percent was Slovak, twenty-three percent Hungarian, nine percent German, and almost three percent Ruthenian.⁷¹ Magyars and Germans resided in towns and a few cities. For example, in Bratislava, sixty-five percent of the population was German, more than fifteen percent Hungarian, another fifteen percent Slovak, and three percent of the classified as “others” (this category included Jews).⁷² Slovaks were by and large a rural population.

According to the 1910 census, 62.6 percent of the Slovak population worked in agriculture, forestry, and fishing, 18.4 percent in industry, 3.2 percent in communication

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.



and transportation, 4.8 percent in commerce, and 4.4 percent in liberal professions.⁷³ This occupational and residential pattern, in which Slovaks were a rural population and Germans and Magyars the urban class, not only reflected actual social divisions in Slovakia but also set the tone for discourse on minorities and their place in Slovak society. When, in the nineteenth century, the Slovak intelligentsia attempted to define Slovaks in new, national terms, one of the first clichés they attacked was the notion that Slovaks were “natural” peasants and thus incapable of self-determination as a nation. Hence, the struggle against Magyars, Jews, and Germans – urban populations – became a part of the Slovak nation building. Antisemitism and antimagyarism were the most visible manifestations of the process.

Although, according to the census, the Jewish population was small – one to three percent – in fact the number of Jews was greater. The reason for this was that Hungarian Jews in Slovakia tended to identify themselves as Hungarians or Hungarian language

⁷³ Ibid., 28.

speakers, not as Jews. In Johnson's opinion, prior to 1918 "the Jew usually identified himself as a German, or to an increasingly greater degree, a Hungarian."⁷⁴ For example, in 1910, of 140,000 Jews in Slovakia – "Jews" being defined as people who professed the Jewish faith – 76,000 entered Magyar as their nationality, 58,000 German, 5,000 Czech or Slovak, 270 Ruthenian, and 320 other nationalities. These numbers changed gradually in the interwar period as more and more Jews spoke Slovak or Czech instead of Magyar or German. Nevertheless, by 1918, the majority of the Slovak middle and upper class consisted of Magyars or Magyar speaking Jews. In the censuses conducted in interwar Czechoslovakia, language was listed as the criterion for determination of ethnicity. In the late 1920s, debates started on what "Jewishness" meant and on the role of language as a marker of nationality. In the end, the government ruled that "Jews may list their nationality as Jewish (without regard to mother tongue)."⁷⁵ In the census of 1930, the decline in the number of Magyars indicated that more Jews identified themselves as Jewish or Slovak instead of Magyar. Yet, the prevailing determination of ethnicity based on mother tongue and the classification of many Slovak Jews as Magyars in interwar Czechoslovakia proved critical for the history of Jews after the Second World War.

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918 ended almost 300 years of Habsburg and Hungarian domination of Slovakia. In October 1918, the Czech bureaucracy replaced the Habsburg authority, marking the beginning of the Czechoslovak Republic. The idea of the Czechoslovak or Czecho-Slovak state was an intellectual product of the beginning of the twentieth century and the First World War. One of the greatest proponents of czechoslovakism – the ideology claiming that Czechs and Slovaks

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, "The Jewish Party," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971).

were one Czechoslovak nation – was Tomáš Masaryk, the future president of Czechoslovakia. Partly as a result of Masaryk's political activity, in May 1918 Czech and Slovak exile organizations signed the Pittsburgh Declaration in favor of a new Czechoslovak state – a union of the two nations. In October that year, the National Council proclaimed itself the provisional government of the Czechoslovak Republic. By the end of the month, the Czech police entered Slovakia to create a Czech presence there. On October 30, in Turčanský Svätý Martin, a group of pro-Czechoslovak Slovak intellectuals declared Slovakia's secession from Hungary and unification with the Czechoslovak Republic. Slovakia retained restricted autonomy within the federation.

Like every minority, Slovakia's Jews – 2.3 percent of the total but ten percent of Bratislava's population – had to adjust to the terms of the newly created federation.⁷⁶ As early as 1918, Slovak Jews began to organize themselves politically by setting up the central Jewish council in Piešťany as well as a chain of local committees around the country. During the Congress of the Jewish National Council in Prague (January 1919), the Czech and Slovak Jewish leaders laid the foundation for the formation of the Jewish Party of Czechoslovakia (Židovská strana). However, despite enthusiasm, Czech and Slovak Jews had no political leverage during the first few years of the republic. The Jewish Party did not win any seats in the parliament elections of 1920. Similar to post-WWI Poland, antisemitism became a public concern. In October 1920 anti-Jewish riots occurred in western Slovakia; in Piešťany, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Žilina, and elsewhere. The pogroms must have shaken the community, for the chairman of the Jewish Party requested President Masaryk himself to intervene.

⁷⁶ According to the census of 1921 on religious affiliation, 4.5 percent of residents of Slovakia professed Judaism. See Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938: Education and the Making of a Nation, East European Monographs* (New York: Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985).

Times changed for Jewish politics in 1923 when the Jewish Party obtained seven seats (out of 201) in municipal elections. Although the foundation of the first fascist paramilitary organization in Slovakia, the Home Defense (Rodobrana), diminished this success, the mid 1920s still marked the beginning of political stability and economic prosperity for the Czechoslovak Republic and the Jewish minority.⁷⁷ The prosperity enhanced Jewish social, political, and cultural life until the Great Depression in 1929. In the 1930s, economic hardship and the radicalization of political life slowed, if not halted, the advance in the minorities' status in Slovakia. Antisemitic rhetoric again came to the fore as a part of public discourse. Particularly vocal on "the Jewish question" was the extremist Hlinka Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana, HSLS).⁷⁸ In 1935, the signing of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty prompted the HSLS to invoke the slogan of "Judeo-Bolshevism," alleging a Jewish-communist threat. In general, HSLS's antisemitism intensified proportionally to the rise of the Nazis in Germany during the 1930s. Although its leader, Andriej Hlinka, declared that "...the Slovak People's Party was not inimical to the Jews, but 'only struggles against those who aim to undermine that world upon which the Jewish faith, too, rests,'" the HSLS's actions belied his words.⁷⁹ Participation of the HSLS's Youth Movement in anti-Jewish demonstrations in Bratislava in April 1936 and HSLS' subsequent proposals to transfer Slovak and Subcarpathian

⁷⁷ Rodobrana was a predecessor of the Hlinka Guard that had emerged in 1938 to protect the rallies of the Slovak People's Party.

⁷⁸ The Slovak People's Party (Slovenská ľudová strana, SLS) was founded in 1913. In 1925, the party was renamed after its leader, Andriej Hlinka – The Hlinka Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana, HSLS).

⁷⁹ Livia Rothkirchen, "Slovakia: 1918-1938," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America).

Jews to Birobidzhan were the most visible manifestations of the Hlinka Party's political stand.⁸⁰

While the events of 1936 were alarming, what came later directly led to the end of the Czechoslovak state. When the Nazis were just forty kilometers from Bratislava after the annexation of Austria, they made territorial demands on the Czechoslovak government concerning the western regions (Sudetenland), which were densely populated by Germans. After concerted British and French political pressure to accept Hitler's demands, Czechoslovakia finally consented. In September 1938, President Beneš signed the Munich Agreement, which ceded Sudetenland to Nazi Germany. After the humiliation of the Munich deal, President Beneš resigned and went into exile, soon replaced by Emil Hácha. As a consequence of this political crisis, a new Slovak government was formed which declared autonomy and reinstated a hyphen in the republic's name.⁸¹ On November 2, 1938, in the Vienna Arbitration, Hungary – with Hitler's support – coerced Czecho-Slovakia to surrender the territories in southern Slovakia and southern Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Czechoslovakia retained the western Slovak towns of Bratislava and Nitra, while Hungary recovered the most disputed Slovak towns (populated in more than fifty percent by Hungarians): Košice, Uzhgorod, and Mukachevo. In the Arbitration, Slovakia lost twenty-one percent of its territory, twenty percent of its industry, and over thirty percent of its arable land. Slovakia's sense of humiliation was complete.

During the coming years, the Vienna Arbitration became a central bone of contention between Slovakia and Hungary. Uncertainty, confusion, and a sense of

⁸⁰ Protests against performance of the movie "*Golem*."

⁸¹ New Czecho-Slovakia consisted of the Federation of the Czech lands, autonomous Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

betrayal – all fed Slovak hatred against the Magyars. This anger, however, was difficult to express since both countries were allied with the Third Reich. To channel their enmity, many Slovaks displaced their resentment to another group – Jews. In the popular imagination, Slovak Jews were seen as Magyars in the same way that Polish Jews were seen as Soviet Bolsheviks. Magyar-speaking Jews especially turned into a target of anti-Magyar sentiment in Slovakia. Slovaks blamed them for territorial losses and for all real and imagined misfortunes bestowed by Hungary on the country. In this way, anti-magyarism and antisemitism dovetailed allowing a transfer of one national antagonism to another.

As Berlin's grip over Slovakia tightened and the HSLŠ gained almost exclusive power, the situation of Jews worsened. During one of the first meetings of the new Slovak government with Nazi representatives in October 1938, the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Ferdinand Ďurčanský declared that the new Slovak leaders would treat the "Jewish problem" in Slovakia in a manner similar to that in Germany.⁸² Considering the total victory of the HSLŠ in the elections in December 1938, Ďurčanský's words had to be taken seriously. The newly established HSLŠ's militia, the Hlinka Guard (Hlinkova Garda, HG), and the police squadrons of the ethnic Germans attacked Jews on a regular basis,

Anti-Jewish propaganda, previously disguised under nationalistic and demagogic slogans (although basically of economic nature), now openly demanded that property "stolen" by the Jews be returned to the people. Many Slovaks saw in these slogans an easy avenue towards satisfying their greed.⁸³

⁸² Rothkirchen, "Slovakia: 1918-1938."

⁸³ Ibid., 114.

Anti-Jewish violence became worse in 1939.⁸⁴ The Hungarian-born Jews were forced out of Slovakia to Hungary and when Hungarians did not admit them, “several hundred families, including small children, had to remain for weeks on the borderline between the two countries, inadequately clothed and without food.”⁸⁵

On March 13, 1939, Hitler summoned Josef Tiso and told him to declare Slovak independence. On the next day, March 14, the Slovak Parliament declared the independent Slovak State, of which Josef Tiso became president. On March 15, German troops proceeded toward Prague to proclaim the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Czecho-Slovakia was officially dead. Five months later, on September 1, the Second World War broke out. Although, to a great extent, Slovakia turned into a puppet state, it retained some autonomy. Its handling of “the Jewish question” can serve as the best example of this ambiguous position.

In 1940, the Slovak government implemented the first anti-Jewish laws: Jews and Gypsies were gradually excluded from schools, the army, industry, commerce, and state institutions. *Aryanization* – the expropriation of Jewish property – was in full swing causing staggering impoverishment of the Jews. In early 1942, the Slovak ministry of the interior started to set up labor camps in Sereď, Nováky, and Vyhne Spa, among others.⁸⁶ On March 25 of the same year, the deportations of Slovak Jews to Auschwitz began. Later that year more deportations were organized. By October 1942, 57,000 people were

⁸⁴ Eduard Nižňanský, *Židovská Komunita na Slovensku Medzi Československou Parlamentnou Demokraciou a Slovenským Štátom v Stredoeurópskom Kontexte* (Prešov: Universum, 1999).

⁸⁵ Rothkirchen, "Slovakia: 1918-1938.", 116.

⁸⁶ Eduard Nižňanský, Igor Baka, and Ivan Kamenec, ed., *Židovské Pracovné Tábory a Strediská na Slovensku 1938-1944, Holokaust na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Simecku. Židovská Náboženská Obec Bratislava, 2004).

deported, more than half of the total Jewish population of Slovakia.⁸⁷ Slovak historian Ivan Kamenec summarized his analysis of the Slovak deportations as follows,

It is necessary to point at one important and surprisingly little known fact: the Slovak state was the only country in Europe, not directly occupied by Nazi Germany, which had deportations of Jewish citizens through their own power and administrative means and forces. Nothing can be changed by the fact of the satellite position of the Slovak state in relation to Germany and Nazi pressures on the “solution of the Jewish issue.”⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Slovakia was also the only country that discontinued the deportations in fall 1942 and did not reactivate them despite constant Nazi pressures to do so. Why that happened is still not clear. Was the Slovak regime more “rational” than the Nazi regime? Did they realize that after deporting impoverished Jews, further deportations made no “practical” sense? The fact remained that thousands of Slovak Jews were spared and lived through the Slovak national uprising – the final act of the war in Slovakia.

The Slovak uprising in the summer and fall of 1944 marked the final crisis of the Slovak fascist regime.⁸⁹ Preparations for military action had started already in the fall of 1943 when the Protestants, led by Jan Ursíny and Jozef Lettrich, joined forces with the Communists against the fascist government. In December 1943, both groups jointly established the Slovak National Council (Slovenská národná rada, SNR), which became

⁸⁷ Ivan Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991); Ladislav Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945* (Bratislava: Print-Servis, 1992); Ivan Kamenec, "The Deportation of Jewish Citizens from Slovakia in 1942," in *The Tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia 1938-1945: Slovakia and the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question"*, ed. Waclaw Długoborski (Oświęcim, Banská Bystrica: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2002), 130; Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku: Prezident, Pláda, Snem SR a Štátna Rada o Židovskej Otázke 1939-1945* (Zvolen: Klemo, 2003).

⁸⁸ Kamenec, "The Deportation of Jewish Citizens from Slovakia in 1942," 136.

⁸⁹ Gustáv Husák, *Svedectvo o Slovenskom Národnom Povstaní* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Politickej Literatúry, 1964); Vilém Prečan, ed., *Slovenské Národné Povstanie: Dokumenty* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Politickej Literatúry, 1965); *The Slovak National Uprising and the Czechoslovak Revolution (1944-1948)*, (Bratislava: Veda, 1985); Karol Kállay and Vladimír Minác, *Memories of the Slovak National Uprising* (Bratislava: NVK International, 1994).

the highest legislative and executive power in the Slovak resistance movement. On August 29, 1944, the SNR launched the armed insurrection from Banská Bystrica (central Slovakia). Soon, partisan units took control of central Slovakia and mobilized about 80,000 men.⁹⁰ Although in October 1944, the uprising suffered defeat, some units continued guerilla action until liberation in April 1945, when the Slovak fascist regime was eventually overthrown.

The uprising demonstrated the growing support for the Communists and their capacity to rally people. Meanwhile, the Kremlin, with the help of the Red Army's presence, exerted more and more pressure on the political situation. In late 1944, despite the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of friendship (December 1943), Stalin annexed Subcarpathian Ukraine. After its loss, President Beneš, still in exile at the time, realized that concessions toward Stalin were inescapable. To retain influence over Czechoslovak political developments, the president granted formal approval for the formation of a new government in Prague. Through this act, Beneš rendered impossible the return of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile but ensured that the new administration in Prague would be obliged to respect his authority. In March 1945, Czech and Slovak representatives were invited to Moscow to negotiate composition of a new administration. After a week of heated discussions, the participants reached the final agreement, the Košice Program, which set the political parameters for a reestablished Czechoslovak Republic.⁹¹

⁹⁰ M. R. Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1948, Soviet and East European Studies* (New York, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁹¹ The National Front approved of the Program on April 5, 1945, in Košice.

The Košice Program established principles for the new republic, its foreign policy and interior affairs.⁹² The document's authors stressed the ideal of a people's democracy and friendship with the USSR as the principle doctrines of the new state. The program expressed gratitude and admiration for the Red Army, hailing its structure and efficiency and presenting it as a model for the reorganized Czechoslovak military. In foreign policy, it gave priority to a friendly and close relationship with the Soviet Union in military, political, economic, and cultural spheres. Good relationships with other countries of the region, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, were also emphasized. It encouraged private enterprise but, at the same time, reinforced state control over the economy. Furthermore, the Košice Program made clear a need to confiscate property and funds that had belonged to "citizens of enemy states, especially Germany and Hungary; German and Hungarian citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic who were active in helping to destroy and occupy Czechoslovakia."⁹³ The program also included an article on setting up people's retribution courts to judge war traitors and collaborators.⁹⁴ Overall, "Košice" envisioned the Czechoslovak Republic as a socialist state characterized by dependency on the Soviet Union in foreign affairs, retribution against "enemies," and growing state intervention in the economy.

Soon after the Moscow negotiations, the National Front – the coordinating institution of all Czech and Slovak anti-fascist parties – formed a central administration. In the new Prague government (also known as *Košická vláda* – the Košice government),

⁹² Michal Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*, (Bratislava: Archa, 1993).

⁹³ *Programme československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích, tzv. Košický vládní programme*, in http://www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945_kosvlpr.htm (accessed June 2, 2008).

⁹⁴ Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Post-War Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

out of twenty-six ministers, thirteen were pro-communist, twelve non-communist, and one neutral.⁹⁵ Klement Gottwald of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ) became the prime minister. The Communists controlled the politically vital ministries of interior, defense, and information, in addition to the two less critical departments of agriculture and education. Not ready for elections and not willing to rally anti-communist sentiment around Beneš, the Communists stopped short of the takeover despite their strong political position. They considered the political system, regulated by the Košice Program, an optimal environment to implement revolutionary measures. In June 1945, Klement Gottwald, Zdeněk Fierlinger (ČSS), and Petr Zenkl (ČNS) signed the so-called “social advance agreement” forming the basis for a new socialist coalition.⁹⁶ The signatories correctly expected that the projected measures – land reform, nationalization, and the deprivation of Germans and Magyars of citizenship – would boost their popularity and garner the support of the majority of the population.

The Košice Program regulated the Czech and Slovak coexistence in the republic. Although there was no mention of a federation in the program, the National Front agreed that Czechs and Slovaks were two separate nations sharing one state and enjoying rights to separate governmental structures.

[The government] will end all old conflicts and, while recognizing Slovaks as an independent nation, the government will, from its first steps, make everything so

⁹⁵ There were three Czech Communists from the Czechoslovak Communist Party (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ), three members of the Slovak Communist Party (Komunistická strana Slovenska, KSS), politicians from the Czech Social Democratic Party (Česka sociáldemokratická strana, ČSS), Czech National Socialist Party (Česka národnosocialistická strana, ČNS), People’s Party (Lidová strana, LS), and Democratic Party (Demokratická strana, DS). The majority of so-called non-party experts in the government were admitted or covert communists. A neutral minister was Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Masaryk, son of Tomáš Masaryk. Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

that in the Czechoslovak conditions the principle of “equal to equal” would be realized and the brotherhood between both nations effectively applied.⁹⁷

The Košice Program obliged the Prague central government to recognize the legal position of the Slovak national administration, the Slovak National Council (SNR) and the Board of Commissioners. The SNR became the primary legislative and executive institution of Slovakia after the war.⁹⁸ Among its responsibilities was the appointment of the Board of Commissioners (Zbor poverenikov), which functioned as SNR’s executive organ.⁹⁹

While the Košice Program established a solid ground for recognition of the autonomy of the Slovak institutions, it did not resolve the prerogatives of the Slovak legislature and executive vis-à-vis their central counterparts in Prague. Ambiguity in this matter gave rise to a new chapter of political tensions between the SNR and the Prague administration. In April 1945, as a result of negotiations, the SNR and the central government agreed that, until the central legislature was elected, presidential decrees would have legislative power only in those Slovak matters that were relevant to the entire state.¹⁰⁰ Presidential decrees could not be applied in Slovakia without prior consent and approval from the SNR.¹⁰¹ This arrangement confirmed the equality of Slovakia in the

⁹⁷ *Programme československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích, tzv. Košický vládní programme*, in http://www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945_kosvlpr.htm (accessed June 2, 2008).

⁹⁸ From 1945 until 1948, the chairman of the SNR was Jozef Lettrich (Demokratická Strana, DS).

⁹⁹ Karol Šmidke (KSS) and, from 1946, Gustáv Husák (KSS) were chairmen of the Board of Commissioners. The Board consisted of ten to twelve members.

¹⁰⁰ Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*.

¹⁰¹ Attempts to resolve this apparent imbalance of power defined Czech-Slovak political relations until 1946. The Czech government and the SNR’s leadership met repeatedly in Prague to negotiate their differences. One of the first meetings to negotiate the limits of the central government’s power in both parts of the republic took place at the end of May 1945. The two most controversial issues – the legislative power of presidential decrees in Slovakia and the prerogatives of the Board of Commissioners – stood at the core of the negotiations. The outcome of the talks was the First Prague Agreement (*Prvá pražská dohoda*) signed by the Prague government and the leaders of the SNR on June 2, 1945. The accord confirmed the extensive legislative and executive prerogatives of the SNR and the Board of

Czechoslovak hierarchy of power and influence and ensured that Slovak autonomy was realized in practice until the elections to the legislature in May 1946. This had critical consequences for Slovak Jews. Since the SNR had the power not to implement any presidential decree, it would reject decrees favorable to Jewish interests. For example, Jewish restitution was slowed in Slovakia due to this political arrangement between Prague and Bratislava.

Meanwhile, ordinary Czechs and Slovaks celebrated the end of the war.

Immediately after the German withdrawal, euphoria and joy were common in the Czech lands. The population was happy, cheered and embraced one another for days on end.

People turned to the future with hope. As Heda Margolius Kovály recalled in her memoir, “We tried to bury it [the war] quickly, the earth settled over it, and we turned our backs on it impatiently. After all, our real life was now beginning and what to make of it was up to us.”¹⁰² In Slovakia too, people welcomed the end of the war with joy and relief.

However, Slovaks remained unsure about their future; more than their Czech neighbors.

According to Michal Barnovský, three major factors shaped Slovak attitudes after the war. First, the Slovak national uprising, as opposed to the Czech battles, did not end the

Commissioners. The Board maintained its dual function as an executive body within the SNR and an executioner of central government rulings in matters of importance for the whole republic. Executive power in the Czech lands remained with the Prague government. Until May 1946, the Provisional National Parliament (Dočasné národné zhromaždenie, DNZ), elected on October 28, 1945, was legislative power in the Czech lands while the SNR was the legislature in Slovakia. In April 1946, representatives of Prague and Bratislava met again to renegotiate mutual prerogatives. The participants signed the Second Prague Agreement (*Druhá pražská dohoda*), which limited Slovak power to anoint university professors, judges, and civil servants. The accords also coordinated the responsibilities of the Slovak and Prague executive; both had to present and discuss their proposals with their counterparts before submitting them to president or prime minister. On June 27, 1946, the National Front and the SNR signed the Third Prague Agreement (*Tretia pražská dohoda*), which further limited legislative and executive power of the Slovak representatives, and thus the Slovak autonomy. The Agreement enabled Prague to exert firm control over the legislative and executive proceedings of the SNR and the Board of Commissioners. None of Slovak legal proposals could be implemented without the formal consent of the Prague government.

¹⁰² Heda Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: a Life in Prague 1941-1968* (Cambridge: Plunkett Lake Press, 1986), 45.

war.¹⁰³ Instead, the terror continued after the uprising, leaving hundreds of victims behind. Second, the entire process of liberating Slovakia lasted almost nine months; much longer than in the Czech lands. In the context of the ongoing massacres, announcement of yet another draft meant a great strain on the nation. Third, the Slovak war losses doubled the Czech losses. Destruction of central Slovakia, for example, was extensive, whereas the Czech lands escaped major material damage during the war. All these aspects ultimately led to the general exhaustion of the population. Barnovský argued that in such conditions short-lived enthusiasm was hardly surprising. Additionally, and not insignificantly, the activity of the Soviet secret police in Slovakia in the final months of the war added to the general misery, “While Prague welcomed the Red Army with open arms and celebrated the victory, in Slovakia the relation toward the liberators was tarnished by accusations against NKVD members who had illegally sent thousands of people to the Soviet gulag.”¹⁰⁴

Czechs and Slovaks were also divided about the future. Unlike Czechs, Slovaks did not enthusiastically welcome the reestablishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. In a relatively short period of time, Slovaks had experienced two major upheavals that enflamed Slovak nationalism – the establishment of the autonomous Slovak State (March 1939) and the national uprising (August 1944). Even though the Slovak State was a fascist regime, it fulfilled the nationalistic longings of a significant section of the Slovak population. Unsurprisingly, while Slovak nationalism was rising the concept of czechoslovakism was dying. The recreation of Czechoslovakia after the war engendered a sense of loss rather than of achievement since many Slovaks still remembered prewar

¹⁰³ Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*.

¹⁰⁴ My translation. *Ibid.*, 38.

Prague centralism and the Czech superiority it conveyed. Dissatisfaction with the resurrection of the Czechoslovak Republic added to the general disappointment and fuelled apprehension about the future in Slovakia. Obviously, the most frustrated Slovaks were those who benefited from the war (for example, *aryanizers*) and now were threatened to lose all the profits. Also, the combatants had an acute sense of injustice by not being honored appropriately with either symbolic medals or social benefits. The farmers were not satisfied either since the land reform did not bring any of the anticipated benefits. Obviously, the German and Magyar minorities had no reason to sing the praises of the new regime either.

The treatment of both minorities was a central issue in Slovak political life after the war. The Czechoslovak legislature made little or no distinction between Germans and Magyars in the matters of legal status and human rights.¹⁰⁵ The Košice Program envisioned equally strong measures against the two minorities. Schechtman quoted Czechoslovak Minister of State (in-exile) Hubert Ripka, who said in November 1944,

I am here speaking to our citizens who are of German (ethnic) nationality...but I should like to point out at the very outset that we take the same view of the question of the Magyar minority as well, which will be settled in accordance with the principles to be put into effect as regards the Germans in Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁶

In Košice, the National Front – applying a rule of collective guilt – agreed to strip the citizenship of, expropriate, and expel Germans and Hungarians who had moved to Czechoslovakia after the Munich agreement in September 1938. In May 1945, President Beneš publicly declared that, “the overwhelming majority of the Germans and Hungarians will have to leave our land. This is our final decision...Our people can no

¹⁰⁵ Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955*, 132.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

longer live in the same country with Germans and Hungarians.”¹⁰⁷ Between 1945 and 1947, the administration succeeded in expelling approximately 2.5 million Germans from Czechoslovakia.¹⁰⁸ After mass expulsions, about 200,000 Germans remained in the Czechoslovak Republic, of which 20,000 resided in Slovakia.

Among Slovaks, the German question was less pressing than among Czechs. Until the war, the Slovaks had not experienced German expansionist policies to the extent that the Czechs had. Therefore, after the war anti-German resentment in Slovakia had not reached the heights of Czech antipathy toward Germans. In addition, the lack of common borders, and thus relatively small migration, kept both nations at a safe distance. By and large, it was the Magyar question that caught Slovak attention.

Magyars and Slovaks were neighbors with a long and convoluted history of strained relations. The Vienna Arbitration of 1938 and the following Hungarian takeover of southern Slovakia dramatically exacerbated these already tense relations. Slovaks regarded the Hungarian occupation as a particularly vicious example of Magyar irredentism. Consequently, Magyars were seen as the primary enemy of the Slovak nation. Right after the war, Slovak political representatives considered retribution against Hungary as one of the most pressing issues of the day. In February 1945 the SNR formulated a stance toward Magyars. Hungarians who came to southern Slovakia during

¹⁰⁷ Kálmán Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948* (New York: Social Science Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1982). Also, see the text of the original speech in *Čas* (12 May 1945).

¹⁰⁸ On the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia in the years 1945-47, see Wilhelm Karl Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans* (Munich: University Press, 1953); Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955*; Tomáš Staněk, *Odsun Němců z Československa, 1945-1947* (Praha: Academia: Naše Vojsko, 1991); Piotr M. Majewski, *Edward Beneš i kwestia Niemiecka w Czechach* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2001); Ther and Siljak, ed., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*; Zdeněk Beneš and Václav Kural, ed., *Facing History: the Evolution of Czech-German Relations in the Czech Provinces, 1848-1948* (Prague: Gallery for the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, 2002), 210; Piotr Pykel, "The Expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia," in *The Expulsion of the 'German' Communities from Eastern Europe at the End of the Second World War*, ed. Steffen Prauser and Arfon Rees (Florence: European University Institute, 2004).

the occupation were supposed to leave the country. Those Magyars who were born in Slovakia or had immigrated before the occupation of 1938 could retain their Czechoslovak citizenship if they proved their loyalty to the Slovak nation, the Czechoslovak Republic, and democracy. The National Front reiterated these terms two months later in the Košice Program. The central government in Prague and the Slovak representatives also demanded that “truly democratic” Magyars should cleanse (*očistiť*) the Magyar minority of fascist, anti-Slovak, and magyarizing “elements.” The authorities expected the slovakized Magyars to become a part (*včleniť*) of Slovak national life.¹⁰⁹

The expulsion of Hungarians from Slovakia was never fully realized since the western powers demanded the process be stopped. Facing international condemnation, Slovakia attempted to solve the problem differently. It attempted an exchange of citizens with Hungary, removal of Hungarians to the Czech borderlands, and “reslovakization” of those who remained (in practice, aggressive assimilation).¹¹⁰ By mid-July 1945, the Prague government had made up a plan to conduct bilateral negotiations with Hungary to facilitate the exchange; Slovaks would be transferred to Slovakia while Hungarians would be moved to Hungary. On February 27, 1946, the *Agreement on Exchange of Population between Czechoslovakia and Hungary* was signed. Under the terms of the agreement, only Slovaks and Czechs residing in Hungary would have the right to opt for the resettlement while “Hungarians in Slovakia were to be drafted for resettlement

¹⁰⁹ Štefan Šutaj, *Maďarská Menšina na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948: Východiská a Prax Politiky k Maďarskej Menšine na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Veda, 1993), 39.

¹¹⁰ See Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955*; Juraj Zvara, *Maďarská Menšina na Slovensku po Roku 1945* (Bratislava: Epoque, 1969); Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948*; Štefan Šutaj, *Reslovakizácia: Zmena Národnosti Časti Obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. Svetovej Vojne* (Košice: Spoločenskovedný Ústav SAV, 1991); Štefan Šutaj, “*Akcia Juh*” - *Odsun Maďarov zo Slovenska do Ciech v Roku 1949: Stúdia* (Praha: Ústav pro Soudobé Dejiny AV CR, 1993); Šutaj, *Maďarská Menšina na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948: Východiská a Prax Politiky k Maďarskej Menšine na Slovensku*.

regardless of whether or not the persons affected wished to be transferred.”¹¹¹ The number of the expelled Hungarians was to balance the number of the “resettled” Slovaks. The discrepancy in numbers (120,000 Slovaks in Hungary vis-à-vis 650,000 Hungarians in Slovakia) inevitably led to conflicts over the execution of the agreement. Eventually, approximately 90,000 Slovaks registered for the transfer, giving the Czechoslovak government a free hand to expel an equal number of Hungarians (in addition to war criminals and others). Eventually, by the end of 1947, a total of 31,000 Magyars left Slovakia and approximately 33,000 Slovaks left Hungary.

Facing the failure of the population exchange, the Czechoslovak government ordered the scattering of the remaining Magyars across Czechoslovakia, most notably to Sudetenland in the west of the country. The government carried out the dispersal under the provisions of presidential decree no. 88/1945 on the *Mobilization of Manpower*.¹¹² Ludvík Němec wrote that “this operation was, of course, designed to camouflage the compulsory internal resettlement for in some cases family members as well as workers were evacuated from their homes by force and the promise of receiving property as compensation in their new homes.”¹¹³ As a result of the operation, by the end of the spring of 1948, approximately 68,000 Magyars left the country, preferring escape to Hungary than the forced resettlement to the Czech lands.

In the opinion of Kalman Janics, a Hungarian born in Slovakia, reslovakization was yet another policy of the Czechoslovak government to reduce the number of

¹¹¹ Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955*, 140.

¹¹² Štefan Šutaj, Peter Mosný, and Milan Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojujnom Slovensku* (Bratislava: Veda, 2002), 132. Text of the decree in Ludvík Němec, "Solution of the Minorities Problem," in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948*, ed. Victor S Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹¹³ Němec, "Solution of the Minorities Problem."

Hungarians in the country by forced assimilation, having failed to do so through population exchange,

“Re-slovakization” stood for a return to Slovak nationality of those who had been Slovaks at one time but, in the ethnic stirrings of the Carpathian Basin, either their ancestors or themselves had become Hungarian. Re-slovakization was supposed to have been voluntary, and even a matter of privilege. However, considering the methods employed it would be more accurate to describe it as forced assimilation. The Hungarian citizen was confronted with the choice: “Sign, or your life!” Signing meant civil rights, security, retention of belongings. Not signing meant homelessness, danger of persecution, economic bankruptcy.¹¹⁴

Slovak historian Štefan Šutaj, on the other hand, interpreted it as a process by which the Czechoslovak government gave magyarized Slovaks the opportunity to “return” to their nationality.¹¹⁵ As Chairman of the Central Commission for Reslovakization (Ústredná reslovakizačná komisia v Bratislave) Mikuláš Huba stated at the opening session on July 1, 1946, “The Czechoslovak government gives to magyarized Slovaks (*pomaďarčeným Slovákom*) an opportunity to return voluntarily to the Slovak nation. The Commission expects this to be a hard but fulfilling duty.”¹¹⁶ The Košice Program and presidential decree no. 33/1945 harmed those Slovaks who had become “victims” of magyarization long before the war. Šutaj argued that, at least originally, reslovakization was supposed to correct this situation. Ultimately, however, reslovakization became enforced slovakization – “an effort to fundamentally transform the national composition of

¹¹⁴ Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948*, 136-37.

¹¹⁵ Šutaj, *Reslovakizácia: Zmena Národnosti Časti Obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. Svetovej Vojne*.

¹¹⁶ Minutes from the first meeting of the Central Commission for Reslovakization, 1 July 1946, Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, Slovak National Archives, Bratislava (Slovenský národný archív, hereafter cited as SNA).

southern Slovakia by means of change of nationality,” and thus an attempt to solve the Magyar question in Slovakia.¹¹⁷

Preparations for the campaign of reslovakization began in the spring of 1946, next to the population exchange program with Hungary. To initiate and implement the process, the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava established the Central Commission for Reslovakization.¹¹⁸ Before launching the process, the commissioners of internal affairs, education, and agriculture in Bratislava called upon teachers and clerks from district and city national committees, representatives of the Resettlement Bureau, and other members of the “politically and morally clean” intelligentsia (*inteligentné osoby politycky a mravne bezúhonné*) to organize and carry out the process.¹¹⁹

Reslovakization was not limited to the issuance of certificates. Since the commissioner of education in Bratislava and the Slovak League were aware that many “reslovakized” people could barely speak Slovak, they established more than 500 language classes and courses in Slovak literature and culture that were attended by about 34,000 people in southern Slovakia.¹²⁰ Similarly to the repolonization program, changes to the names of

¹¹⁷ Šutaj, *Reslovakizácia: Zmena Národnosti Časti Obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. Svetovej Vojne*.

¹¹⁸ The Commission consisted of the members of the Slovak League, the Foundation of National Renewal (Fond národnej obnovy), national security, head of the Resettlement Bureau (Osídľovací úrad), and employees of the statistics offices. In every district, a chief commissar for censuses (hlavný sčítací komisár) was directly responsible for reslovakization and represented his district to the Central Commission. He appointed a district commissar (okresný sčítací komisár), usually the head of the district national committee, who was responsible for establishing and managing local commissions handling reslovakization. Ibid., 12. Also see minutes from the first meeting of the Central Commission for Reslovakization, 1 July 1946, Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, SNA.

¹¹⁹ Minutes from the meeting of the representatives of the Board of Commissioners in Bratislava with the official representatives of the Resettlement Bureau in Bratislava, 1946, Povereníctvo vnútra (hereafter cited as PV) – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 490, SNA.

¹²⁰ Šutaj, *Reslovakizácia: Zmena Národnosti Časti Obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. Svetovej Vojne*, 21.

towns, villages, and streets were introduced. The “reslovakized” were also pushed to “slovakize” (*poslovenčiť*) their names.¹²¹

Despite these efforts, censuses from the 1950s and 1960s suggest that reslovakization was largely superficial and did not bring about the long-term ethnic transformation of southern Slovakia. In 1950, 355,000 persons declared Magyar nationality, ten years later the number rose to 519,000 and has remained stable until the present day. Those residents, who signed up for reslovakization, seem to have done so merely to protect their livelihood and residence in Slovakia, rarely treating the program as an actual means to “return to Slovakness.” Residents of southern Slovakia also continued to speak Magyar at home and on the street. The case of L. Tamáš who applied for cancellation of reslovakization in 1949 was not unique. In his letter to the administration, Tamáš wrote that “he was of Magyar nationality and had reslovakized only because he was promised equal rights with the rest of the citizens of Slovakia.”¹²²

None of these measures resolved Slovak-Hungarian tensions. On the contrary, the actions only further antagonized both peoples. No segment of the Slovak population was willing to oppose the anti-Magyar policies knowing that the government had already deprived the Magyar residents of their rights. The fight against anti-Magyar repressions seemed hopeless. Hence, Slovak Hungarians were left on their own with no legal or social instruments to protect their status. These circumstances caused an intense sense of victimization (*krivda*) among Hungarians as well as disappointment among Slovaks, who had expected a decisive solution to the Magyar question. This situation lasted until 1948 when the government finally restored the rights of the Magyars in Czechoslovakia.

¹²¹ Undated and unsigned document on reslovakization, “Poznamky” Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, SNA.

¹²² Šutaj, *Reslovakizácia: Zmena Národnosti Časti Obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. Svetovej Vojne*.

After a year of temporary political measures, the Czechoslovak government scheduled the first postwar parliamentary elections for May 26, 1946. Barnovský found that both non-communist and communist parties welcomed the elections with optimism, believing in eventual victory. On the one hand, after the communist defeats in Hungary and Austria, the non-communists expected a similar outcome in Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, the communists anticipated gaining approximately forty-one percent of the total votes despite the news from abroad.¹²³ In Slovakia, both parties were less confident than their Czech counterparts about the final results. A failing economy, the resurgence of the *ľudáci* (advocates of the Tiso regime), and a general atmosphere of disappointment and uncertainty affected the election campaign. Of the four competing parties, the Democratic Party (Demokratická strana, DS) and the Slovak Communist Party (Komunistická strana Slovenska, KSS) emerged as the two main players in the Slovak elections.¹²⁴

Although the communists were less popular in Slovakia than in the Czech lands, they still had a considerable constituency. By the end of 1945, the KSS – led by Karol Šmidke – had 197,365 members and the support of more than thirty percent of the Slovak population.¹²⁵ The May 1946 elections proved, however, that it was the DS that had the greatest support in Slovakia. By the end of 1945, the DS had 230,000 members, of whom more than fifty percent (120,000) were farmers. This strong agrarian base clearly defined the party's priorities. Land reform, preservation of private property, free competition, and

¹²³ Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*, 91.

¹²⁴ The remaining two parties were the Party of Labor (Strana práce, SP) and Freedom Party (Strana slobody, SS).

¹²⁵ Sixty-nine percent of KSS members were workers, 12.4 percent farmers, 9.7 percent tradesmen, and 6.7 percent professionals. Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*, 40.

partial nationalization constituted cornerstones of the DS program. The Democrats – led first by Ján Ursíny and, from July 1945, by Jozef Lettrich – labeled themselves the party of the political center, promoting “social progress” for all strata of the Slovak nation. Economic and social reforms, carried out in a Christian and non-socialist spirit, were to serve as vehicles for social advancement.

During the first months after the war, the Communists and Democrats had a lot in common. Both parties had fought against Nazism and Slovak fascism; supported the anti-German and pro-Russian coalition; promoted the democratization of public life; campaigned for the confiscation and redistribution of German and Hungarian property; and advocated the delegitimation of Catholic radicalism. Both favored social and economic reforms and the reestablishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. However, with the struggle for votes, ideological and political conflict between the camps began. By the spring and summer of 1945, the first cracks in the friendship appeared when the DS and KSS espoused incompatible ideas about the scope of land reform, the nationalization process, and the strategy toward political Catholicism.¹²⁶ In March 1946, the Catholic representatives and the DS’s leadership (the DS being mostly Protestant) signed an accord, known as the April Agreement, which aimed to clarify and improve Catholic-Protestant relations in the DS.¹²⁷ This agreement provided the Slovak Communists with new ammunition against the Democrats.

From that time, the KSS repeatedly accused the DS of collaborating with radical Catholicism and former activists of the Tiso regime – not without reason. Undoubtedly,

¹²⁶ Catholicism caused a great amount of anxiety in Slovak politics after the war. On the one hand, the Catholic Church was discredited by its involvement with the Tiso regime. On the other hand, the Church represented a large part of the electorate (about a third).

¹²⁷ The April Agreement introduced new rules of representation. Protestants and Catholics would be represented in all DS administrative organs at a ratio of seven to three.

in the Catholics' view, the DS carried more attraction than the KSS. The DS underlined the centrality of Christian faith and the protection of Slovak "national rights." According to Barnovský, about 5.4 percent of the applicants to DS's membership belonged to the fascist Hlinka Party (HSĽS) before 1938 and this percentage rose to nineteen percent during the war. The DS was not a stranger to antisemitic rhetoric either. Its daily, *Čas* (Time), periodically published articles which targeted Jews as "trouble makers," especially as far as restitution and the rights of partisans were concerned. Although individual politicians, like Lettrich, were on friendly terms with Jewish communal leaders, as a whole, the DS had a bad reputation among Slovak Jews.

In the elections of May 1946, the Communists won thirty-eight percent of the total votes – forty percent in the Czech lands and thirty percent in Slovakia. The Slovak Democrats won fourteen percent of the total votes in Czechoslovakia and an impressive sixty-two percent of all votes in Slovakia.¹²⁸ Although the government disenfranchised more than 250,000 potential voters by applying regulations against war collaborators, the results were nevertheless telling. In the Czech lands, the Communists won a plurality without use of coercion. In Slovakia, although the Communists lost, securing only half as many votes as the Democrats, they still won thirty percent of the votes and emerged as the second most powerful party in the region. These results go against the common assumption that the communists could win power only through the use of violence or trickery.

Europeans – especially those who did not have direct relations with the Soviet Union – found communism particularly attractive after the Second World War. Socialism

¹²⁸ The Czech National Socialists (ČNS) secured eighteen percent of the total votes, the People's Party (LS), sixteen percent, and the Czech Social Democrats (ČSS), thirteen percent.

seemed to have been the best alternative to the failed model of prewar capitalism. Communist ideology offered immediate solutions to the most urgent psychological and material concerns. In her memoir, Kovály provided a glimpse into the nature of those concerns, dissecting the needs and motivations that led people to support or even join the Czech Communist Party.¹²⁹ She and her husband, Rudolf Margolius (executed after the show trials in 1952), became fervent supporters of the communists immediately after the war. While Rudolf rose in the communist hierarchy, eventually receiving a government post, Kovály listened and observed rather than actively participated in building the new system. She recalled that when the war ended and the celebrations died down, there was a void left; an intense expectation of something new – of change.¹³⁰ The majority of the population had a sense that to date every social system had failed; capitalism had proved unsuccessful before the war while fascism had destroyed the last shreds of faith in social or political “progress.” People were overwhelmed by “sheer despair over human nature, which showed itself at its very worst after the war. Since it is impossible for men to give up on mankind, they blame the social order in which they live; they condemn the human condition.”¹³¹ In this mental landscape, only socialism or communism seemed to have the potential to “fill the void” and heal the social conditions. Communism promised total social transformation, “progress toward a better society,” and “happiness and prosperity for all.”¹³² Since the war left people filled with fear and helplessness, communist propaganda calmed those fears by offering simple answers to very complicated questions. Many, including Jews, believed that communism would indeed fulfill its promises and

¹²⁹ Kovály, *Under a Cruel Star: a Life in Prague 1941-1968*.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 55.

bring brotherhood, equality, and the end of racial oppression. The rise in idealism and the belief in prioritizing the common good above individual needs reinforced this faith. Fear of Soviet domination that kept the majority of Poles away from the lure of communism did not work in Czechoslovakia. As Kovály noted, no one in Czechoslovakia doubted that they would be able “to run their own show” – the national road to socialism.¹³³

The communist victory in May 1946 in the Czech lands confirmed their great popularity among Czechs and proved correct pre-electoral communist speculation. The results in Slovakia were more ambiguous. An unequal distribution of pro-communist votes and the DS's impressive sixty percent in Slovakia forced the Czechoslovak Communists to address the issue of power sharing with non-communists in both regions. In the Czechoslovak system of proportional representation, the victory was supposed to grant the Democrats the majority in Slovak national political institutions and national committees. However, the Slovak Communists launched a vicious campaign undermining the DS's victory, which forced the latter to struggle to secure any representation in the Slovak administration. This political fight began a new chapter of animosities and political tensions within Slovakia as well as between the Prague center and Slovak periphery.

The clash between Prague's push toward centralism and the Slovak effort to maintain broad autonomy found its most pronounced manifestation during the Tiso trial in spring 1947. The demonstrations of sympathy and demands to release Tiso from prison proved that czechoslovakism was not only dead among politicians but also on the so-called “street.” The protests spread all over western Slovakia – in Piešťany, Nove Mesto nad Váhom, Chynorany, and elsewhere. In Piešťany, on March 19, approximately 1,500

¹³³ Ibid., 63.

people demonstrated; the police arrested about forty of them. In Nove Mesto and Váhom about 400 to 500 people took to the streets in protest. The police arrested twenty-three.¹³⁴ In a major demonstration in Bratislava on March 21, protesters pledged loyalty to the Tiso's republic. In Piešťany, protesters demanded the release of Tiso and of all other priests currently in jail. The marchers chanted pro-Tiso slogans and demanded the establishment of people's courts as the primary institution of justice in the people's democracy. Each demonstration ended after the police and army intervened.¹³⁵ Overall, the series of demonstrations showed that support for Tiso was still alive and the idea of an independent Slovak state was deeply rooted.¹³⁶

It should be noted that the pro-Tiso demonstrations unsettled the Jewish community in Slovakia. There was a sense of insecurity among Slovak Jews prompted by fears that the demonstrations would turn into anti-Jewish riots. Although no major riot against Jews occurred, the demonstrations did bring some of the nationalistic and antisemitic pro-Tiso groups into the daylight. *Ludácke podzemie* – the radical underground – was a loose network of separatist organizations promoting the reestablishment of an independent Slovak state. Although the underground had no real power to affect the political landscape, the government constantly vilified it as the major security threat. Czech politicians, in particular, dramatized the potential danger simmering in Slovakia. In order to combat it, the ministry of the interior introduced special police measures against the alleged conspiracy. The so-called “unveiling of the

¹³⁴ Barnovský, *Na Ceste k Monopolu Moci: Mocenskopolitické Zápasy na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948*, 143.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ The DS did not officially approve of the protests in the spring of 1947 for a couple of reasons. First, the party found the demonstrations harmful to the very cause of the Tiso trial. Second, the DS representatives realized that by supporting the protests they would jeopardize their good relations with the Catholic Church, which earlier had disapproved of the pro-Tiso demonstrations.

anti-state conspiracy” (*odhalenie tzv. protištátneho sprisahania*) began in September 1947 with the arrests of more than 300 underground Slovak activists.¹³⁷ Soon, the anti-conspiracy action turned into a communist terror campaign against the Democrats. A series of trials against the most prominent DS politicians unsettled the Slovak political scene. The secret service – fulfilling the orders of Minister of the Interior Václav Nosek – fabricated evidence against the DS leaders, implicating them in an alleged plot against the republic. The KSS also organized demonstrations demanding that the DS cleanse its ranks of *ludaks* and other fascist “elements.”

The entire propaganda campaign of fall 1947 aimed to discredit and intimidate the DS leadership, to split the party, to weaken their position in the Board of Commissioners, and to undermine political Catholicism and Slovak nationalism. Eventually, the Communists succeeded in engendering a sense of despair and hopelessness among the Democrats, as well as weakening their position in the Board. Although the fall crisis ended in political compromise, it greatly undermined DS morale and its position in the Slovak power structure. The crisis also served the Czechoslovak Communists as a pretext to initiate the use of terror, intimidation, and evidence fabrication as political tactics. Not without reason, Barnovský called the events of fall 1947 “a general rehearsal” before the February takeover of 1948.¹³⁸

The political methods of the handling of the legal opposition were strikingly similar in Poland and Slovakia. The histories of the PSL in Poland and the DS in Slovakia offer an interesting case study in postwar communist policy toward legal opposition. In the two countries the opposition parties enjoyed governmental posts and

¹³⁷ Ibid., 193-208.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

relative peace until spring 1946, when the first accusations were leveled at them. However, the major campaigns directed at discrediting the opposition did not take full effect until the fall of 1946 in Poland and a year later in Slovakia. In both cases, the Communists terrorized their political adversaries by arrests, headquarters' searches, and constant harassment and abuse. Although the PSL in Poland and the DS in Slovakia actually secured the majority vote in a referendum and elections respectively, they had to surrender the benefits of their victory in the face of terror and, in the Polish case, the falsification of results.

In Prague, between fall 1946 and summer 1947, there was relative tranquility: the political opposition was not censored and did not suffer any major restrictions. It was July 1947 that brought a major political crisis in Prague.¹³⁹ In response to political and economic troubles, the Czech Communists established a department for the infiltration of the other parties, activated covert Communists in social organizations across Czechoslovakia, and employed the police apparatus to fight political adversaries. The latter in particular became the major bone of contention in the Czechoslovak political scene, eventually precipitating the final crisis. On February 12, 1948, ministers of the non-communist parties demanded that the communists stop dominating the provincial police. Minister Nosek refused to cooperate. The Communists activated their influences in trade unions and all other social associations and organizations. They set up local armed "action committees," which were supposed to replace the local government

¹³⁹ Karel Kaplan, *Nekrvavá Revoluce* (Toronto: Sixty-Eight Publishers, 1985); Karel Kaplan, *The Short March: the Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1948* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Norman Stone and Eduard Strouhal, ed., *Czechoslovakia: Crossroads and Crises, 1918-88* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

councils. On February 20, the Czech Communists formed the people's militia of 15,000 people calling those units a "spontaneous force."

In response to the unfolding situation, twelve non-communist ministers resigned in the hope that President Beneš would form a new government without the Communists. Beneš, however, decided to wait. On February 22, thousands of unionists – mainly communists – paraded in Prague, attacking the offices of the opposition parties and demonstrating for a communist takeover. The head of the army, General Ludvik Svoboda, committed his forces to support "the people." Moscow concentrated the Red Army on the borders. On February 25, Beneš accepted Prime Minister Klement Gottwald's proposals of a new, fully communist government. In June 1948 Beneš resigned and died soon after. Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Masaryk's dead body, found beneath the window of his office, marked the symbolic end of the old and the beginning of the new era.

To sum up, these were the general historical, political, and social frameworks in which Polish and Slovak Jews negotiated their position in the two states and societies after the war. These were times of transitional chaos and uncertainty. Lack of law and order, legislative chaos, the formation of ad hoc administrative cadres, economic and political instability, extensive material damage of all infrastructure, shortage of housing, food, and so forth, made life after the war a struggle for day-to-day survival. At the same time, Poles, Slovaks, and Jews were bombarded, on a daily basis, by news of trials, retributions, and simple revenge. Constant migrations of millions of returnees, refugees, and expellees to and from villages, towns, cities, and countries added to the general instability of the period. These migrations contributed to the dismantling of larger social

networks, already disrupted by war. The following chapter will describe the return of Jewish survivors as a part of this process – plunging into the country of chaos in search of a lost home.

CHAPTER 3

RETURN TO “NO HOME” (1944-46)

The story presented in this chapter is the account of return of Jewish survivors to Poland and Slovakia after the Second World War between July 1944 and June 1946. Return is a useful category of historical analysis since it allows insight not only into large historical processes but also into their effects on individual human and ethnic experience.¹ In the following narrative, Russian liberation, return migration, assessment and affect of war damages on society at large, and general postwar social conditions, all represent large historical processes whereas the personal testimonies embody individual experiences shaped in response to the surrounding social and political circumstances. The use of the return as an organizing concept will help me to establish a connection between these two spheres of human experience and, at the same time, to render the return a social project central to understanding of the overall postwar experience.

¹ Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld, "Introduction: an Ethnography of Return," in *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind*, ed. Lynellyn Long and Ellen Oxfeld (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 4.

Soviet Liberation²

Although, *de jure*, the war ended only in May 1945, many residents of Poland and Slovakia began their return home as early as summer and fall 1944. Depending on the place of residence, hiding, or confinement, the local populations experienced the end of the war at various times between January 1944 and May 1945. As the Red Army advanced from east to west across the country, residents of eastern Poland were free as early as the summer of 1944 while hundreds of thousands of others from territories further west had to wait almost a year longer, until April and May 1945. As a result, there is no one narrative of liberation but rather hundreds of thousands of stories, each one having its own dynamic and chronology. The stories presented in this chapter cover the period between July 1944 and June 1946, which roughly coincides with the liberation of Poland (the districts of Kraków, Lublin, and Kielce, among others) and Slovakia (the regions of Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, and Prešov), as well as the repatriation of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union.

On January 3, 1944, the Red Army crossed the eastern frontier of prewar Poland (near Sarny); Henryk Grynberg eloquently described their entry,

² During the last half century, Polish historiography (first in exile and then at home) has widely contested the notion of post-WWII “liberation.” At the core of the dispute was the link between the presence of the Soviet military in Poland in the role of “liberators” and subsequent Soviet political domination. The argument went that while liberation implied freedom from oppression, the Red Army’s advance was (and was widely perceived as) nothing more than the replacement of one oppressor by another. In 2005, during the preparations for the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war and liberation of the KL Auschwitz, heated political debates best exemplified the ongoing uneasiness around the term “liberation.” Fully aware of this debate, I will nevertheless use the term “liberation” without quotation marks henceforth throughout the thesis. The sources available to me indicate that most Jews, the majority of the rural population of Slovakia and Poland, all camp inmates (regardless of their ethnic background and political views), and the majority of Slovaks opposing the Tiso regime, eagerly awaited the approaching Red Army to rescue them from Nazism. It is true that the Soviet liberation bore severe consequences for the political profile of the two countries in the decades to come. In this narrative, however, it is not the later political influence of the Soviet liberation that is critical but its effect on postwar ethnic dynamics.

The Russians came down the pitted clay highroad that went through village after village of which only the chimneys remained. They came through villages of jutting chimneys, sounding the road with long poles. They came on horsedrawn wagons, gun carriages, and slow, heavy tanks. Their heads were shaved clean, their dirty forage caps shoved back rakishly. The wooden spoons they'd made themselves stuck out from the soft creased tops of their boots. When they halted, they pulled out those spoons and ate their soup and kasha with them, then wiped them on their pants and stuck them back in their boot tops again. They advanced all day and all night, and all the next day again until nightfall.³

On July 20-21, 1944, the Soviets crossed the river Bug (the present eastern border of Poland) and advanced to the west towards what constitutes present-day Poland. In July and August 1944, the Red Army liberated, among others, Lublin, Przemyśl, and Rzeszów – the major cities in southeastern Poland. After reaching the suburbs of Warszawa in the midst of the uprising in August 1944, the Army stopped to enable the Germans to carry out their final crackdown on the Polish underground and its military forces.⁴ In January 1945, the Soviets resumed their advance westward liberating Kielce (January 15), Warszawa (January 17), and Kraków (January 19), among others. Throughout February and March, the Soviets entered most of the cities, towns, and villages in central and northern Poland. On May 6, 1945, the city of Wrocław capitulated – the final German bridgehead in Lower Silesia.⁵ The Nazi occupation of Poland was officially over.

In Slovakia, the Red Army broke into the country in November 1944 during the final days of the Slovak national uprising. By December 1944, Romanian and Soviet troops had driven German troops out of southern Slovakia. On January 19, 1945, the Red Army, accompanied by the First Czechoslovak Army Corps, liberated eastern Slovakia

³ Henryk Grynberg, *The Victory*, trans. Richard Lourie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 1.

⁴ Andrzej Kunert, ed., *Kronika Powstania Warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Zysk i S-ka, 2004); Włodzimierz Borodziej, *The Warszawa Uprising of 1944* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

⁵ The Fortress Wrocław (German: Festung Breslau).

including the main cities of Prešov and Košice. Three months later, in March 1945, both armies took over the northwest and central regions including the city of Banská Bystrica. On April 1, 1945, the Soviet and Czechoslovak military entered Topolčany and, three days later, Bratislava – today's capital of Slovakia. The last days of April 1945, when the Soviets conquered the remaining western parts of Slovakia, marked the final demise of the Tiso regime. On May 7, 1945 (effective May 8), Nazi Germany capitulated and signed an unconditional surrender in Reims, France. On May 8, 1945, the Slovak government-in-exile capitulated to the US Army in Kremsmünster, Austria. The war was officially over.

It is a commonly held belief that during and after the war the overwhelming majority of Polish society considered the Russians as bad if not worse than the Germans.⁶ Sociologists investigating the formation of national stereotypes and prejudices in Poland today suggest that the Polish-Russian history and the collective memory it generated, can explain anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiment among Poles.⁷ The major historical events that shaped the vision of Russia as the enemy of contemporary Poles are the Soviet

⁶ Assessment of the quality and intensity of anti-Russian sentiment in postwar Polish and Slovak society remains a matter of speculation. There were no surveys conducted on attitudes toward Russians and other minorities in the late 1940s. Among available sources are personal testimonies as well as fictional and non-fictional essays written at the time. See essays by Polish peasants, written three years after the war, in Krystyna Kersten and Tomasz Szarota, ed., *Wieś Polska, 1939-1948: Materiały Konkursowe*, 4 vols. (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1967). In Czechoslovakia, the public opinion surveys were conducted in 1948. The idea originated in Prague in early 1946, in the office of Minister of Information Václav Kopecký. Government agents conducted the first survey in April 1948, and the last one (of total twenty-four surveys) in November 1950. Approximately 1,000 to 1,200 respondents, selected according to sex, age, occupation, and denomination, answered six to fifteen questions on various themes, ranging from Czech and Slovak national identity, Czech and Slovak relations with the Magyar minority, to Czech and Slovak attitudes toward religion and the regime, among other issues. This material, however, does not include questionnaires on attitudes toward the Soviet Union and the Russians. See Čeněk Adamec, *What's Your Opinion? A Year's Survey of Public Opinion in Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis, 1947); Čeněk Adamec, *Počátky Výzkumu Verejného Mnení v Českých Zemích* (Prague: USD, 1996).

⁷ Andrzej de Lazari and Tatiana Rongińska, ed., *Polacy i Rosjanie: Przewyciężanie Uprzedzeń* (Łódź: Ibidem, 2006). See sections by Paweł Boski and Joanna Więckowska, Adriana Skorupska, Marzena Sobczak and Roman Bäker, Ada Stajewska, and Robert Orłowski, among others. Almost all contributors emphasized role of history as central determinant in shaping Polish-Russian national stereotypes and sentiments.

occupation of eastern Poland in 1939, the Katyń massacre in 1940, the postwar takeover, and decades of Soviet political domination. All these events were experienced or learnt from the popular press, sermons, political speeches, and textbooks.⁸ The generation that came of age in the 1930s and 1940s based their conception of the Soviet Union on the partitions of Poland (which they did not experience) and the more recent Polish-Russian war of 1919-21 and the Soviet occupation of September 1939 (both experienced first-hand).

What remains unclear is how widespread these views were in the mid 1940s among various strata of society across the country. For example, how common among peasants in the Kraków district was the knowledge that the NKVD had murdered Polish officers in Katyń and how influential was this knowledge in shaping attitudes toward the Soviet liberators in 1944-45? Although this subject needs more research, I speculate that the most recent events involving the Soviet Union and the Russians were still in the process of being internalized by the general population at the time. Knowledge of the recent events and translation of that knowledge into resentment was by no means complete among Poles.⁹ The suffering at the hands of the Russians was still in the process of becoming the central lens for the perception of Russia and the potential threat it posed.

Also, intensity of resentment depended on geographical location. In the eastern regions of Poland, for example, the Red Army could not count on warm welcome from

⁸ In November 2005, sixty-seven percent of Poles claimed that Russia was the country Poland should fear the most while “only” twenty-one percent pointed to Germany as the main enemy. Data collected, analyzed, and published by the Institute of Public Affairs (Instytut Spraw Publicznych, ISP), Jarosław Cwiek-Karpowicz, “Public Opinion on Fears and Hopes Related to Russia and Germany,” <http://www.isp.org.pl/?v=page&id=268&ln=eng> (accessed June 23, 2008). Also see Ibid.

⁹ A process of incorporation, transformation, and constant renegotiation of particular moments and events from the past into collective memory in Poland, in general, and of Polish-Russian experience, in particular, still awaits research. Collective memory remains one of the most ambiguous and difficult categories of historical analysis. See, among others, “AHR Forum: History and Memory,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997).

the overwhelming majority of Poles. For the most part, Poles in this area, having the Soviet occupation of the years 1939-41 fresh in their minds, perceived the Russian liberation as another military conquest. Noach Lasman, a young Polish Jew (born in 1914 near Poznań), remembered that a desire for liberation by the western powers instead of the Soviets was common in the town of Łosice (eastern Poland) in the summer of 1944. Lasman recalled numerous conversations with local inhabitants who admitted that they had dreamt, unrealistically, of the western allies liberating the country.¹⁰

The essays, written for the competition *Opis mojej wsi* (Description of my Village) by farmers from across Poland, in the spring and early summer of 1948, suggest that the further west the more relieved and welcoming the local population was.¹¹ While farmers from the Lublin province appeared, by and large, skeptical (sometimes relieved but never enthusiastic) about the approaching Soviets, their counterparts from the provinces of Kielce and Kraków often described “enthusiastic” welcomes and general happiness accompanying the entry of Soviet soldiers.¹² A farmer from the province of Kielce wrote, “The day of January 14, 1945, was the day of liberation for my village. Myself with a few neighbors, we welcomed with bread, salt and vodka the first Soviet tank that was bringing us freedom, liberty, and democracy.”¹³ Also, Lasman noted that the celebratory mood was particularly evident in western Poland, which had been

¹⁰ Noach Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957, Wspomnienia, Relacje, Dzienniki* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), 15.

¹¹ The competition was announced in newspapers by Instytut Prasy *Czytelnik* (the Press Institute Reader). Kersten and Szarota, ed., *Wieś Polska, 1939-1948: Materiały Konkursowe*.

¹² Since the recollections were yet void of future uneasiness and fear of Russian imperialism, the readers of these recollections have no reason to doubt sincerity of the writer. Farmer’s son, twenty-one years old, graduate of elementary school from Gnaszyn (Kielce Province) wrote, “On the next day, at dawn, a column of vehicles along with infantry entered [the village]. The population ran out on a street in crowds, welcoming enthusiastically its liberators. For soldiers everything was found: vodka, beer, cigarettes, clean underwear, and the like. Each one of us, with gratitude, would share the last bite of food with the soldiers. The residents laughed, cried, and prayed with joy.” *Ibid.*, 32.

¹³ Village Mnichów in Kielce Province. *Ibid.*, 71.

incorporated into the Reich in 1939. For example, in the Łódź area “the population received the Russians as liberators without any ‘but’ ...they were choked with freedom.”¹⁴ Even though the link between geography and responses to the Red Army needs more research, it is safe to say that the liberators received welcomes that depended on the residents’ recent experiences. Those from the territories occupied by the Soviets in 1939-41 had reason to be apprehensive of their liberators and thus restrained from “enthusiastic” celebration. In contrast, inhabitants of the central provinces (for example, Kraków and Kielce), having had no direct experience with the Russian occupation in the most recent past, had no such restraints.

What was the Jewish position in this complex matrix of Polish-Russian relations at liberation between 1944 and 1945? After all, Jewish responses to the Soviet advance in September 1939 had far reaching consequences for Jewish safety in the eastern territories and greatly contributed to reinforcing the belief in an alleged Jewish inclination toward communism and loyalty to the Soviet Union (and thus disloyalty to Poland).¹⁵ During the liberation of 1944-45, the Jews again had the most to gain from the Germans being driven out. The question of who would chase them away was insignificant. Lasman recalled that for him and many other Jewish survivors,

¹⁴ Noach Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), 41.

¹⁵ The most compelling inquiry into a cliché of Jews giving “enthusiastic welcome” to the Red Army in September 1939 belongs to Jan T. Gross. See his article “Ja za takie oswobodzenie Im dziękuję i proszę Ich żeby to było ostatni raz,” in Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna Dekada: Trzy Eseje o Stereotypach na Temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i Komunistów, 1939-1948* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 61-92. Also see B.C. Pinchuk, “The Sovietization of the Jewish Community in Eastern Poland 1939-1941,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 56, no. 3 (1978); Antony Polonsky and Norman Davies, *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-46* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991); Pawel Korzec and Jean-Charles Szurek, “Jews and Poles under Soviet Occupation (1939-1941): Conflicting Interests,” in *From Shtetl to Socialism*, ed. Antony Polonsky, *Polin* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1993).

[O]nly one question existed: when were the Germans going to be driven away from Poland. I had no preferences as to who should do that in accordance with the principle “Whoever is first is best.” I knew, of course, that the majority of the residents of Podlasie would want allies from the West and the London government; however, my colleagues and I could not afford the luxury of choosing liberators.¹⁶

After five years of Nazi occupation and terror, the image of approaching liberators, no matter in what uniform, was intoxicating. Lasman recalled that

[O]n August 1, 1944, ten days after the declaration of the July Manifesto, the Red Army liberated me. A handful of Jewish survivors welcomed the liberators with enthusiasm not because they were Russians and not because they carried some ideas of brotherhood; the cause was prosaic: they were the ones who saved our lives.¹⁷

In this context, one may assume that the Soviet liberation of 1944-45 and the Jewish reaction to the Red Army further antagonized relations between Jews and non-Jews, as in September 1939. However, I suggest that the behavior of Jewish survivors in 1944-45 did not have any considerable impact and did not buttress the stereotype of a Jew-communist, even in the eastern territories of Poland. First, there were virtually no Jews left in the area and those who survived could hardly “celebrate” anything considering their physical and psychological condition. Their behavior was thus scarcely visible in the public sphere. In most cases, individual Jewish survivors emerged in silence from wells, forests, rooms behind walls and closets, basements, and attics, without the theatrical fanfare of liberation. The moment of liberation did not entail picturesque Jewish crowds throwing flowers on Russian soldiers. Instead, liberation took the form described by Wilhelm Dichter in his fictionalized autobiography *Koń Pana Boga* (God’s

¹⁶ Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

Horse).¹⁸ For months, nine-year-old Wilhelm and his family hid in a well, in the countryside near Borysław (present Ukraine) – the city they had lived in before the war.

The following is a description of the moment of their liberation in the summer of 1944,

Russians approached. By night, through cracks in stones, we saw the sky flaring up. The Earth roared and trembled so heavily that we were afraid of being covered up.... At noon Maks [a Pole who had hidden them in the well] ran up. “Come out!” he screamed. “The Russians have come.” “Ask him where they are,” mother whispered to Nusia [her sister]. “Where are they?” asked Nusia. “Everywhere.” We started to remove the stones. Maks pulled us up. A wet eye of the well, encircled by a stone shaft, looked straight into the sun.¹⁹

Second, in the atmosphere of general relief no Jewish demonstration of joy could antagonize Poles at their liberation. After all, regardless of their feelings toward the Russians, Poles across the country were relieved at seeing the withdrawal of the Germans in 1944-45 even if effected by the USSR. As I showed before, residents of central and western Poland in particular, mindful of the extreme anti-Polish wartime policies, were as relieved by the Russian arrival as any Jewish survivor. Even in the eastern provinces of postwar Poland, where the population was more cautious about the potential political consequences of a Soviet liberation, the average Jewish response did not dramatically stand out. Therefore, I argue that the mode of Jewish reaction to the Soviet advance during the 1944-45 campaign, in contrast to September 1939, had little or no effect on future ethnic relations in Poland. Instead it was the prolonged presence of the Soviets and their military forces in the country that triggered a far-reaching social and political transformation of ethnic relations.

¹⁸ Wilhelm Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga* (Kraków: Znak, 1996).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

By considering Polish and Slovak interaction with Russians and the Soviet state, on both the individual and collective level, it is safe to say that in the late 1940s Poles were more prone to anti-Russian sentiment than Slovaks. In Slovakia, the intellectual and discursive framework was overall less conducive to russophobia and hence to accusations of Jewish loyalty to the Soviet Union. The absence of previous Russian aggression, as well as their relative distance from the Soviet Union, left Slovaks mostly neutral toward it at the end of the war. For the Slovaks, it was Hungary that occupied a similar place in national rhetoric and sentiment as Russia did in Polish collective memory. A millennium of Hungarian domination of Slovakia, the Vienna Arbitration of 1938 allocating Slovak territories to Hungary, and finally the German crackdown on the Slovak national uprising, all contributed to general anti-Hungarian and anti-German sentiment. Hence, when the First Czechoslovak Army Corps joined the Soviet military in its advance through Czechoslovakia, the alliance did not stir controversy among Czechs and Slovaks.²⁰ The opposite was true.

Although it is difficult to estimate with certainty how the local population welcomed the liberating forces in Slovakia and the Czech lands, both armies seem to have been given a warm welcome much of the time. Josef Weiser, a young Slovak Jew (born in 1916 in a small village Pušovce in eastern Slovakia), a partisan in the Slovak national uprising, recalled the “enthusiastic” welcome given to the Red Army by the local population in Žakarovce (eastern Slovakia). Without a doubt exaggerated and colored by

²⁰ The First Czechoslovak Independent Field Battalion was organized in Buzuluk (the Ural Mountains in the Soviet Union) in 1942. In November 1943 it played a key role in the liberation of Kiev (Ukraine). In the fall of 1944, after the battle of Dukla Pass, the First Czechoslovak Army Corps entered Czechoslovakia. The Corps consisted of 16,000 soldiers: Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Jews, Soviets, and others. In 1942 half the Battalion was Jewish. With months, the proportions changed to twenty-five percent of Jews in January 1943 and 5.8 percent in September 1943. See Michal Gelbić, <http://www.czechpatriots.com/csmu/members.php> (accessed June 23, 2008).

his political sentiments, the following fragment nevertheless illustrates the mood in this particular village. Weiser described how on one morning the Red Army entered Žakarovce and a swarm (*roj*) of people came down to the village and “there has been already a gate of fame...they had their own band there and bread, bacon, and so forth. So they welcomed them [the Soviets]; simply and very cheerfully [they welcomed] these Soviets.”²¹

After Liberation

Once liberated, Jewish survivors spent the first hours of freedom in pursuit of something to eat and wear and a place to sleep. Months, sometimes years, spent in concentration and death camps or literally under ground, in wells, holes, forests, and the like, left survivors not only psychologically damaged but also physically wrecked.²² Jews and non-Jews, who survived death, concentration, or labor camps, were all in terrible condition. A prisoner of Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Terezín (the northwestern Czech Republic), remembered how just before the end of the war “all of [inmates] had temperatures. They had diarrhea when they ate even the smallest amount of food. They were covered with lice, and all of them were suspected to have typhoid.”²³

²¹ “*A tam už byla sláva brána, [?] mali svoju kapelu, [?] chlieba, slaniny, a tak ďalej. Tak proste ich tam vítali veľmi radostne tychto Sovietou...*,” Josef Weiser, interview by Peter Salner and Ingrid Kralova, February 1 and 11, 1995, interview HVT-3659, VHS, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT (hereafter cited as Fortunoff Archive).

²² Dehumanization of Nazi camps in Poland and Germany has been well documented and researched by scholars in Europe, America, and Israel. The most illuminating are personal testimonies of Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, and Elie Wiesel. See Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man* (New York: Orion Press, 1959); Elie Wiesel, *Night, Dawn, the Accident: Three Tales* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972); Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976).

²³ Eva Roubíčková, *We're Alive and Life Goes On: a Theresienstadt Diary*, trans. Alexander Zaia (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1998), 170.

Survivors of Auschwitz were in even worse shape.²⁴ Pictures, taken by the Soviets on the day of liberation, show the Auschwitz inmates in a state of extreme emaciation; walking skeletons with flesh covering their bones. These people needed the essentials; to eat, to wash themselves, and to change out of their flea-infested rags. Excruciating hunger, a daily reality for almost six years of the war, now led people to eat anything they found or were offered.

Cases of death from overeating were not uncommon right after liberation.²⁵ After years of hunger, empty stomachs could not handle the sudden intake of heavy food. When well-intentioned benefactors fed survivors with too much food, it often ended in diarrhea at best and death at worst. In this respect, Russians turned out to be “safer” liberators than Americans. While the Russians could offer limited supplies like bread, canned meat, some tea, and cigarettes, Americans brought all sorts of delicacies including salami, cheese, and real coffee. Most of the time, however, it was not an excess but a shortage of food that was the problem for the survivors. Lasman, Halina Birenbaum, and other survivors had similar memories of constant, miserable, and futile attempts to appease hunger for weeks after the war.²⁶

Clean clothing and shelter were the other major concerns in the first few hours or days after liberation. The clothes of the survivors, who had hidden in forests or underground in wells or caves, were rotten, full of bugs, and moldy, in urgent need of replacement. *Pasiaki* (the striped clothing of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps) were

²⁴ In the camp, according to the recent estimates, 1.1 million Jews, 140,000 to 150,000 Poles, 23,000 Roma, and thousands of people of other nationalities were killed. Only 7,500 prisoners were left in the camp when the 322nd Infantry Unit of the Red Army entered the area. Franciszek Piper, "Weryfikacja Strat Osobowych w Obozie Koncentracyjnym w Oświęcimiu," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, no. 2 (1994).

²⁵ I have not come upon any statistical data to support this statement.

²⁶ Halina Birenbaum, *Powrót do Ziemi Praojców* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1991); Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*.

dirty and infested with lice and fleas. Water, soap, and a clean bed became the commodities most in demand. If the liberators were Soviet, hope for organized, institutional help was most often in vain. As a rule, Russian soldiers limited liberation to opening the gates of a camp and providing the proverbial bread and butter. They also made sure that most of the freed prisoners would go back to their homeland or hometown as soon as possible. Birenbaum recalled how after some time, equipped with “bread and meat,” Russians just ordered all inmates to set off for home.²⁷ The overwhelming majority of survivors and camp inmates did not eat properly, wash, or change their clothes until they reached their hometown or a bigger city with ad hoc organized aid.

Before that, they were left to their own resourcefulness in finding food, clothing, and shelter among the local population. Jews who survived outside camps relied completely on the good will of the local population in both Poland and Slovakia. Individuals who had rescued Jews by providing a hiding place for weeks and months of occupation most likely continued helping during the first days after liberation. For example, Chaim Weill’s rescuers in a small village near Banská Bystrica (central Slovakia) offered him and his family a house in which to stay and recuperate until they would find something more permanent. Russians liberated Weill in February 1945, when he was just thirteen years old. As a son of a religious family he was supposed to have celebrated his bar mitzvah a few weeks after liberation. The non-Jewish family that had saved them let the Weills stay a couple of months longer. They even made a small

²⁷ Survivors rarely estimated the exact timeframe of their immediate post-liberation experience. Their narratives usually indicated a span of a few days between the moment of liberation and the start of the journey home. Birenbaum, *Powrót do Ziemi Praojców*, 7.

celebration for Chaim's bar mitzvah; they cooked ham – the most luxurious food they knew – which, obviously, Chaim's family could not eat.²⁸

Needless to say, not all survivors were that fortunate. One's postwar lot depended on the character and motives of the person on which he or she had relied for help. If money had been the prime motive, the rescued was most likely kicked out immediately after news of the end of the war had reached the household. Not unusually, the reason for the demand that they leave the premises was the owner's fear of neighbors discovering that he or she helped a Jew. Michał Borwicz, director of the Provincial Jewish Historical Commission in Kraków, recalled how after mentioning local righteous gentiles by name, "many of those ... came ... with the accusation that by naming them we were exposing them to unpleasant situations and even revenge."²⁹ As Joanna Michlic accurately observed, this testimony illustrated the social isolation of rescuers and overall public disapproval for rescuing Jews during and immediately after the war.³⁰ Testimonies of Polish Jewish survivors indicate that the overwhelming majority of them had negative experiences immediately after liberation when it came to obtaining help from non-Jews.

Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War became one of the most contested subjects of intensive research in America, Poland, and Israel during the last three decades.³¹ I agree with those scholars who have suggested that the most hostile

²⁸ Chaim Weill, interview by Susanne Glaser and Adele Nudel, March 18, 1990, interview HVT-1487, VHS, Fortunoff Archive.

²⁹ Michał Borwicz, "1944-1947," *Puls* 24 (1984); Michał Borwicz, "Polish-Jewish Relations: 1944-1947," in *The Jews in Poland*, ed. Chimen Abramsky, Maciej Jachimczyk, and Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

³⁰ Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: the Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 191.

³¹ See Władysław Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewinówna, *Ten Jest z Ojczyzny Mojej: Polacy z Pomocą Żydom, 1939-1945* (Kraków: Znak, 1969); Antony Polonsky, ed., *'My Brother's Keeper?' Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London: New York, 1990); Emanuel Ringelblum and Joseph Kermish, ed., *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press,

(open collaboration with Nazis, denunciations, and murders) and the most empathic attitudes (rescuing activities) were the least common and on the margins of “normal” social conduct.³² The majority, although witness to the unfolding genocide, remained passive, silent observers of their Jewish neighbors’ fate. However, this passivity meant that the average Pole refused when asked for bread or a place to stay overnight.

For Slovak Jews, assessment of their state and their neighbors was even more problematic.³³ The Slovak State, notorious for its antisemitic rhetoric and praxis, rounded up and transported Jews to death camps in Poland and labor camps in Slovakia during the first two years of the war. The same state, however, halted the deportations in 1942 and hence saved thousands of Slovak Jews from inevitable death in the gas chambers. The survivors found themselves protected by the very state that had launched a vicious campaign against them. Meanwhile, the conspicuous involvement of ordinary Slovaks (e.g., the regular Slovak police, among others) in genocidal practices turned into one of the most painful disappointments for Slovak Jews. In this respect, both Slovak and Polish Jewish survivors shared an aggravated sense of isolation and abandonment by their non-

1992); Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (London: Arrow Books, 2001); Joshua D. Zimmerman, ed., *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

³² Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*; Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warszawa, 1940-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

³³ Slovak historiography on popular attitudes toward Jews during the war is much more limited. Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, Ivan Kamenec, Eduard Nižňanský, Livia Rothkirchen, and Yehoshua Büchler remain the few scholars profoundly engaged in the debate. See Livia Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jews: A Documentary History*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1961); Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, *The "Final Solution": The Slovak Version* (Boulder, Colorado: University of Colorado, 1971); Ivan Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991); Ivan Kamenec, "The Deportation of Jewish Citizens from Slovakia in 1942," in *The Tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia 1938-1945: Slovakia and the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question"*, ed. Waclaw Długoborski (Oświęcim, Banská Bystrica: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2002); Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku: Prezident, Pláda, Snem SR a Štátna Rada o Židovskej Otázke 1939-1945* (Zvolen: Klemo, 2003); Yehoshua Büchler, "Reconstruction Efforts in Hostile Surroundings: Slovaks and Jews after World War II," in *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin after World War Two*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Berghahn Books, 2005).

Jewish neighbors. In both Slovak and Polish Jewish survivors' eyes, people who resided outside of ghetto walls, by and large, did nothing to help those inside. After liberation, when it was time for both sides to meet, it seemed that help did not come either.

During the first hours and days after liberation, sharing bread or opening one's stable for a night or two, even though in most cases no longer a matter of life and death, still bore immense consequences for the survivors' mental composure and provided the basis for a future evaluation of attitudes toward Jews. Unfortunately, the available data do not reveal how many doors opened when survivors and former camp prisoners knocked to ask for food or clean clothes. Even though I am unable to assess the character of these first encounters, I argue that the very moment of knocking signified the beginning of a new process of remaking and renegotiating postwar ethnic relations. This process was in full swing during the return journey home.

Journey Home

On the first few days after liberation, Jewish and non-Jewish camp inmates, Jewish survivors in hiding or refuge, and, among others, discharged soldiers, all departed toward their hometowns, hoping to find intact homes and living relatives. Alice Braun, a twenty-one-year-old Jewish woman from Michalovce in eastern Slovakia, set off on the road home because, as she said,

I just did not want to stay there [in Nachod in Bohemia, where she was liberated]. I knew I had nothing at home. Because I imagined by the time what I saw that my parents could not be alive. But I went back home because I did not want to stay in

Germany; I did not want to stay in strange places. I went home just maybe I find somebody.³⁴

This hope, against all odds, to find someone alive was the single most powerful motivation to go back to the place where home had been before the war.

Jewish survivors on their homebound journey represented only a small fraction of the masses of people in motion in postwar Eastern Europe.³⁵ Between 1944 and 1946-47, movement within state boundaries as well as across frontiers was a daily reality. Both in Poland and Slovakia, domestic migration, interwoven with movement across state borders, became the dominant characteristic of the landscape. In 1945 alone, approximately 1,117,000 prewar Polish citizens returned home from camps in Germany and another 360,000 came from elsewhere in Europe.³⁶ Kersten's comment on Poland in the years 1944-48 as a country of people in motion can equally be applied to postwar Slovakia.³⁷ In both countries, hundreds of thousands of Poles, Slovaks, Jews, Hungarians, Germans, and Ukrainians crossed the borders from the east, west, north, and south on a daily basis. Small and large columns of returnees from concentration and labor camps in Germany and Poland, from the Soviet gulag, or military service; repatriates, exiles, and

³⁴ Alice Braun, interview by Jaschael Pery, January 23, 1992, interview HVT-1909, VHS, Fortunoff Archive. Eventually, Braun found a relative in Žilina where she stayed until she met her future husband, also a survivor. They stayed in Czechoslovakia until 1949.

³⁵ While some return movement was entirely voluntary (solely based on individual assessment of one's gains and losses accompanying return), thousands of returnees were forced to relocate to particular territories as a part of the so-called repatriation and population exchange projects organized and controlled by a state. In the majority of cases, even if a journey seemed voluntary in fact it was forced by social and political circumstances. Considering the available data and the character of these movements, distinguishing between voluntary or forced returns is often impossible.

³⁶ Krystyna Kersten, *Między Wyzwoleniem a Zniewoleniem: Polska 1944-1956* (Londyn: Aneks, 1993), 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9. Also see Krystyna Kersten, "Ruchliwość w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej Jako Element Przeobrażeń Społecznych i Kształtowania Postaw," *Przegląd Historyczny*, no. 4 (1986); Krystyna Kersten, "Forced Migration and the Transformation of Polish Society in the Postwar Period," in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

so-called displaced populations, marched through, making up the postwar East European landscape.

As Kersten established, in the course of repatriation between 1945 and 1948, about 1.5 million prewar Polish citizens were repatriated to Poland from the territory of the Third Reich (including POWs and prisoners of labor and concentration camps).³⁸ Another staggering 1.2 million pre-1939 Polish (including Jews) citizens were officially “repatriated” to Poland from the eastern territories, now annexed by the Soviet Union.³⁹ Jerzy Kochanowski raised this number to 1.5 million after the inclusion of all repatriates from the prewar Polish eastern territories, Siberia, and Central Asia in the years 1944-48.⁴⁰ Overall, almost three million people returned to Poland from the Soviet Union and Germany as a result of forced repatriation as well as voluntary homebound movement.

By the end of 1947, thousands of Czechoslovak citizens had also returned voluntarily (mainly from Germany) or had been forcefully transferred from the Soviet Union to Czechoslovakia. In June 1945, for example, Czechoslovakia signed a treaty with the Soviet Union that authorized the cession of its eastern province of the Subcarpathian Ukraine to the Soviets and agreed upon provisions for subsequent population transfers. Of the projected population exchange of 50,000, approximately 27,000 Czechoslovak citizens were repatriated to Czechoslovakia by the end of 1947.⁴¹ Overall, between 141,000 and 161,000 Czechoslovak pre-1938 citizens (including Jews)

³⁸ Krystyna Kersten, "Kształtowanie Stosunków Ludnościowych," in *Polska Ludowa, 1944-1950: Przemiany Społeczne*, ed. Franciszek Ryszka (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 104.

³⁹ Kersten, "Forced Migration and the Transformation of Polish Society in the Postwar Period," 82.

⁴⁰ Jerzy Kochanowski, "Gathering Poles into Poland: Forced Migration from Poland's Former Eastern Territories," in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 138.

⁴¹ Joseph B. Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 44.

returned to Czechoslovakia after the war.⁴² Finally, in addition to the repatriation of citizens from abroad, the Polish and Czechoslovak states carried out grand projects of demographic engineering (which I describe elsewhere), including forced relocations and large-scale “ethnic cleansing,” which resulted in setting the populace of both countries in constant motion.

Among the returnees, Polish and Slovak Jews who survived the war in camps, countryside, monasteries, forests, and in the Soviet Union constituted a significant portion. According to Paul Glikson, at the beginning of January 1945, there were about 10,000 Jews in newly liberated Poland.⁴³ Until June 1945, about 61,000 Jews were registered in Poland, including 13,000 in active military service.⁴⁴ In the provincial and district Jewish committees, the number of registered Jews reached 106,000 in January 1946 and peaked at 240,000 six months later in June 1946.⁴⁵ This sudden increase in numbers resulted from organized repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union in the first half of 1946. By 1948, a total of approximately 175,000 Jews repatriated from the USSR to Poland.⁴⁶

In Slovakia, the number of Jewish migrants was much smaller. As Robert Y. Büchler estimated, about 11,000 Jews survived the war in the territory of Slovakia.⁴⁷ Another 9,000 Slovak Jews returned or were repatriated from Hungary and from camps in Germany, among other places. Finally, approximately 10,000 Jews survived in the

⁴² Ibid., 122-26. Also see Robert Y. Büchler, "Znovuoživenie Židovskej Komunity na Slovensku po Druhej Svetovej Vojne," *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, no. 4 (1998).

⁴³ Paul Glikson, "Jewish Population in the Polish People's Republic, 1944-1972," in *Papers in Jewish Demography* (Jerusalem: 1977), 237-38. Compare to Józef Adelson, "W Polsce Zwanej Ludową," in *Najnowsze Dzieje Żydów w Polsce w Zarysie do 1950 Roku*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993).

⁴⁴ Glikson, "Jewish Population in the Polish People's Republic, 1944-1972."

⁴⁵ Ibid., 239.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁴⁷ Büchler, "Znovuoživenie Židovskej Komunity na Slovensku po Druhej Svetovej Vojne," 67.

Magyar occupied territories, which now returned to Slovakia. In summary, the peak of Jewish returnees in Slovakia reached about 33,000.⁴⁸

What was the journey back home like between the summers of 1944 and 1945, and in the first half of 1946, during the repatriation from the USSR? Between the summers of 1944 and 1945, Jewish returnees used all possible and scarce means of transportation to return home. Although the Allies and withdrawing Germans bombed much of the railroad structure, what remained was invaluable for returnees. Badly overcrowded and terribly slow due to frequent and lengthy stops, trains were nevertheless faster than walking. The Dichters' train journey to Poland, a part of the repatriation from Ukraine, best illustrates the conditions of the railroad system in postwar Eastern Europe. Their trip began late at night one day in December 1944, after spending the entire day waiting for the train to fill up. From Drohobycz (present western Ukraine), they traveled through Sambor, Chyrów, Malhowice, Przemyśl, Radymno, Jarosław, and Przeworsk to Rzeszów (present southeastern Poland).⁴⁹ The entire journey, more than 200 kilometers (124 miles), lasted three nights and three days. Stops lasting for hours; sleeping in a seated position with dozens of other people around; urinating outdoors at train stops (in the freezing cold); and the inevitable shrinking of food and water supplies, all contributed to obvious misery of the journey.

The overwhelming majority of Jewish returnees had no money to buy a ticket and have a seat – a wooden bench. Those without a ticket were allowed to travel on top of the train or in open boxcars. For example, Joseph Kline's trip from Prague to Budapest on a train roof in late spring 1945 was a typical train journey home of a penniless returnee,

⁴⁸ Ibid. Also see data collected in YIVO and JOINT Archives.

⁴⁹ Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga*.

So we all got on a train [on a roof] and we went to Budapest and on the same train we were all traveling with her [one of Kline's traveling companions] husband together and we didn't know that he was on the train. Because we were traveling [on a roof and the husband was inside]...Trains were so packed, there were no scheduled trains. You just stayed at the station, when a train came you got on it. You didn't need any tickets; there were no conductors, there was nothing. There was total havoc ...we were on the roof because there was no room inside...⁵⁰

Similar stories of passengers “traveling on top of the wagons or hanging from the steps...” of overcrowded trains can be multiplied.⁵¹ They all testify to the general disorder of the post-liberation period. If, as Kersten suggested, official statistical data left two to three million migrants unregistered, we are left with the difficult of visualizing image of millions of people moving from one place to another on a daily basis across Eastern Europe. In such a context, the typical life experience in 1944-46 was located not in physical buildings but on roads, on trains, and in train stations.

Some of Dichter's most vivid memories from the beginning of the journey involved images of the train station surrounded by a cordon of soldiers supervising the repatriation process.⁵² Train stations, so often overlooked by historians, were fascinating places of human interaction after liberation. I argue that train stations were the focal spaces of human and ethnic relations immediately after the war. After all, it was there, in crowded stations, where people lived for days before departure and where they slept for nights, having no other place to go after arrival. It was there where survivors found news about relatives, often reuniting with loved ones after years of separation. It was there where aid institutions distributed supplies for returnees, repatriates, and deportees.

⁵⁰ Joseph Kline, interview, August 28, 1984, interview HVT-611, VHS, Fortunoff Archive.

⁵¹ Emery Gregus, *Reclaiming the Past: Memoirs of a Survivor* (Ottawa: private edition, 2001), 150.

⁵² Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga*.

Finally, it was at the train stations that political organizations welcomed travelers with leaflets promoting their political and social programs. Lasman described how, after leaving the Polish Second Army in the summer of 1945, he found himself homeless and spent the first two nights in the train station in Łódź. There, he met a few Jewish boys who informed him where the Jewish committee was and suggested that, instead of going to the committee, he should rather go to the Zionist Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsair office.⁵³

Birenbaum also described the train station in Warszawa as a place of Zionist political agitation,

Activists of various Zionist parties, representatives of kibbutzim, awaited the returnees in train stations where they agitated to join their parties. Shortly after their [the returnees'] leaving a train, they [the activists] told them, that no Jews survived, that everything was devastated and razed to the ground, and various Polish gangs hunted and killed the surviving Jews.⁵⁴

Since a great section of the railroad system was destroyed, returnees could rarely make a complete journey by a single train. Most often the returnees combined all available means of transportation to get back home. They walked, hitchhiked, and took trains – whatever was available at the time. Joseph S. Kalina, a Slovak Jew from Prešov, started his journey home from relatively close, only a hundred miles away, near Banská Bystrica.⁵⁵ “A hungry, lice-ridden, one hundred pound skeleton,” as he described himself, Kalina first walked until exhaustion. Then he stopped at the edge of the road and pointed his thumb eastward,

⁵³ Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*, 53.

⁵⁴ Birenbaum, *Powrót do Ziemi Praojców*, 24. Although the postwar reality was not much better than its Zionist interpretation, the intentionally black version of events served particular Zionist political beliefs and goals, i.e. emigration to Palestine.

⁵⁵ Joseph S. Kalina and Stanley R. Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey*, vol. 9, *Studies in the Shoah* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).

Some rides lasted only a few miles; others took me from one village to another. On foot, I begged for food, never coming up empty...When I came to a town that had train service anywhere east, I got on board and took it as far as it went... At the end of the line I started walking and hitchhiking again. The further east I went, away from the front, the fewer Russian vehicles there were. I hitched rides from farmers and townspeople in their hay wagons and buggies.⁵⁶

Janet Rogowsky had a similar recollection of joining a small group of people riding in a cart drawn by two horses, “During the ten hour trip, we had to stop many times, to feed the horses and relax a while, because our bodies were aching from our long ride on the rough roads.”⁵⁷

Some returnees walked the entire journey home. Peter Cukor, a nine-year-old Hungarian Jew, liberated by the Russians in Strasshof near Vienna, recalled traveling through Slovakia on the way home to Hungary,

So here we [Peter, Peter’s mother, and two other members of his family] were, [after] years of the concentration camps, no food, no clothing, or anything like that. And we’re moving in opposite direction from two armies, you know, two armies are moving west, we are moving east and they already use ... the food, and all the resources of the land and we are trying to survive over there. And it was terrible. First of all it was extremely traumatic to know that as we started walking back ... like the half an hour of walking ...we got ourselves in the middle of bombing...⁵⁸

Caught in the middle of fighting, Cukor’s mother became hysterical over the possibility of being killed after the war was over.⁵⁹ Fortunately, Peter and his family escaped the battlefield safely. Eventually, it took them about two to three days to walk from Vienna

⁵⁶ Ibid., 180.

⁵⁷ Testimony of Janet Rogowsky, Collection of testimonies, Acc.1996.A.431, USHMM.

⁵⁸ Peter Cukor, interview by Dana Kline and Susan Millen, April 16, 1987, interview HVT-838, VHS, Fortunoff Archive.

⁵⁹ Since late fall of 1944, the eastern front had moved rapidly westward making heavy bombings and military operations common in western Slovakia in the spring of 1945.

(Austria) to Bratislava (western Slovakia).⁶⁰ They walked very slowly. Peter's mother had to carry him most of the time since he was too sick and too weak to walk by himself. Peter recalled how, frail herself, she threw out a jar of jam because it was too much for her to carry. To get something to eat, they knocked on the door of Austrian farmhouses. As a rule, the local population never failed to share some food with them.

Kalina also mentioned equally generous Slovak farmers who provided food to all travelers and returnees, "Farmers everywhere [in central Slovakia, between Banská Bystrica and Prešov], despite their circumstances, had great empathy for their displaced countrymen. A few villages even set up outdoor kitchens with produce available until dark."⁶¹ Alice Braun's account, however, differs from Kalina's testimony,

In Nachod, I was liberated by the Russian army but I did not see the Russian army because I was in private homes. You know the Czechs took us, Czechs were marvelous people. They were wonderful, wonderful people. The Czechs, not the Slovaks. The Slovaks were hateful and they are to this day... Czechs were marvelous, they fed us, they gave us clothing, everything. The moment we crossed the border with Slovakia this is what we got: "There is more of you coming back than you left!" ... This is what we got when we came in.⁶²

Both testimonies, as any personal account, are highly impressionistic. However, they should not be easily dismissed as unreliable sources. Although not credible enough to form evidence for sentiments among Slovaks after liberation, they testify to existing hopes and disillusionments among Jewish survivors at the time. On the one hand, Braun and others, having personally suffered antisemitism in Slovakia, translated this

⁶⁰ A distance of sixty-four kilometers (forty miles). Cukor and his family walked more than twenty kilometers (12.4 miles) per day and about 1.6 kilometers (a mile) per hour (in daylight only).

⁶¹ Kalina did not mention to the hospitable farmers that he was Jewish. Joseph S. Kalina and Stanley R. Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).

⁶² Alice Braun, interview by Jaschael Pery, January 23, 1992, interview HVT-1909, VHS, Fortunoff Archive.

experience into a general opinion on every ordinary Slovak. On the other hand, Kalina, who encountered kind and friendly gestures, were eager to think of their observations as true for the entire Slovak population.

Kalina went even further in his narrative, claiming that among all returnees on the road, regardless of their ethnicity, there was “*an esprit*” – a common spirit,

We had much in common: a shared national heritage, hunger, and suffering. War had driven most of them from their homes, dispersed their families, and destroyed loved ones and friends. Conversation was compassionate but not overly inquiring. Where are you from? Where did you end up? Where are you going? People had been through enough; they didn't want to hear any more about travail.⁶³

Leopold Marschak, a Polish journalist who came back to Lublin from Vilnius in December 1944, shared similar experiences. On the way from the airport (he and his wife traveled from the USSR by a small government plane), people stopped them to ask where they were coming from and to shake their hands.⁶⁴ This actual or perceived common spirit among travelers was a significant and unique dimension of the immediate postwar experience. Although elusive and short-lived, the solidarity in suffering beyond ethnic boundaries seemed true to returnees on the road back home. People craved compassion after years of suffering and mistreatment; hence any gesture of sympathy was welcomed with gratitude. The impression of solidarity created a sense of belonging to a large group of people bonded by suffering and oblivious to ethnic differences.

The following accounts, however, render this post-liberation solidarity illusory. For example, Kalina admitted that he avoided mentioning that he was a Jew because “who knew what antisemitic resentments existed among the refugees. Even had I not

⁶³ Kalina and Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey*, 181.

⁶⁴ Leopold Marschak, *Zaraz po Wojnie* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 17.

been afraid to say I was a Jew, I still would have been reluctant to do so. Living as a second-class citizen for so long, my feeling of inferiority was ingrained.”⁶⁵ Likewise, the Dichters did not “announce” their Jewishness to co-passengers on the train, fearing a negative reaction. Dichter recalled how during the trip new passengers greeted everyone with the Catholic “Praise the Lord!” Women sang religious hymns, prayed out loud, and said the rosary. Rarely did someone engage in a dialogue with co-travelers. Dichter remembered one woman from near Tarnopol telling a story of the UPA attacking her village, “They burnt everyone in the church – she said, returning to her rosary.”⁶⁶ Amid similar stories and prayers, nobody bothered the Dichters.

Kalina, the Dichters, and thousands of others were not harassed perhaps because they did not disclose their origins or perhaps because they did not “look” Jewish, or perhaps and simply because nobody cared as co-passengers were overwhelmed by their own discomfort and misery. However, their fear that, having known their background, the passengers would have had reacted differently was not just a matter of personal anxiety. In reality, trains in Poland were often the scenes of brutal attacks against Jewish passengers, especially in 1946.⁶⁷ Murders on trains, known as *akcja pociagowa* (train operation), were instances of postwar violence in which, as the historian David Engel put it, “the primary criterion for selection was simply the fact of being Jewish.”⁶⁸ Marked by unequal emaciation and fearful demeanor, dressed in rags or in striped prisoner clothes,

⁶⁵ Kalina and Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey*.

⁶⁶ Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga*, 97.

⁶⁷ The CKŻP collected dozens of reports on anti-Jewish violence on trains, especially between September and December 1946. See collection of the CKŻP, the Special Commission, RG 15.087 M, USHMM.

⁶⁸ David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 74.

the majority of Jews remained the most visible returnees on the road regardless of their attempts to conceal their origin.

Overall, although trains were particularly dangerous for returning Jews, open roads, trains, and forests remained unsafe for everyone. Everybody feared criminals at large as well as armed and drunken partisans; Jews feared armed nationalists (for example, the NSZ); and women feared Russian soldiers. Birenbaum recalled how, on the way to Warszawa, she and her companions occasionally got a lift from Russian soldiers who then forced them to perform public labor. By nights, girls never let each other stay alone, wary of assault or rape.⁶⁹ Numerous testimonies repeat similar concerns about the nightly “activities” of Russian soldiers. Edith Farber recalled her trip to Bratislava as filled with fear of Soviet soldiers who raped women regardless of age.⁷⁰ Farber noted that the way to survive was to find a man; if there was a man present, they would not touch a girl. Cukor recalled the following pattern on his way to Hungary through Slovakia, “When night came the Russians changed greatly. At night they got drunk, and the only thing they were interested in was sex and they did not care with whom.”⁷¹ Cukor remembered how he and his female companions always tried to find a haystack for a night to hide there and sleep safely. But, as Cukor noted, many women did not escape assault.⁷²

⁶⁹ Birenbaum, *Powrót do Ziemi Praojców*, 7.

⁷⁰ Testimony of Edith Farber, Collection RG 50.002.67, USHMM.

⁷¹ Peter Cukor, interview by Dana Kline and Susan Millen, April 16, 1987, interview HVT-838, VHS, Fortunoff Archive.

⁷² On victims of Soviet rapes, see Atina Grossmann, "Trauma, Memory, and Motherhood: Germans and Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-Nazi Germany, 1945-49," in *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History during the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Return to the Countryside

The word *return* implies that by reentering one's native country, city, town, or village a *returnee* is necessarily returning to something familiar. However, there was nothing more unfamiliar than the landscape returnees saw during their journey and upon arrival. The war left Poland and Slovakia materially destroyed and impoverished. Poland particularly suffered unsurpassed losses during the war. The early material devastation and human casualties were caused by the military operations of the September campaign of 1939. Suppression of the Warszawa ghetto uprising in April and May 1943 left whole quarters of Warszawa burnt and leveled to the ground. The years 1944-45 witnessed the climax (apart from the operation of the six death camps at their peak in 1942 and 1943) of human and material damage. German retaliation, after the Warszawa uprising of 1944, left thousands dead and the entire city in ruins. The Soviet advance at the turn of 1944 and 1945, and German withdrawal, left most of the country's remaining communication system in shambles.⁷³

Each region suffered damage proportional to the intensity and the scale of local military operations and dependent on the particular local political and military strategy. The most devastated was western Poland, where major cities, bridges, and roads were destroyed. Another major location of war damages was Warszawa and its countryside.

⁷³ Half the transportation and communication was destroyed, including cars, locomotives, railway bridges, tracks, and roads. In total, 162,000 buildings in cities and towns and nearly 354,000 farms were destroyed. Twenty-two million acres, or half the arable land of the country, lay fallow; forty-three percent of cultural and art objects were destroyed or stolen; sixty percent of educational and scientific institutions destroyed or closed; and sixty-four percent of the postal, telegraph, and telephone system damaged. Takeover of the Polish industry for the Nazi military effort added to the losses. *Sprawozdanie w Przedmiocie Strat i Szkód Wojennych Polski w Latach 1939-1945*, (Warszawa: Biuro Odszkodowań Wojennych przy Prezydium Rady Ministrów, 1947); Joseph Vincent Yakowicz, *Poland's Postwar Recovery: Economic Reconstruction, Nationalization, and Agrarian Reform in Poland after World War II* (Hicksville: Exposition Press, 1979), 13. Also see Eugenio Reale, *Raporty: Polska 1945-1946*, trans. Pawel Zdziechowski, vol. 164, *Biblioteka Kultury* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1968), 42.

During two uprisings and the subsequent military operations, Warszawa lost more than seventy percent of its residential buildings and eighty percent of its total structure.⁷⁴ In the eastern and southern regions of Poland, bridges, roads, and railroads were devastated; the cities were robbed of the most precious artifacts; and the quarters where Jewish ghettos had been established were burnt down or significantly ruined. Urban centers like Kraków, Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Kielce, and Lublin endured relatively less damage than the cities in central and western Poland.⁷⁵ Kraków – the capital of the Nazi administration in occupied Poland – survived almost intact. Its damage was limited to the Jewish cemeteries, historic monuments, and bridges across the Vistula River.⁷⁶

Slovakia, a Nazi ally, escaped the damaging effects of direct military occupation, thus suffering less human and material losses than Poland. Most of the damage occurred during the years 1944-45 after the Slovak national uprising. Launched in August 1944, the uprising saw heavy fighting concentrated mostly in central Slovakia, near Banská Bystrica, and spreading toward the eastern regions. The counter-offensive and occupation ultimately led to considerable material damage and loss of human life. After the uprising, the Nazi Einsatzgruppen burnt entire villages in retaliation and on suspicion of

⁷⁴ Eighty-five percent of all historic buildings in the city of Warszawa, eighty percent of theaters, and half hospitals, residential houses, and churches were ruined. Hanna Jędruszczak, "Miasta i Przemysł w Okresie Odbudowy," in *Polska Ludowa, 1944-1950: Przemiany Społeczne*, ed. Franciszek Ryszka (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 280-81.

⁷⁵ While the most damaged areas of Warszawa and Wrocław each lost approximately a hundred million cubic meters of residential space, Kraków and Lublin lost "only" approximately six to fifteen million cubic meters each. Ibid.

⁷⁶ While, by and large, the cities fared much worse than villages during the war, the villages in eastern and southern Poland were an exception to the rule. Next to central (near Warszawa) and northern Poland, it was the provinces of Rzeszów, Kielce, Białystok, and Kraków that contained the greatest number of destroyed agricultural farms. Hanna Jędruszczak illustrated affect of military operations on local villages with a case of the countryside seventy kilometers (forty-three miles) north from Kraków. During three days in December 1944, 95,000 people were evacuated from 120 villages, and forced to hide in ruins, stables, wells, and forests without warm clothing and food, while the military operation was destroying their property. Ibid.

collaboration with partisans. Villages like Kremnička and Nemecká were entirely wiped out, losing 747 and 900 residents respectively.

As the historian Eugen Steiner has put it, “most of the towns in Slovakia were badly damaged; ...transport and industry completely disrupted,” widening the gap in economic potential between Slovakia and the Czech lands where “most of the towns, including Prague, and most of the industrial plants remained intact.”⁷⁷ Although the communication and transportation systems suffered considerably in Czechoslovakia, in comparison to Poland the extent of the damage was relatively small.⁷⁸ Considering that most of the damage to the railway tracks occurred in Slovakia, sparing the rest of the country, the railroad system was in better shape in the Czech lands.⁷⁹ Finally, chemical works, oil refineries (most notably the oil refinery and storage facilities in Bratislava), textile industry, and heavy industry suffered severe damage from bombing or general dislocation and shortages of materials.⁸⁰ Overall, Slovakia suffered considerably more damage than the Czech lands but relatively less than Poland.

Material devastation filled the landscape of the two countries to which Jewish survivors returned. Only former residents of a few cities of Kraków, Rzeszów, and Przemyśl and villagers from regions that had escaped direct military operations – northern and southern Poland as well as western and eastern Slovakia – found their places almost intact. Most often, however, the survivors saw ruins upon their arrival. In totally devastated cities, like Warszawa, the chances of seeing a prewar apartment were almost

⁷⁷ Eugen Steiner, *The Slovak Dilemma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 82-3.

⁷⁸ According to the reports of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), in Czechoslovakia in June 1945, “sixty-two percent of locomotives, twenty percent of the goods wagons, and thirty-five percent of the passenger coaches were fully operative.” Michael Kaser and E. A. Radice, ed., *The Economic History of Eastern Europe 1919-1975: Interwar Policy, the War and Reconstruction*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 512.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

nonexistent. Moreover, even if the house was still standing, Jewish survivors were not let in or did not even bother to knock. As I describe in the next chapter, Jews in Poland and Slovakia could rarely repossess their prewar houses. In such cases, survivors usually left their hometowns after a few days. They slept over at an acquaintance's place or in an abandoned, empty house, or elsewhere, planning to go to a big city where Jewish committees organized shelters for homeless survivors. But before departure, survivors wanted to make sure that they looked for any other relatives who might have returned.

Kalina found five members of his immediate family upon the return to his hometown Prešov.⁸¹ Although he failed to repossess his house, like thousands of other Polish and Slovak Jews, finding five members of his immediate family alive was rare in Slovakia and, even more so, in Poland. The following human landscape was more typical,

... Three, almost whole, families survived; the rest were, in general, young orphaned people. Among the young, nobody had an occupation; the older had been tradesmen or craftsmen before the war... As far as plans for the future were concerned, everybody waited for the end of the war to get in touch with relatives overseas and, possibly, leave.⁸²

Thirty Jews came back to Łosice, where Jews constituted sixty percent of the total population before the war ...

Death rates suggest that Polish and Slovak non-Jewish returnees could count on finding their families alive whereas Jewish survivors had less chance, if any, to find a surviving relative. In Poland, nine percent of Poles (2.5 million of approximately thirty-one million) were killed while, of 3.4 million Jews living in Poland before the war, 2.8

⁸¹ Kalina and Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey*, 186.

⁸² Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*, 16.

million or eighty-five percent perished in the Holocaust.⁸³ In most cases, the war did not completely destroy the immediate and extended families of non-Jews. Jewish families, on the other hand, were by and large completely shattered. Only every sixteenth Polish Jew – 200,000 out of more than three million – returned to his or her prewar hometown.

In Slovakia, twenty-two percent (30,000 out of 137,000) of Jewish civilians came back after the liberation.⁸⁴ Thus, statistically, Slovak Jews fared much better than their Polish counterparts. Although only twenty-two percent of Slovak Jews returned, their overall survival rate was much higher. Due to Slovak autonomy in domestic affairs, including handling “the Jewish question,” Jews were safer in Slovakia than in Nazi occupied Poland. About 69,000 or fifty-one percent of the Slovak Jewish population of 1939 was killed in Nazi concentration and death camps.⁸⁵ This percentage rises to seventy-eight percent, if the Jewish population from before 1938 is considered. After the Vienna Arbitration in November 1938 and subsequent Magyar annexation of southern Slovakia, 44,000 Jews found themselves outside of the country of origin. Another 5,000 Slovak Jews emigrated between 1938 and 1940. As for war losses among non-Jewish Slovaks, out of the total non-Jewish population of 3.5 million in Slovakia in 1939, civilian and military deaths of non-Jews amounted to 41,000 or 1.2 percent of the total

⁸³ Józef Marszałek, "Stan Badań Nad Stratami Osobowymi Ludności Żydowskiej Polski Oraz Nad Liczbą Ofiar Obozów Zagłady w Okupowanej Polsce," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, no. 2 (1994). Total population in the Polish territories in 1939 was 35,100,000. The WWII casualties were the following: civilian Polish casualties: 2,000,000 to 2,200,000 (Czesław Łuczak, "Szanse i Trudności Bilansu Demograficznego Polski w Latach 1939-1945," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, no. 2 (1994).); Jewish casualties in the Holocaust: 2,700,000 to 2,900,000 (Marszałek, "Stan Badań Nad Stratami Osobowymi Ludności Żydowskiej Polski Oraz Nad Liczbą Ofiar Obozów Zagłady w Okupowanej Polsce."); other minorities casualties: 1,000,000 (Łuczak, "Szanse i Trudności Bilansu Demograficznego Polski w Latach 1939-1945."); military casualties: 400,000.

⁸⁴ Büchler, "Znovuoživenie Židovskej Komunity na Slovensku po Druhej Svetovej Vojne."

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Number of 69,000 does not include those Slovak Jews, for example, who were murdered in Hungary in 1944.

non-Jewish population.⁸⁶ Overall, Slovakia suffered the loss of 118,000 or 3.3 percent of the total population. Those numbers, however, are relatively small when compared to total Polish and Polish-Jewish casualties reaching approximately six million or seventeen percent of the entire prewar population.⁸⁷

Although statistically more Jewish relatives had a chance to survive the war in Slovakia than in Poland, these calculations have limited relevance to the understanding of postwar human encounters. In both Poland and Slovakia, there were Jewish families in which no one survived. Indeed, very few nuclear families survived intact. No extended Jewish families made it through the war without tremendous losses. This realization that no loved ones survived was one of the most painful experiences of postwar return. Joy of liberation was replaced by an acute sense of loneliness and the awareness that there was nobody left waiting and no home to go back to. Lasman's loneliness in June 1945 could be ascribed to many, particularly Jewish survivors in the moment of liberation: "I had no address in the world, nobody awaited me and I did not know well what to do with myself. For all this, tears streamed in a trickle down my face."⁸⁸

In the absence of loved ones, the postwar homecoming was truly an impossible project.⁸⁹ Kalina reflected the common longings of the majority of survivors when he said, "... I needed to be home with my family. I needed emotional nourishment just as

⁸⁶ See historical demographical data for Slovakia in <http://www.populstat.info/> (accessed June 23, 2008).

⁸⁷ Jerzy Zdzisław Holzer, "Bilans Demograficzny Polski Dla Okresu 1939-1945," *Dzieje Najnowsze* 26, no. 2 (1994); Luczak, "Szanse i Trudności Bilansu Demograficznego Polski w Latach 1939-1945."

⁸⁸ Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*, 51.

⁸⁹ Even if an entire hometown was spared during the war, the place the returnees were coming to was never the same, never frozen in time. Thus cultural anthropologists call homecoming "an impossible project," in which the return to one's home inevitably turns into an illusory dream. Although used in a context of contemporary migrations, Chambers' term of "impossible homecoming" aptly fits into analysis of the social experience in the late 1940s in Eastern Europe. See Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994); Daniel Warner, "Voluntary Repatriation and the Meaning of Return to Home: a Critique of Liberal Mathematics," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 7, no. 2/3 (1994).

much as I required nourishment from food.”⁹⁰ He needed home, understood in Witold Rybczyński’s terms, as “the healing response to all other places and peoples ... [as] security, comfort, certainty.”⁹¹ For Jewish returnees to postwar Poland and Slovakia, home was a yardstick to evaluate their experience. While non-Jewish camp survivors and discharged soldiers had familial homes with mothers and fathers waiting for them, the overwhelming majority of Jewish survivors had no such home in which they could heal. With their houses taken over and families killed, Polish and Slovak Jews found themselves in a state of aggravated homelessness. The conspicuous absence of home in its most material (building) and figurative (family) sense became the greatest disappointment and disruption in the return of Polish and Slovak Jews. Consequently, this dual homelessness led to a trauma and a sense of displacement, which ultimately turned into the alienation of the Jewish returnees from their old hometowns and homelands.⁹²

For some survivors, one way to cope with the death of loved ones was finding out how they had died. There was much talk about who did what to whom during the war, particularly in small villages and towns. Contrary to the common assumption that war activities were a taboo subject, available testimonies suggest that people were inclined to talk about their neighbors within the limits of their communities. Dichter, for example, remembered how after an emotional reunion and a nutritious dinner at his cousin’s in Borysław, the family talked for hours about who had survived and who had not, which

⁹⁰ Kalina and Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey*, 186.

⁹¹ Fran Markowitz, "The Home(s) of Homecomings," in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (New York: Lexington Books, 2004), 23-24. Also see Witold Rybczyński, *Home: a Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking, 1986).

⁹² Anders H. Stefansson, "Homecomings to the Future: from Diasporic Mythographies to Social Projects of Return," in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (New York: Lexington Books, 2004).

neighbor had betrayed and which had not.⁹³ Also, Grynberg recalled that in Dobre people talked about killings of his family. Rumors circulated that "...somebody must have led the Germans to the dugout where [Grynberg's] mother's family had been hiding. Maybe some peasant, maybe a gamekeeper."⁹⁴ Grynberg's mother had no intention to follow up on these stories. By then, she had already accepted her relatives' deaths as something that had been bound to happen. What she could not come to terms with was her husband's death. She knew that a local, not a German, killed her spouse four months before the end of the war. In this case, however, local residents were not willing to tell Mrs. Grynberg the truth. It was one thing to suggest vaguely that murder had been committed and another to betray one of their own. Fifty years after the Second World War, during a conversation with my grandmother on crimes committed in her village (Dębiany near Jędrzejów in Kielce province), she refused to tell me who had killed a small Jewish child in the village during the war. Everybody in the village knew who had committed this crime but nobody would reveal the "secret" to an outsider.

In villages and small towns, where everybody knew almost everything about everybody, the return after liberation inevitably turned into constant renegotiations of the terms of communal coexistence. People knew how their neighbors had behaved during the war; who had collaborated with the Germans, who had gone into the forest, and who had helped or denounced Jews. After the war, villagers judged one another according to their communal hierarchy of values. For them, only collaboration with the Nazis was unacceptable and thus openly condemned. All other types of behavior, although often thought of as repulsive, remained within the limits of acceptability. Action or inaction

⁹³ Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga*, 59-61.

⁹⁴ Grynberg, *The Victory*, 12.

towards their Jewish neighbors belonged to that category. Villagers knew well that denouncing or killing Jews during the war was morally questionable if not repugnant. Yet they were willing to justify anti-Jewish wrongdoing in their community as a part of the inescapable costs of the war. After all, the Jews were doomed in this war and nothing could have been done to reverse their fate, especially when the death penalty and rules of collective responsibility were applied to those who dared to help.

Despite this self-proclaimed absolution, inescapable guilt, on the one hand, and material gain from Jewish property, on the other, left villagers with a sense of unease in the presence of returning survivors.⁹⁵ In my opinion this unease made peasants and townsmen ask the most painful, well-documented question in countless Jewish testimonies: “Are you alive? We thought the Germans killed all of you.” How much easier the return to normalcy would have been for an entire village if none of their Jewish residents had returned and nobody had asked difficult questions. The absence of the Jewish returnees would have spared their neighbors questions about what happened to a Jewish family member who had been hiding in the area and had not been killed by the Nazis; what happened to one’s house, farm, furniture, or money entrusted to a non-Jewish neighbor; and dozens of other concerns. But a handful of Jewish survivors returned and an entire community had to cope with the consequences of their past actions.

A similar dynamic occurred in Slovak villages and towns; Poles were not the only ones who asked the notorious question, “Are you still alive?” Georg Keleti remembered that when he came back to his house in Spišská Nová Ves (Košice region in eastern Slovakia),

⁹⁵ Also argued by Jan T. Gross in, Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

[O]pposite our house was the Slovak arizator [or aryanizer] Mr. Rizman, who together with Mr. Valášek, as Christians, took away one of the biggest fabric stores... Mr. Rizman lost his natural color and began shaking himself, asking me: 'How is it possible that you are here, Ďuri?' They were thinking about what they knew happened in the death camps and thought all Jews were murdered by the Germans. They thought there were no more Slovak Jews alive.⁹⁶

I speculate, however, that the level of guilt in the Polish and Slovak populations regarding the Jews after the war differed due to the character of wartime collaboration. The Slovaks, who participated in the persecution of Jews, had the sanction of the quasi-independent Slovak State, and thus acted "legally." Those Poles, who participated in the persecution of Jews, lacked such sanction, and were collaborating with the occupier. I speculate that this wartime dynamic caused more guilt in Poland than in Slovakia, and thus more hatred toward the Jewish returnees. The absence of death camps in the physical and mental landscape of Slovakia and their strong presence in the lives of Poles, who witnessed genocide "in their own backyards," only added to the sense of responsibility.⁹⁷

In Poland, these unresolved tensions only intensified the mutual distrust and fear immediately after liberation. In the most extreme cases, villagers sought resolution by "getting rid of" a survivor or threatening to do so unless he or she had left the area. Occasionally leaflets were published "ordering" Jews to leave town within a few days.⁹⁸ These tactics were especially effective with women and children, who had no means to protect themselves. I have not found evidence of similar behavior in Slovakia. True, non-Jews often did not let returning Jews back into their houses but, by and large, Slovak

⁹⁶ Testimony of Georg Keleti, Associate Professor of Environmental and Clinical Microbiology at the University of Pittsburgh, Collection of testimonies, Acc.1995.A.564, USHMM.

⁹⁷ John J. Hartman and Jacek Krochmal, *I Remember Every Day: The Fates of the Jews of Przemyśl during World War II* (Przemyśl: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu, 2002).

⁹⁸ Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie: 11 Sierpnia 1945* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000), 35.

Jews succeeded in settling in smaller communities around Slovakia, mostly undisturbed. Besides the smaller guilt-fear factor, it was the absence of civil war that improved the physical safety of Slovak Jews.

Immediately after the liberation of 1945, Poland and Slovakia equally suffered the ubiquitous presence of Red Army soldiers, guerilla groups, and militiamen, which made access to arms and guns dangerously easy. This availability further intensified the general sense of fear and insecurity. In particular, the vicinity of a forest – a major location of guerilla groups – had a great psychological effect on local residents. Both Jews and non-Jews in Poland and Slovakia – regardless of their political allegiances – feared partisans as unpredictable and dangerous. Although politics played an important role in shaping the attitudes of the local inhabitants toward partisans, it could not eradicate their fear. People across ethnic and social lines were simply scared of the consequences of the omnipresent lawlessness and guns in the hands of young, often drunk partisans. Since villages and small towns – in comparison to big cities – were literally (and figuratively) closer to the forests, the general level of insecurity increased proportionally.

Testimonies indicate that Jews were more scared of Polish partisans than of the militia and Soviet soldiers.⁹⁹ Jewish survivors were especially frightened by the wartime antisemitic record of extreme nationalists and the general climate of the Polish underground. So they looked to the Soviet and the government forces for protection – a choice dictated by the absence of other viable alternatives. In fact, the communal and

⁹⁹ In Poland, the majority of non-Jews politically identified themselves with the anti-Soviet guerilla warfare while distrusting the state organized militia. In contrast, Jews in postwar Poland tended to look for allegiance with the militia and the Soviet garrisons rather than the partisan units. In Slovakia, non-Jews and Jews alike supported anti-fascist guerilla and Soviet troops. Of approximately 11,000 of the remaining Jews in Slovakia, 2,000 participated in the Slovak national uprising in August 1944 (roughly fifty percent of survivors eligible and capable of joining the military). The number of partisans varied from 18,000 in August 1944 to 78,000 in September and October 1944.

individual sense of security among Jewish returnees often depended on the presence of the Russian military in the area. As discussed above, for Polish Jews the question “who will liberate us?” and, by the same token, “who will protect us after liberation?” was of secondary importance as long as the liberators and protectors did their job. Meanwhile, Russian soldiers, aware of anti-Soviet sentiment among Poles, were more inclined to socialize with the mainly neutral Jews. In any case, whoever maintained good relations with the Soviets not only enjoyed their armed protection but could also count on extra supplies of meat, fish, sugar, tea, and chocolate – luxuries in postwar Eastern Europe. Overall, however, the behavior of Red Army soldiers increased rather than decreased the general insecurity of the times and added to the perils of return.

In contrast to Poland, Slovakia became a safer place as soon as the guerilla units dissolved. The use of weaponry and encounters with the uniformed stopped being a regular part of everyday life by early summer of 1945. Slovak Jews experienced the perils of civil war only in northeastern Slovakia, in 1947, when Ukrainian guerilla units (*Banderovcy*) crossed the border, escaping from Poland to Austria. Keleti remembered,

We saw many Czechoslovak officers in field uniforms, and we heard distant shootings, like during the war.... During this escape, [Ukrainians] went through remote villages in Slovakia... They began to murder the few Jews who returned after the terrible sufferings to the villages in east[ern] Slovakia...¹⁰⁰

What was the exception for Slovak Jews was a daily reality for Polish Jews. The end of the war in Slovakia was indeed the end of the war for Slovak Jews. In Poland, the end of the war against the Nazis marked the beginning of the domestic war against the Soviets.

¹⁰⁰ Testimony of Georg Keleti, Collection of testimonies, Acc.1995.A.564, USHMM.

Weaponry combined with alcohol was particularly lethal to the security of the Polish street. But alcohol consumption was a huge social problem in both countries. The results of public opinion surveys, conducted in Czechoslovakia in 1946, indicate the extent of the problem and social anxiety surrounding this issue in the postwar period. Eighty-six percent of respondents answered “yes” to the question, “Do you think that the authorities should move against increasing [alcohol] drinking?”¹⁰¹ Only six percent disagreed and eight percent were not sure. Such overwhelming approval for state intervention into the matter not only pointed to a generally high reliance on the state but also proved alcoholism to be a significant disruptor of private and public life, serious enough to warrant state intervention. In almost every testimony from the two countries, there are accounts of excessive drinking of vodka.

Stereotypically, Jews were sober while Poles (and Slovaks) were drunk throughout the centuries. Literary images of Jewish inn owners and Polish drunken peasants permeated the culture and became powerful “truths.” Consequently, drinking vodka turned into one of the most conspicuous ethnic markers in Poland defining Poles as naïve and romantic drunkards and Jews as sober and malicious inducers to drink. While before the war this stereotype of Jewish sobriety probably held true for the majority of Polish Jews, after the war it no longer did.¹⁰² Among the factors contributing to the spread of alcoholism was the traumatic experience of war and incapacity to handle the magnitude of personal loss. Alcohol made it easier to cope with past trauma; it offered moments of oblivion. It became an easy means to escape the past if only momentarily.

¹⁰¹ “Problém Alkoholismu” *Veřejné Mnění. List Čs. Ústavu pro Výzkum Veřejného Mnění* 1, no. 4-5 (1946): 10.

¹⁰² Although Judaism does not prohibit the use of alcohol, the Jewish tradition in Poland (except for Hassidism) indeed created cultural boundaries by keeping Polish Jews away from social alcohol drinking. Assimilation only partially disturbed this process.

Jews were not an exception. Furthermore, the social composition of the surviving Jewish population was the prime factor contributing to the changing general image and actual habits among Jews. Survivors were mostly teenage or young to middle age; rather polonized and more secular than religious; and men rather than women, thus constituting a group statistically most prone to alcohol consumption. Moreover, thousands of the survivors had spent the war in the Soviet Union where alcohol played an important role in the social fabric of everyday life. The average Polish village was probably not more sober than a Russian one after the war. Under the German occupation, farmers across Poland undertook their own illicit distillation of alcohol, a practice which continued after the war.¹⁰³ Consequently, a scene of Jews, Poles, and Russians drinking together (even sharing the same bottle) right after liberation in small towns or villages was neither surprising nor uncommon. An interesting question would be to what extent and how Jewishness, Polishness, and Russianness were expressed during those drinking bouts. Did intoxication render all ethnic lines obsolete and create true camaraderie beyond ethnicity? Or perhaps drunkenness only exacerbated the mutual distrust and sense of otherness? The culture of alcohol consumption in postwar Poland still awaits research.

While drinking was one way to cope with the recent losses, talking about the dead was yet another means to mourn. Of course, reaction to one's experiences and the mode of coping with the trauma was highly individual. Nevertheless, as I mentioned before, silencing the past was not common. Rather, the opposite was true: people did not attempt to escape from talking, recalling, and remembering what had just happened in their lives. Lasman, for example, recalled how eager the Jews from small towns and villages near

¹⁰³ See multiple testimonies in Kersten and Szarota, ed., *Wieś Polska, 1939-1948: Materiały Konkursowe*.

Siedlce were to tell their stories immediately after the war. Lasman even wanted to write all these testimonies down in order to bear witness,

I met survivors, listened to their stories and I thought that these matters should be written down straight away. When we were in hiding we thought that one should bear witness about what had happened. We realized that we were few witnesses of the massacre gone through.¹⁰⁴

These accounts run counter to the frequent historiographical claim that the Shoah remained a taboo subject for decades after the war.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, there was no sustained public debate of the Shoah in the late 1940s in Poland and Slovakia when the process of incorporating these events into collective memory only began. However, the genocide of Jews was not completely silenced. Private conversations and public memorialization of the recent events in Poland and Slovakia prove that there was plenty of discussion on the subject in private and public sphere in the two countries immediately after the war.

Whether expressing or silencing their emotions, most Jewish survivors did not feel “comfortable” in villages and small towns. Their discomfort not only stemmed from lack of physical safety, fear of their neighbors, and proximity to the forests. More importantly, it was homelessness, loneliness, stark visibility, and feelings of displacement that drove former Jewish village residents from their places of birth. In a village of a few hundred or even in a town of a few thousand, their past, their war experiences, their losses – in other words, everything that constituted their Jewishness – were on constant display. Although not inevitably confronted with hostility, Jewish returnees were still too

¹⁰⁴ Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*.

¹⁰⁵ Hasia Diner has recently challenged the argument of Jewish silence and lack of memorialization of the Holocaust in the United States before the 1960s in, “Before the Holocaust: Post-War American Jews Confront Catastrophe” (the 14th Annual David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, March 17, 2004).

traumatized by the war to handle any confrontation, including the peaceful negotiation of communal belonging. Stripped of their families and homes they had little leverage to negotiate successfully their admittance to postwar communal-village life. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of Jewish survivors, in both Poland and Slovakia, moved out from their villages and small towns soon after their return from the war. Rarely did they move directly abroad. Rather, they first relocated to bigger urban centers, where they could expect more institutional help, physical security, and relative anonymity.

Return to the City

In a big city, Jewish survivors from the province did not need to constantly negotiate their belonging to a place. Big cities, like Kraków, Warszawa, and Łódź in Poland, and Bratislava and Košice in Slovakia, offered at least the perception of anonymity in a crowd and thus relative invisibility as a Jew. On a city street, Jewish survivors from villages and towns “disappeared” among thousands of other temporary urban residents on the move – refugees, repatriates, and returnees. Invisibility was not always psychologically helpful for Jewish survivors since it created the acute sense of loneliness. Birenbaum described her arrival in Warszawa as a lonely and gloomy experience,

I stood again on a Warszawa street...No. I didn't find anything here. None of my relatives. Crowd of unfamiliar Poles carried me like a little kernel, needed by no one in this reborn world. Where am I going to turn to? To whom? What did I come here for, what did I survive for? I had such a heavy heart!¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Birenbaum, *Powrót do Ziemi Praojców*.

Anti-Jewish pogroms, haunting the urban centers of Kraków, Kielce, Rzeszów, Topolčany, and Bratislava soon proved how illusory this “invisibility” was. Apart from the illusion of physical safety and anonymity, big cities offered Jewish survivors direct, tangible institutional support that small villages or towns could not match. When Birenbaum wandered around the city, random people told her about the Jewish committee in Warszawa, which registered returnees and offered the aid. So, having no other place to go, Birenbaum took the first steps toward the committee building at 60 Sienna Street.

By and large, it was Jewish organizations and committees in Poland and Slovakia and abroad, which offered material aid and psychological support for Holocaust survivors. The first such aid association, the Organizational Committee of Polish Jews in the USSR (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich w ZSRR), was created in the Soviet Union as early as July 1944.¹⁰⁷ The committee’s main purpose was to help all Polish Jews who were still in the USSR. Its members searched for survivors in Siberia and in the far north; supplied them with food and medication; and organized their return to Poland. A month later, on August 8, 1944, survivors within Poland could expect institutionalized help from the newly established Bureau for Matters Concerning Aid to the Jewish Population of Poland (Referat do Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej) – an autonomous institution within the Polish government.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, due to the overwhelming scale of destruction, subsequent chaos, and a shortage of basic supplies, the bureau and the central authorities were able to provide little help. In response, local self-aid committees mushroomed in urban centers across the country. These Jewish committees served as

¹⁰⁷ Chairman Emil Sommerstein, Deputy Chairmen Leon Finkielsztejn and Bernard Mark, and Secretary Dawid Sfar. See Adelson, "W Polsce Zwanej Ludową," 425.

¹⁰⁸ Chairman Szlomo Hirszenhorn.

contact places (survivors posted their information in committee buildings to find relatives), supplied Jewish returnees with urgently needed clothes, food, and medicines and, in the long run, eased further adaptation to postwar circumstances. On November 4, 1944, the Polish government established the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, CKŻP), which became an umbrella organization for all local Jewish committees and assumed the role of representing Polish Jews in Poland and abroad.¹⁰⁹

In Slovakia, Jewish returnees could not count on any institutional support until the spring of 1945, when Rabbi Armin (Abba) Frieder returned to Bratislava.¹¹⁰ Immediately after the liberation of Bratislava (April 4), Frieder opened the Yeshurun office, initiated cooperation with surviving orthodox representatives, and undertook activities toward, not only the restoration of Jewish communal life in the city but also organization of immediate help for Jewish survivors-returnees.¹¹¹ This aid, however, was limited to Bratislava and its vicinity due to the damage suffered by the transportation system. In order to ease Jewish recovery elsewhere, local self-aid committees similar to those in Poland formed across Slovakia. In September 1945, the Central Union of Jewish Communities in Slovakia (Ústredný sväz židovských náboženských obcí na Slovensku, ÚSŽNO) was established.¹¹² In contrast to the CKŻP, the ÚSŽNO struggled for

¹⁰⁹ Adelson, "W Polsce Zwanej Ludową," 426.

¹¹⁰ Armin (Abba) Frieder (1911-1946) was rabbi of the Neolog (liberal) Jewish community and active Zionist in Nove Mesto nad Vahom in Slovakia from 1938. During the war, Frieder was an active member of the underground resistance movement *Working Group* in Bratislava. After liberation, he was appointed the Chief Rabbi of Slovakia.

¹¹¹ The Yeshurun was the Union of the Slovak Liberal Congregations, formed in 1926. Emanuel Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 232.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 247.

recognition as representative of all Slovak Jews. The orthodox congregations refused to recognize the ÚŠŽNO until 1947.

The CKŻP in Poland, the ÚŠŽNO in Slovakia, and numerous local committees, could not meet all the needs of the Jewish returnees. Resources of the Polish government were insufficient to cover all the necessary expenses whereas the Slovak government refused to grant Jews any special help. Thus, the role of Jewish organizations abroad, in general and Zionist organizations, in particular, was critical.¹¹³ For example, the American JOINT Distribution Committee played a key role in supplying the CKŻP in Poland and the Jewish communities in Slovakia with money, clothes, food, and medicines.¹¹⁴ Other organizations included the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews (Obshchestvo Zdravookhraneniia Evreev, OZE-TOZ), the World Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American ORT Federation (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training), HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the American Federation for Polish Jews, and others. The United Nations Recovery and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) also had its share in the postwar general as well as specifically Jewish economic recovery.

The Jewish survivors in Poland did not welcome foreign Jewish aid without reservations. The response of survivors in Łosice to a letter sent by the Jewish committee in Lublin with a request to register the survivors and to fill in the attached forms, aptly illustrates the ambivalence surrounding American help. The requested paperwork was to

¹¹³ On the Zionist activity in postwar Poland, see Yitzhak Zuckerman and Marian Turski, *Nadmiar Pamięci: Siedem Owych Lat. Wspomnienia 1939-1946* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000); Natalia Aleksion, *Dokąd Dalej? Ruch Syjonistyczny w Polsce 1944-1950* (Warszawa: Trio, 2002); Stefan Grajek and Aleksander Klugman, *Po Wojnie i Co Dalej: Żydzi w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2003). Also see Avinoam J. Patt "Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish DP Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust" (PhD diss., New York University, 2005).

¹¹⁴ As long as the ÚŠŽNO lacked support of the orthodox community, the JOINT circumvented the ÚŠŽNO in aid distribution.

serve as the basis for aid organizations in the United States to estimate and assemble the appropriate aid packages. Lasman remembered that these forms spawned heated discussions and varied reactions in the town. Older Jewish survivors were happy to know that America cared, that it remembered Polish Jewish survivors. The young were more skeptical recalling how their desperate need for help was ignored during the war. Moreover, the questions on the potential need for moral and psychological help struck the readers as ridiculous and detached from reality.

These sons of bitches make fun of us. It's not enough that we hardly saved our necks they still think of us as lunatics. We ourselves are supposed to assess that we need psychiatrist's help...Nobody asked for any moral or, even more so, psychiatrist help. Whoever heard of such a thing? I wrote briefly that I had lost everybody and everything. I was not waiting for help because I was leaving for the army.¹¹⁵

The general public in Eastern Europe has never held psychiatry or psychoanalysis in great esteem, considering psychiatric intervention only a last resort in extreme cases of mental disease. In the context of the immediate end of the war, questions about the potential need for a psychologist were considered insulting since they implied, in the respondent's view, that he or she was diagnosed a "lunatic." For the young and disillusioned survivors of the Holocaust in Łosice, the content and format of the questionnaire, although certainly prepared with the best intentions, was an offensive, naïve, and grossly delayed attempt to help. Here, the abyss between the American and the East European experience of the war – on both the communal and individual level – was conspicuous.

¹¹⁵ Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*, 20-1.

Nevertheless, the majority of respondents, pressed by shortages of almost everything and regardless of their opinion on the questionnaire, requested material aid, food and clothing. During the first months after return, they had no other option. In a special meeting between representatives of the American Jewish Committee and Polish Jewry, the following was said about the situation of Polish Jews in August 1945,

The situation of the Jews in Poland must be described as tragic. There are no families, all are either single survivors of whole families or parts of families. Most of the surviving Jews are young – between the ages of twenty and forty. The children present a special problem. Orthodox Jewry has been almost completely exterminated. Rabbi Kahane estimated the number of surviving orthodox Jews at about 3/4000. Polish Jewry is on the whole a *déclassé* community, without any means. It is no exaggeration to say that the overwhelming majority of the surviving Jewish population lives on Government support, which has risen from 500,000 złoty to 5,000,000 a month. Since a sum of about 200 złoty a day is required per person to satisfy his most urgent and primitive needs, the Government subsidy could hardly suffice to maintain a quarter of the Polish Jews...¹¹⁶

Job opportunities were still limited for Jewish survivors. Some of them did public labor, which paid 300 złoty per month, or engaged in street peddling.¹¹⁷ In February and March 1945, Samuel Kahan (pseudonym Stanisław Lewandowski) wrote that only those who had a food stall made money in post-liberation Warszawa.¹¹⁸ He and his relatives barely made a living, although Kahan had been a co-owner of one of the biggest business firms before the war. After liberation, he peddled cigarettes, matches, and candles, making

¹¹⁶ Discussion “on the situation of Polish Jewry” at the meeting of the representatives of Polish Jews at the World Zionist Conference in England, 7 August 1945, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD, FAD-1, box 92, YIVO.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Also see Jacob Pat and Leo Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947).

¹¹⁸ Testimony of Samuel Kahan, pseudonym Stanisław Lewandowski, 14 March 1945, Collection of testimonies, 302/166, Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warszawa (Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego, hereafter cited as AŻIH).

between thirty-five and 150 zloty a day.¹¹⁹ It was enough to buy lard, onions, potatoes, and coffee, but it was not enough for milk. When a Jewish committee gave Kahan fifteen kilos of bread, he could sell five kilos and use the extra money for more food.¹²⁰ The committee also gave monthly rations of salt, sugar, and jam. A typical diet at the time was dark bread and coffee for breakfast and potato soup for lunch.

Kahan was one of hundreds of Polish Jews who made a living by black marketeering. Both Polish and Slovak Jews participated in black marketeering on a scale which is impossible to assess, but that they did participate there is no doubt. Especially, in postwar Slovakia, the black market was a relatively well documented phenomenon. In the files of the US Embassy in Prague, the following note survived from September 1945, “Major K. [Major Katek] estimated that between thirty and fifty percent of the average family’s food comes from the black market which is largely a city-country proposition with the city folks going to the farms to buy surplus foods and surplus rations tickets.”¹²¹ After the pogrom in Topoľčany in September 1945, one of the leading Jewish figures in Slovakia, Vojtech Winterstein, said,

Jews have to make a living. They have no money, no opportunity to make money, which encroaches upon all Jewish groups. Neither is a Jew allowed to come back to his trade where he would have an opportunity to earn. We do not agree... that a black market should be disallowed (*znemožnený*) among us. It was not we who

¹¹⁹ In May 1945, a loaf of bread cost forty zloty. Memorandum of Solomon Tarshansky to Joseph C. Hyman and Moses A. Leavitt, Collection 45/54, File 737, JOINT Archives.

¹²⁰ Testimony of Samuel Kahan, pseudonym Stanisław Lewandowski, 14 March 1945, Collection of testimonies, 302/166, AŽIH.

¹²¹ Major Katek served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) – a United States intelligence agency formed during the Second World War and the predecessor of the CIA. Confidential memorandum of conversation between Major Katek and A. Rosenson from the State Department, 3 September 1945, Collection of Prague Embassy, RG 84 350/54/13/03, Entry 2378 A, box 4, National Archives, Washington DC (hereafter cited as NA).

put a Jew in the black market, but the conditions that I have talked about. It's not the Jews who create (*robia*) the black market, but the conditions (*pomery*)!"¹²²

Malvina Burstein recounted that, "Life was a misery then. Stores were bombed out, everything destroyed. My sister [who lived in the US] sent me cigarettes after the war which I sold on the black market...."¹²³ For cigarettes, however, turnover was not as high as for food.

Black markets flourished for almost a year after liberation because the Czechoslovak government allowed it to exist, regarding it to be "benevolent" if not necessary.¹²⁴ By 1946, the government saw no more reason for it. Between January and October 1946, the district national committees carried out 22,543 inspections, during which 37,777 cases of "breach of quota delivery regulations" were discovered. The committees tried 63,705 other similar offenses, of which 48,063 were found guilty.¹²⁵ Fines totaling 124 million crowns were imposed. A thousand people were sentenced for the illegal slaughter of cattle and pigs and another 1,000 were sentenced for black market activities between March and September 1948.¹²⁶ Punishments varied from a fine or loss of trade license, to prison sentences of up to a year.

By and large, Jewish participation in the black market economy was a source of anti-Jewish resentment in Poland and Slovakia alike. Anti-Jewish resentment stemmed partly from the belief that Jews were "rarely punished whereas a small-time Slovakian

¹²² Address of Winterstein in Bratislava in response to the pogrom in Topoľčany, September 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, the Strohlietz Institute of Holocaust Studies, Haifa (hereafter cited as SIHS).

¹²³ My interview with Malvina Burstein (92 years old) on September 9, 2005 in her house in Silver Spring, Maryland.

¹²⁴ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

profiteer was very strictly punished.”¹²⁷ In Czechoslovakia, in a survey in 1948, when asked “What, in your opinion, caused resentment against Jews,” thirty percent answered, “They only... profiteer, and live lightly without productive work.”¹²⁸ Other explanations included “selfish greediness,” a privileged position in economic and public life, “jealousy that Jews are rich and doing well,” restitution law, and getting richer and richer while Slovaks get poorer and poorer.¹²⁹

Next to share in the black market, relief from abroad was yet another trigger of anti-Jewish sentiment. In recognition of the issue, the JOINT made attempts to deliver aid to non-Jews although its main purpose was Jewish rehabilitation. Jewish leaders and the Polish government agreed that such aid was “extremely helpful in maintaining good relations between the Jewish and non-Jewish population.”¹³⁰ Hence, the JOINT assisted with cash (a total of 2,600,000 Polish *złoty*) and food and clothing packages to about 200 people, mainly those who had been involved with helping Jews during the war.¹³¹ The JOINT also delivered food supplies to monasteries which had harbored Jewish children during the war as well as to non-Jewish orphanages operating after the war.¹³² During the floods of 1947, the JOINT supplied blankets and food while Jewish orphanages offered food and shelter to more than a hundred non-Jewish children.¹³³ Some medical aid and

¹²⁷ Vyskum 4, otazka 6, “Čo je podľa vašej mienky, u nás príčina odporu proti židom?” PSK S/1948, box 89, SNA.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. I deliberately chose economically based allegations. Also prevalent were accusations of “pretentious behavior and isolationism,” lies, “having everything in their hands,” speaking Magyar and German and not being Slovaks nor Slavs, being “parasites on the nation’s body,” having different faith, being “communist bourgeoisie,” and others.

¹³⁰ Memorandum of the Research Department of the JOINT, prepared by Leon Shapiro, to Henrietta K. Buchman, 22 June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

¹³¹ Annual report of the American Joint Distribution Committee in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹³² “In order to promote good relations between Jewish and non-Jewish children attending public schools, one hundred Christmas packages were placed at the disposal of the children’s homes near Warszawa.” Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

loans were also granted. Overall, the volume of aid to non-Jews was minimal when compared with the total spending of the JOINT in Poland. However, the very attempt was necessary to improve the perceptions of aid for Jews. After all, remarks about Jews faring better than the rest of the population were not isolated (in Slovakia, in particular).

Extending aid to non-Jews at least offered a counterargument.

As in Poland, American aid for Jews antagonized non-Jews in Slovakia. The JOINT – a main Jewish relief organization active in Slovakia after the war – supplied the Jews only. During the pogrom in Topoľčany, “special supplies” (*mimoriadne prídely*) for the Jews in the town were cited as one of the sparks inciting the crowd.¹³⁴ After the pogrom, the commander-in-chief of national security in Bratislava reached deep into the repertoire of emotional imagery when he wrote, “There are frequent cases when Jewish children appear in public with chocolate in their hands, while the rest of children do not have enough bread.”¹³⁵ Generally, the authors of the reports from the pogrom agreed that the apparently common perception that returning Jews were in a better financial shape added to rise of anti-Jewish resentments among people who, by and large, suffered from shortages.¹³⁶ In the memorandum of “the representatives of the public and political life in Topoľčany,” the signatories justified popular anger at the “unjust distribution of the most necessary supplies, favoring one stratum while harming the rest of society.”¹³⁷ The belief

¹³⁴ Address of Winterstein in Bratislava in response to the pogrom in Topoľčany, September 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹³⁵ “*Sú časté prípady, že židovské deti objavia sa na verejnosti s čokoládou v ruke, kým ostatné deti nemajú ani dosť chleba.*” Letter from the commander-in-chief of the NB in Bratislava to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava concerning the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany, 15 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ivan Kamenec, “Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945,” *Studia Historica Nitriensia* 8 (2000).

in the privileged position of Jews was so common that Jewish organizations had to publicly address the issue.¹³⁸

In times of overwhelming shortages, even a small inequality in the distribution of material aid immediately stirred a sense of injustice. In Slovakia, in particular, “the rationing and price control [introduced by the government] was both inadequate and inefficient, for the Government to discourage supplementary feeding.”¹³⁹ Moreover, the government's lack of recognition of Jews as a separate category of war victims led to the refusal of special supplies and unwillingness to explain to the public the Jewish need for foreign relief.¹⁴⁰ Vojtech Winterstein kept explaining that Jews indeed publicly (*verejne*) accepted relief from “world Jewry” (*svetové židovstvo*) only because they were overlooked in the distribution of local supplies; the supplies that they were eligible for.¹⁴¹ Winterstein concluded, “Is it strange that our brothers sent [aid] to us? Which Jew reproached a Slovak that he had received dollars from his brother in America? Blood is no water!”¹⁴²

The Jewish communities in Poland and Slovakia could not afford not to cooperate with American relief organizations since they required millions of dollars to cover all their needs. Caring for the sick alone was a colossal task. Every third survivor in Poland suffered from tuberculosis; many had paralysis of hands and legs. In 1946, ninety percent

¹³⁸ At a public gathering organized by the Organization of Victims of Racial Persecution at the hands of the Fascist Regime in Bratislava (Sdruženie fašistickým režimom rasove prenasledovaných v Bratislave, SRP), on October 7, 1945, the speakers noted that Jewish requests to western organizations for aid were a problem that needed to be addressed. “Slovenskí Židia manifestoali za ČSR” (Slovak Jews demonstrated for the Czechoslovak Republic), *Čas* 140 (1945): 3.

¹³⁹ Report on visit to Czechoslovakia between September 18 and November 29, 1945, prepared by Harry Viteles, 20 December 1945, Collection 45/54, File 202, JOINT Archives.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Address of Winterstein in Bratislava in response to the pogrom in Topoľčany, September 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

of Kraków Jews suffered from ills of heart, stomach, and lungs. Mental disorder plagued Jewish survivors.¹⁴³ Jews in Slovakia were also, by and large, sickly. The proportion of Jews suffering from tuberculosis was exactly the same as in Poland: a third. A doctor from the Jewish hospital in Bratislava as well as “some of the Jewish community leaders of Slovakia” claimed, based on isolated tests, that of 30,000 Slovak Jews, “at least 10,000” still suffered from this illness in June 1946.¹⁴⁴

All these people needed immediate medical aid. In the two countries, Jewish committees and relief organizations set up hospitals, TB sanatoria, and convalescent homes for children. They also funded old people homes and orphanages for homeless children and the elderly, and soup kitchens for the needy. Repatriates from the USSR could count on temporary shelter. In May 1946, at a time when more than 1,000 Jewish repatriates landed in Kraków every month, the Jewish committee in the city organized their arrival as follows,

Repatriates, former residents of Kraków, who get off at the railroad station Kraków-Płaszów are placed temporarily in the PUR barracks near the station, from where they are directed by cars to shelters and barracks of the committee, or to acquaintances and relatives who can guarantee temporary accommodation.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Julian Kwiek, *Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy w Województwie Krakowskim w Latach 1945-1949/50* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1998); Grzegorz Berendt, *Życie Żydowskie w Polsce w Latach 1950-1956: Z Dziejów Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2006).

¹⁴⁴ Confidential report on Czechoslovakia in May and June 1946, prepared by the JOINT Paris office, 30 June 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

¹⁴⁵ On October 7, 1944, the Polish government decreed formation of the State Repatriation Office (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny, PUR) for management of repatriation from the East. Beginning in the fall of 1944, trains commonly called PUR-trains departed daily from the Soviet Union to the Polish cities of Rzeszów, Przemyśl, Warszawa, Kraków, and elsewhere, and further west to the Recovered Territories. Letter from the KWŻ to the CKŻP, 8 May 1946, 303/V/83, AŻIH.

As early as December 1945, there were 2,700 homeless Jews in the city of Kraków, lodged with private families or in the women's section of synagogues.¹⁴⁶ In February 1946, the Jewish committee in Kraków reported that a "catastrophe of homelessness" was imminent with twenty to twenty-five people lodged in a room and still more to come.¹⁴⁷ Between February and August 1946, 8,600 Jewish repatriates registered in the Jewish committee's repatriation department in Kraków.¹⁴⁸ The four shelters were overcrowded and repatriates were in urgent need of food, medication, and clothes.

Conclusion

Jewish repatriates from the USSR were different from other Jewish returnees only in one respect,

In Łódź, Radom, Kraków, and Warszawa, the resident Jews turned out to welcome repatriates and to gape. They came not to stare at rags and hunger ridden faces – any Jew who survived the Nazis inside Poland was familiar enough with these things. They came, instead, to gaze on walking miracles – whole Jewish families, complete with fathers, mothers, and children. In Poland, on liberation day, hardly more than a hundred Jewish families stood intact. But here were Jewish families by the hundreds. Gaunt-faced women rushed at the repatriates to seize and hold their children for a precious minute. Men who were once husbands and fathers wept....The "homecoming" of the Polish Jews was one in name only....¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Report "The Problem of the Homeless in Kraków," December 1945, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 763, JOINT Archives.

¹⁴⁷ Survey conducted by the Jewish committee in Kraków for the CKŻP, February 1946, Collection of the CKŻP, the Department of Statistics, 303/V/490, AŻIH. Also see report of the Jewish committee in Kraków for the CKŻP for the year of 1946, Collection of the CKŻP, 303/IV/74, AŻIH.

¹⁴⁸ Report of the repatriation department of the KWŻ, August 1946, 303/V/84, AŻIH.

¹⁴⁹ Report on "Return to Poland: 140, 000 Polish Jews Come 'Home,'" 18 July 1946, Collection 45/54, File 734, JOINT Archives.

The words *return* and *returnee* falsely imply that “by reentering one’s native country a person is necessarily returning to something familiar.”¹⁵⁰ The return of Jewish survivors after the war proved how wrong this assumption was. There was nothing familiar in the physical and social landscape of postwar Poland and Slovakia. Particularly in Poland, war damage and human losses conspicuously transformed the place. Not only were physical conditions altered but also Jewish returnees came back transformed by suffering, mourning, hunger, exhaustion, constant fear, and humiliation. Because of this dual transformation – of a place and a returnee – the return of Jewish survivors entailed numerous small and large disillusionments among which the most traumatic was dual homelessness: the absence of home in its physical and figurative sense. As I described above, Jewish returnees, by and large, failed to recover their physical homes. Neither did they find their emotional homes – families – intact. Thus the postwar Jewish return as a social project of coming back home failed completely, becoming in fact the story of a homecoming without a home.

Although not all returnees were Jewish, the absolute failure of homecoming was solely a Jewish phenomenon in postwar Poland and Slovakia. There were hundreds of thousands of other returnees who likewise struggled with disillusionment after the war. Poles and Slovaks who returned from forced labor in the Third Reich, from labor and concentration camps in Poland and Slovakia, from the gulag in the Soviet Union, from exile, and from the military had to cope with the loss of their fathers, mothers, and siblings, and their houses in ruins. Ukrainians (eastern Poland), Germans (western Poland), and Hungarians (southern Slovakia) who returned from the camps, the military,

¹⁵⁰ Laura Hammond, "Examining the Discourse of Repatriation: Towards a More Proactive Theory of Return Migration," in *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, ed. Richard Black and Khalid Koser (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 230.

and exile faced particularly harsh reality, including loss of their homes, death of their relatives, and the prospect of expulsion. Yet, no ethnic group other than Jews lost *absolutely everything*, that is, their *entire* immediate and extended families and homes.

In the dramatically changed post-liberation circumstances, this absolute failure of Jewish homecoming greatly affected the social dynamic of the relations between Jews and non-Jews by adding an additional layer to the meaning of Jewishness. Before the Second World War, vibrant Jewish minorities in Poland and Slovakia, ten and three percent of the total population respectively, although often embattled, disadvantaged, and persecuted, were nevertheless a part of their respective societies. With diverse social, religious, economic, and cultural backgrounds, Polish and Slovak Jews inhabited various niches in society at large, both on its periphery and at its center. During the war, the Nazi policies reduced the public meaning of Jewishness to its racial (blood) component; it physically separated Jews from non-Jews and, consequently, remade the former into the ultimate outcasts of society. The “final solution of the Jewish question” not only resulted in the extermination of millions of European Jews but also irreversibly stigmatized its survivors as “ghostly others,” threatening by virtue of their very survival. When the war ended and Jewish “ghosts” were returning home, there was no space left for them in either the mental or the physical landscape. Former non-Jewish neighbors, although struck by their own losses, could nevertheless replace their burnt houses with those left by the Jewish community as well as replace their lost jobs for the ones left by Jews.¹⁵¹ In these circumstances, the return of Jewish survivors after liberation disrupted the new status quo. Moreover, the Jewish returnees’ attempts to reverse the failure of

¹⁵¹ By analogy, Poles in the west of the country mostly filled the residential and occupational spaces left by expelled Germans; Poles in the eastern territories took over after transferred Ukrainians; and Slovaks mostly replaced disadvantaged Hungarians.

homecoming by reclaiming their property and searching for loved ones only exacerbated mutual apprehension.¹⁵²

Therefore, the massive transformations, no matter how traumatic, in social and political conditions could trigger only partial changes in ethnic relations. Rather, it was this disruption of the status quo for non-Jewish *stayees* and the traumatic realization of total homelessness on the part of Jewish returnees that created a new demarcation line between Jews and non-Jews after liberation.¹⁵³ These postwar social processes, aggravated by the recent stigmatization of Jews during the war (which had split and separated people), gave additional meaning to Jewishness, which now came to signify total homelessness combined with threatening ghostliness. These ethnic boundaries, perceived in new ways, led to the deepening of ethnic exclusion and social separation of both Jews and non-Jews. Hostility and social distance became a daily reality accompanying the Jewish return to “no-home.”

In order to explain postwar ethnic conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s, Anders H. Stefansson proposed considering “differing discourses of suffering, material interests, and transformations of identity” as major factors contributing to ethnic postwar splits.¹⁵⁴ He argued that “competing discourses of suffering created extremely powerful cultural stereotypes” which, in turn, formed new lines of separation and hostility.¹⁵⁵ In postwar

¹⁵² See the argument of Jan T. Gross in Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*.

¹⁵³ I borrowed the term *stayee* from Anders H. Stefansson, "Sarajevo Suffering: Homecoming and the Hierarchy of Homeland Hardship," in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, ed. Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson (New York: Lexington Books, 2004). In postwar Poland and Slovakia, the distinction between returnees and *stayees* did not necessarily overlap ethnic lines. Although the majority of Jewish survivors in Poland were returnees, not all non-Jews were *stayees* during the war. As I mentioned before, thousands of residents were moved to the camps, labor, military, and exile. In Slovakia, due to absence of German occupation until August 1944, more Jews survived while staying in their prewar residence.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Polish-Jewish and Slovak-Jewish relations, material interests and revised ethnic categories of Jewishness played a central role in producing postwar hostilities. “Competition in suffering,” or rather the incapacity for mutual recognition, was equally significant in the immediate post-liberation period in Poland. In his novel *Ignorance*, Milan Kundera brilliantly portrayed the obsession of Czech returnees from exile and *stayees* in the country with recognition of their hardships by others, and thus failure to recognize the suffering of others.¹⁵⁶ As in Kundera’s novel, in the first weeks and months after liberation, the majority of Polish Jewish survivors sensed that their non-Jewish neighbors did not “properly” acknowledge their tragedy. Conflicts over the recent past and struggles for recognition of doings and wrongdoings during the war came to occupy a central place in communal life right after liberation. Importantly, these conflicts did not develop exclusively between Jews and non-Jews but also among Jews and non-Jews respectively and separately. Overall, however, indifference and an inability to recognize each other’s losses played a considerable role in widening the existing abyss.

When Stefansson analyzed postwar returns to Bosnia, he emphasized that social relations between returnees (those who left Yugoslavia during the war and returned after the military conflict ended) and *stayees* (those who stayed throughout the war) had been a central and multifaceted element in the experience of homecoming. Bosnian returnees perceived the increased social distance as the central and most “disenchanted” aspect of homecoming.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, in postwar Poland and Slovakia, ethnic exclusion and social separation, as testimonies prove, became a central dilemma for Jewish returnees. Social exclusion led to a profound sense of social alienation manifested in reactions of

¹⁵⁶ Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

¹⁵⁷ Stefansson, "Sarajevo Suffering: Homecoming and the Hierarchy of Homeland Hardship," 69-70.

discontent, displeasure, or dismay. Feelings of being out of place were common among Jewish survivors in their former hometowns, cities, and villages. The homeland became a place of detachment and estrangement where the ability “to reclaim a sense of home” became seriously impaired.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, some decided to stay and attempt to further negotiate the homecoming, overcome alienation, and eventually make a new home. Part of this attempt was restitution of lost property.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 57.

CHAPTER 4
RESTITUTION OF PROPERTY (1944-48)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the most common feature of Jewish “homecoming” was returns to homes and enterprises occupied by somebody else. As Lasman wrote, “...these houses were obviously not vacant and did not wait for their lawful owners....”¹ In small villages, it was usually a neighbor – a familiar face –who occupied a survivor’s house.

On the way I stood near my grandfather’s house. ... I wanted to go into the house, sit down for a while, absorb the weeping of the walls, and watch the reaction of the Poles who lived there now when I reminded them who the previous owners had been, who had built the house and planted the trees, and who had died so frightfully and tragically. I clearly realized how apathetically they would react. After all, they all knew this had been a Jewish town [Ryki].²

In bigger towns and cities, old-time neighbors, total strangers, or state officials took over abandoned apartments, businesses, or tenement houses. Leah Laskowski testified in 1983,

The Red Cross took me on a stretcher to the train, and I was on my way back to my home in Łódź, Poland. When I reached what had once been my home, I found it was no longer mine. A Polish neighbor had moved in and occupied it now. All I

¹ Noach Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), 16.

² Yakov Handshtok, “In the Tracks of the Jewish Life that Disappeared,” in Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *From a Ruined Garden: the Memorial Books of Polish Jewry* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 264.

could find there to remind me of the past – was a single lamp. I remained with the Polish neighbor for a few days...”³

Similar events occurred in Slovakia. Malvina Burstein, born in Trebišov (southeastern Slovakia) in 1913, told me the following story,

After the war, I traveled to see my house. We had a big house. I came back and the woman [their maid before the war who stayed there to take care of the property] hit me. She hit me. She said, ”Why didn’t you die with the rest of the people?” I took the police. I would still want to come to my own house. She hit me again in front of a policeman, and he didn’t do anything. ... I stayed just maybe a month in Trebišov, maybe two, I don’t remember. I didn’t want to stay there. I hated every moment of that. I wanted to leave.⁴

In another interview in October 1995, Burstein implied that she eventually succeeded in getting the maid out of the house. Asked how long she stayed in Trebišov, she answered, “Just till I sold my – I cleared my house, my mother’s house....”⁵ Burstein’s story illuminates the same pattern of Jewish “homecoming” in Slovakia as in Poland after liberation: returning Jews found their prewar possessions taken by Slovak neighbors.

That new owners did not want to relinquish their property to returning Jewish survivors was hardly surprising. For most of them, a new house or a store was a significant improvement in their economic standing, an improvement that the new owners were unwilling to give up. Considering postwar poverty, omnipresent ruins, and shortages, any piece of material property was guarded with utmost caution. Importantly, no authority pressured them to return those acquisitions to previous owners. The Polish

³ Testimony of Leah Laskowski, April 1983, Collection of testimonies, American Gathering Conference Collection, Poland, RG 02.002/20, USHMM.

⁴ Before the war, Malvina Burstein lived in Prievidza before moving to Bratislava where she made hats for a living. For a part of the war, she hid in Prievidza, but in 1942 she managed to escape to Hungary, where the Russians liberated her in the late spring of 1945. I interviewed Mrs. Burstein on September 9, 2005 in her house in Silver Spring, Maryland.

⁵ Interview with Malvina Burstein, 11 October 1995, Collection of testimonies, USHMM.

government was definitely more willing to legislate restitution than its Slovak counterpart. The Polish legislature passed three restitution laws in March and May 1945 and in March 1946, of which all were as generous as similar laws in Western Europe. In contrast, in Czechoslovakia, a restitution law passed relatively late, in May 1946, and met consistent resistance from the Slovak government, which refused to implement it.⁶ Despite this legislative slowdown, proportionally more Jewish property returned to prewar owners in Slovakia than in Poland. Although Poland's legislation was early and impressive, its implementation was mostly non-existent, especially in the Polish countryside. By and large, only a negligible number of houses and enterprises, mostly in Polish cities, were returned to their prewar owners.

This failure had a few reasons. First, local bureaucracy was the single greatest obstacle in implementing Jewish restitution in both Poland and Slovakia. National committees in Slovakia and municipal liquidation offices in Poland made decisions concerning property according to their personal or institutional interests. Under the pretext of public interest and the need for nationalization (Poland and Slovakia) as well as "bad" nationality and the lack of patriotism of Jewish claimants (Slovakia), local apparatchiks halted many restitution cases. Although, at the time, Jewish leaders blamed state officials for being antisemitic, I speculate that antisemitism only rarely played a significant role. Most times, material interests and simple corruption seemed to have governed the behavior of local apparatchiks.

Second, a general trend toward nationalization and the slow degradation of the principle of private property made private property restitution mostly irrelevant for

⁶ In comparison, the French government produced three out of four restitution ordinances between November 1944 and June 1945. Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

governmental policy-makers. As early as 1946, contemporaries in the United States pointed out that “postwar trends toward state-ownerships, and a state controlled economy (the nationalization of industries) notably in Central and Eastern Europe, seriously restricted the extent to which Jewish properties would be returned, while inflationary conditions reduced the value of the funds and securities which were recovered.”⁷

Third, I speculate that guilt and moral obligation – the necessary preconditions for effective legislation and implementation of restitution – were absent from public discourse.⁸ Neither of the two state administrations was driven by guilt or the sense that it owed anything to anyone. In Slovakia, when speaking about the persecution of Slovak Jews during the war, the chairman of the Slovak National Council (SNR), Lettrich, allegedly said,

The Slovak nation never had anything to do with it. The Slovaks demonstrated against the fascist activities of the representatives of Tiso’s regime; they hid Jews and helped them to overcome hardships even at the risk of being persecuted themselves. The Slovak people always sympathized with those who were abused and persecuted.⁹

The Polish government, on the other hand, had no fascist legacy. On the contrary, it praised itself on its consistent fight against fascism, hand in hand with the “brotherly” Soviet Army. Governmental pro-Jewish rhetoric stemmed from political and ideological

⁷ JOINT Weekly Review, 4 October 1946, Collection of the JOINT, File 644 J6 A1, JOINT Archives.

⁸ Elazar Barkan wrote about contemporary examples of restitution as related to the importance of morality in the public sphere. He wrote that “restitution for historical injustices embodies the increasing importance of morality and the growing democratization of political life.” Thus, according to this theory, less democratization and a de-emphasis of the importance of morality hampers restitution. Barkan understands restitution as “the entire spectrum of attempts to rectify historical injustices. Restitution refers to the integrated picture that this mosaic creates and is thus not only a legal category but also a cultural concept.” Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (New York: Norton, 2000), 308.

⁹ Summary of Lettrich’s speech, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD, FAD-1, RG 347.7.1, box 11, YIVO.

considerations and had nothing to do with guilt; hence it lacked sufficient motivation to push effective Jewish restitution on the ground.

Finally and most importantly, I argue that the two governments were apprehensive of full Jewish restitution due to fears of the potential social unrest. Thus, “with a view to avoid social and political conflicts, the governments ... tended to sympathize with citizens who have benefited from the anti-Jewish laws, and now resisted efforts to enforce restitution.”¹⁰ In Slovakia, these were the former Slovak *aryanizers* as well as the newly appointed national managers, administering property which had been abandoned by deported Jews. They constituted a force to be reckoned with. Especially partisans of the Slovak national uprising, who were given national management of property as a reward for their fight against fascism, were now determined to keep their gains. As quoted earlier, officials of both governments were aware that any appearance of alleged “favoring Jews” would stir trouble. Indeed, they quickly realized that the correlation between restitution and anti-Jewish violence should not be underestimated.

Wartime Robbery

Before the restitution, there was robbery. The expropriation of Jews in Poland under Nazi occupation was different from the expropriation of Jews in quasi-independent Slovakia. How the robbery unfolded had a paramount effect on restitution and the relations of Jews with the surrounding population after the war. “Wild” looting of Jewish property seemed to have been more widespread in Poland than in Slovakia during the war. This had less to do with alleged “national disposition” than with the fact that political conditions in the two countries radically differed. First, the very existence of a Slovak

¹⁰ JOINT Weekly Review, 4 October 1946, Collection of the JOINT, File 644 J6 A1, JOINT Archives.

government made a substantial difference. The Tiso regime counted the economic well-being of its citizens – ethnic Slovaks alone – among its primary political considerations. Thanks to policies privileging Slovaks at the expense of everyone else, including Germans, the average Slovak's economic survival was not under constant threat.¹¹ Grossly oversimplifying, Slovaks seemed to be less desperate for material gains than their Polish counterparts, who lived under direct German occupation. The Nazi policy of total exploitation of Poland and the absence of a Polish government left Poles in a state of constant insecurity and anxiety to “arrange” proper means of living. Kazimierz Wyka, a renowned Polish literary critic, brilliantly portrayed the Polish economy under occupation,

It was necessary [for the Germans] somehow to establish relations with the native population. This was achieved through the second fundamental condition: *the rationing system as a social fiction*. The rationing system imposed on the native population was such that no one could manage to survive. Since all trade in agricultural products was forbidden, every German policeman who grabbed the butter out of a peasant woman's basket was acting legally. The Polish population was officially given nothing beyond an insufficient amount of bread. During the war I did not *legally* consume so much as one gram of lard, one drop of milk, one slice of sausage. Yet quite a lot of these foods came my way – and there were millions like me. This fiction must be considered the basis of the economic changes within the General Gouvernement. Even the most complex social-psychological processes are related to it. During the winter of 1939-40, the population under the General Gouvernement faced a simple dilemma: to eat only what was permitted and die of hunger, or – *somehow to make do*. Naturally no one seriously entertained the first alternative, so the only important question was: *how to survive despite the regulations*.¹²

¹¹ Ladislav Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945* (Bratislava: Print-Servis, 1992); Tatjana Tönsmeier, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern European States Allied with Nazi Germany," in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, ed. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther (Berghahn Books, 2007).

¹² Kazimierz Wyka, "The Excluded Economy," in *The Unplanned Society: Poland During and After Communism*, ed. Janine R. Wedel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 25. Original Polish text in Kazimierz Wyka, *Życie na Niby: Pamiętnik po Kłesce* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984).

All behavior, even if outside of conventional morality as known in the time of peace, became normative as long as it secured survival; “economic life was excluded from the realm of social responsibility.”¹³

Second, the sheer amount of movable and immovable property in the two countries differed vastly. In Slovakia, 80,000 or three percent of the total population “vanished” whereas in Poland three million or ten percent did. The absolute quantity and value of looted property was thus much higher in Poland, particularly considering the size of share of the Polish Jewry in the overall economy before the war.¹⁴ There was simply much more to loot in Poland than in Slovakia.

Finally, critical for the character of wartime spoliation was “the relationship between the German Reich and the territories it ruled...”¹⁵ This relationship determined the modes and agencies of expropriation by regulating the share of local population and the central and local administration in the material profits. In wartime Poland, the power framework was radically different from that in Slovakia. While the Slovak government enjoyed relative autonomy to shape its own domestic policy, the Polish government was in exile and the country was under total Nazi occupation. Except for the resistance movement, there was no source of Polish authority in the country. In contrast to Slovakia, no independent Polish authority in occupied Poland had the opportunity to control domestic affairs and supervise expropriations. On the flip side, neither was there an authority which would protect the country’s economy. All the decisions concerning property and economic life were made by German authorities in accordance with their

¹³ Wyka, "The Excluded Economy."

¹⁴ Ten percent in Poland and three percent in Czechoslovakia.

¹⁵ Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther, ed., *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe* (Berghahn Books, 2007).

ideological, political, and economic interests, and by and large without any consideration for the local economy. Germans strictly controlled the takeover of raw material, property of high historic value, large estates, luxurious tenement houses, and others. Also, the *aryanization* of profitable enterprises and plants was managed only by Germans. In villages and small *shtetlekh*, there was not much of sufficient value to tempt the Germans. So they turned a blind eye to the Poles' massive looting of these leftovers. Neither did the Germans object to peasants coming in wagons to remove booty from liquidated ghettos.¹⁶ In contrast, the fascist Slovak State supervised and regulated wartime *aryanization*, leaving limited room for the surrounding population to plunder abandoned property. Usually, as soon as Jews were deported, functionaries of the regime and members of the Hlinka Guard sealed Jewish property for future distribution or auctioning. Notoriously, these two groups stole whatever they could before sealing the apartments but did not let anybody else partake in the booty.

In Poland, German interests varied from region to region. On one hand, the Germans treated western Poland (annexed to the Third Reich) as a subject for total germanization and hence protected it from wild economic devastation. The Nazi administration ensured that no branch of industry, trade, or commerce was in non-German hands, yet they stopped short of deindustrialization of the region.¹⁷ In fact, Herman Göring gave orders for the massive recovery of the local industry and its speedy unification with the economy of Greater Germany.¹⁸ On the other hand, the so-called

¹⁶ Anecdotal. Władysław Bartoszewski's story told by Professor Piotr Wróbel.

¹⁷ Dieter Pohl, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern Europe under German Occupation 1939-42," in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, ed. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther (Berghahn Books, 2007).

¹⁸ On Nazi economic policies in occupied Poland, see Czesław Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*. ed., 2 vols. (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970); Czesław Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo

General Government (Generalna Gubernia, GG) – the area of central and southeastern Poland occupied by the Third Reich – was considered a “dumping ground” populated by *Untermenschen*, a region whose sole economic purpose was to supply agricultural produce for local and German markets.¹⁹ The total economic exploitation of the region stemmed logically from Nazi ideology and the conception of *Ost*, which envisaged the expansion of German “living space” (*Lebensraum*) and the creation of a vast reservoir of cheap and slave labor through military occupation and expropriation, ultimately leading to the extermination of the local population.²⁰

At the beginning of the occupation, the Nazi military administration embarked on an extensive project of confiscation and common theft of all property left by refugees; their property was now considered “abandoned.” In the annexed territories, all private property was registered. In the GG, the Germans proceeded with a plan of meticulous deindustrialization, involving the plundering of raw materials and the devastation of industrial plants.²¹ The stolen industrial goods were then transferred to the Third Reich. After the war, Polish representatives found more than 7,000 train-wagons of Polish stolen goods in Germany and Austria.²² During the first year of the occupation, the Nazi civil administration issued a number of directives aimed at concentrating all valuables in German hands. Bank accounts were frozen, the larger and more luxurious apartments

Poznańskie, 1979); Andrzej Dmitrzak, *Hitlerowskie kontrybucje w okupowanej Polsce, 1939-1945* (Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, 1983).

¹⁹ Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*.

²⁰ Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 535. Czesław Łuczak presented more precise estimates of property confiscated and transported out of Poland during the Nazi occupation. For example, by the beginning of 1942, the Nazi administration confiscated 95,000 freight-cars, 2,600 engines, and seventy-five commercial ships; they took over almost 900,000 agricultural enterprises with a total of eight million hectares; in the annexed territories alone, the administration took over almost a million apartments and 200,000 commercial enterprises; and, finally, ninety percent of the historic art in the GG changed their owners and were in part transported to the Third Reich. Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, 226-56.

were taken over by local German administrators (or transferred to collaborating Poles), and private trade and commerce were forbidden. The entire job market and the system of prices and wages were now controlled by the occupying power. With the extermination of the Polish intelligentsia and the German takeover of all managerial positions, the population was basically pauperized and degraded to manual labor.

Although discriminatory economic legislation affected Jews and non-Jews alike, as violence against Jews worsened, so did damage to their economic status. The story of Kraków Jews clearly illustrates this process of gradual expropriation of Jews in occupied Poland (the GG).²³ On September 8, 1939, the German administration issued instructions to mark all Jewish stores, cafes, restaurants, and enterprises with a Star of David in order to facilitate robbery and discrimination.²⁴ At the end of September 1939, the administration started confiscating Jewish apartments, allocating the more spacious and nicely located ones to German officials and administrators flocking to the city (as well as to well-connected Polish claimants). Owners were usually given two to three hours to leave the premises.²⁵ On November 20, 1939, all Jewish accounts and deposits in bank institutions were frozen. Cash withdrawals were supervised and limited. Robbery of jewelry from random Jews on the street and plundering their houses in search of

²³ Based on Michał Borwicz, *Organizowanie Wściekłości* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ogólnopolskiej Ligi do Walki z Rasizmem, 1947); Arieh L. Bauminger, *The Fighters of the Kraków Ghetto* (Jerusalem: Keter Press Enterprises, 1987); Tadeusz Pankiewicz, *The Kraków Ghetto Pharmacy* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987); Mieczysław Staner, *The Eyewitness* (Kraków: The Author, 1999); Julian Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki z dziennika doktora Twardego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001); Aleksander Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001); Andrzej Chwalba, *Kraków w latach 1939-1945*, vol. 5, *Dzieje Krakowa* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2002); Katarzyna Zimmerer, *Zamordowany świat: losy Żydów w Krakowie 1939-1945* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004); Anna Pióro, *The Kraków Ghetto 1941-1943: A Guide to the Area of the Former Ghetto* (Kraków: The Historical Museum of the City of Kraków, 2005).

²⁴ On November 18, 1939, the chief of the Kraków district issued a directive ordering all Jews to wear a Star of David on the right arm. Disobedience was punished by death, after March 1941 in particular (until the establishment of the ghetto in March 1941, the Nazis limited the punishment to fine and imprisonment).

²⁵ Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie*, 20.

valuables (unannounced blockades of streets and searches of houses) were daily occurrences during the first two years of the war. So were random round-ups and transports to locations of public labor. On December 11, 1939, the administration ceased to pay Jewish pensions, including military and widows' retirement funds.

The Germans forbade Jews (and Poles) to transfer or sell their property, in particular from Jews to non-Jews. On December 15, 1939, General Governor Hans Frank legally established the Trusteeship Agency (Urząd Powierniczy or Treuhandstelle), which was to supervise the takeover and management of enterprises, retail stores, and houses by Germans, Volksdeutsche, and Ukrainians. Czesław Łuczak estimated that the trustees (*treuhänder*) took over about 700 enterprises in Kraków proper and 3,000 enterprises in the entire Kraków district by April 1940.²⁶ In isolated cases, voluntary collaboration between a former owner and a trustee was allowed to maintain production and profits for both parties.²⁷ In the majority of cases, however, trustees brutally confiscated enterprises to extract easy profits. In February 1940, Kraków Jews were obliged to register all their property, which further jeopardized their already fragile ownership. Efforts to hide items with their non-Jewish friends and neighbors were common. In many cases, however, denunciations sent both involved parties to prisons or concentration camp. In the entire GG, the confiscation of enterprises unfolded as follows,

... [O]ne hundred and twelve thousand Jewish-owned businesses, often the smallest microenterprises, fell prey to confiscation; almost 100,000 of them were completely closed down. The approximately 115,000 handicraft businesses in the

²⁶ Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, 235.

²⁷ Oskar Schindler is the most well known example. Schindler was a German businessman – a member of the Nazi Party – who took over a Jewish factory in Kraków (enamelware production) during the *aryanization* process in the fall of 1939. He employed about 1,100 Jewish workers and is believed to have saved them from violence and deportation. At the end of the war, he evacuated all his Jewish employees to Czechoslovakia. In 1967, the Yad Vashem Institute honored him as one of the Righteous among the Nations.

General Government suffered a similar fate. . . . Those Jewish-owned businesses that continued to exist suffered considerable discrimination, with barely any capital available to them and severely limited supplies of raw materials. Businesses that were not considered important for the war effort or that could be easily replaced by their Polish or German counterparts were the first to be hit by confiscation. Jewish commercial firms were partly replaced by German district wholesale firms and partly by Polish and Ukrainian cooperatives, which had begun to gain favor before the war. Local governments and chambers of commerce or chambers of handicrafts supported this *Aryanization* by taking over whole businesses, or at least their equipment and goods. Medium-sized enterprises that were considered irreplaceable were administered by the Trusteeship Agencies, mostly by unqualified or corrupt ethnic Germans.²⁸

For Kraków Jews, the establishment of the ghetto in March 1941 meant final and total pauperization. Three hundred and twenty buildings in a designated part of Kraków were to shelter approximately 15,000 Jews.²⁹ The establishment of the ghetto meant that the non-Jewish inhabitants of the area had to move out from their houses. Some Jews came to an agreement with non-Jews about exchanging apartments. Such arrangements succeeded only rarely since overpopulation of the ghetto did not allow for a single family to occupy an entire apartment. Moreover, the German administration made arbitrary decisions which rarely coincided with private arrangements. Soon, in the face of deportations and rumors of projected annihilation of Polish Jews, the concerns regarding property lost their urgency anyway. Subsequent deportations of the sick, the elderly, women, and children in June and October 1942 and the final liquidation of the ghetto in March 1943 left a handful of properties for the German administrators and the surrounding population.

²⁸ Pohl, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern Europe under German Occupation 1939-42," 72. Dieter Pohl based some of his estimates on Łuczak, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, 235.

²⁹ The number of Jews in the Kraków ghetto fluctuated due to deportations to concentration and death camps. The Nazi authorities adjusted a size of the Kraków ghetto to the changing numbers of its inhabitants.

The Germans played Poles against Jews in the outright robbery that was called property transfer. In Kraków, for example, the German administration allocated Jewish apartments – of no interest to them – to Poles, knowing well enough that they created a potential source of conflict. Borwicz wrote in 1947,

Next to the things that the victims left for storage to their acquaintances, there were so-called “formerly Jewish” (*pożydowskie*) apartments and “formerly Jewish” stores. Let us reiterate and realize: these were the crumbs of crumbs. But Germans did everything to push the population to avail themselves of these goods. In many cities, even before closing the Jews in ghettos, Germans took over apartments of Poles, directing the evicted into “formerly Jewish” apartments. As everywhere and as always, there was no shortage of those who greedily waited for booty left by the victims.³⁰

Borwicz was correct in speaking of “crumbs of crumbs” available to Poles in cities like Kraków or Warszawa. Germans meticulously registered and controlled all property and property transfers in the large cities, allowing only a small portion of booty to go to non-Germans. However, most of the time, Germans were absent from villages and small *shtetlekh* and that is where the local non-Jewish population profited the most from the disappearance of Jews. Let us imagine a small town where sixty percent of the population was Jewish before the war and occupied the center of the town.³¹ Although perhaps only a small minority had valuables, the overwhelming majority had at least a place of

³⁰ Borwicz, *Organizowanie Wściekłości*, 30.

³¹ Michael C. Steinlauf pointed to an often overlooked aspect of Polish occupation of Jewish houses and enterprises after the war, besides obvious economic profit, “Indeed, an important aspect of the Polish postwar demographic transformation was the movement of peasants from villages on the outskirts of *shtetlekh* into their center, to occupy the traditional Jewish quarters surrounding the marketplace.” In Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997). Yoysef Raykh from Bełchatów remembered this transformation as follows: “Here I stand in the marketplace and consider the house which is located right at the corner of Pabyanets Street. Here, a few steps up, was Hershel Plavner’s store. I walk closer and am greeted with a bitter sight: now they sell holy pictures and crucifixes there. I walk through the market and look at the stores of Yoysef-Leybish Grushke, Henekh Adler, Goldshteyn, and others. All of these shops have been taken by the new merchants.” From Kugelmass and Boyarin, ed., *From a Ruined Garden: the Memorial Books of Polish Jewry*.

residence. After the Jews were deported and if the town was not bombed or badly damaged, the non-Jewish population was left with vast opportunities to improve their material status.

Jan T. Gross' account of wartime spoliation by the surrounding Polish population is particularly vivid and troubling. Gross wrote, "Property transfer from Jewish to Polish ownership was marked not only by opportunistic exploitation, but also by outright plunder, associated with mass killings of the Jews by the German occupiers."³² Gross described how the Polish population in the countryside waited for the deportation to end in order to start looting; how Poles murdered Jews to acquire their property; and how burial sites of executed Jews were dug up in search of gold teeth caps.³³ His study finds much corroboration in sources. The files of the Special Commission at the CKŻP describe the following incidents.³⁴ In October 1942, in village Wola Lubecka (southern Poland), Walenty B. took all the belongings of and denounced to the police Regina Mansdorf and her eight-year-old daughter who were hiding in his place.³⁵ Franek Z. from Lubcza (southern Poland) also offered hiding to Salomon Bieler, his wife and son, took their property, and then denounced them to the police.³⁶ Another man denounced a married Jewish couple to the police in the winter of 1944 near Tarnów because they demanded their property back.³⁷ After the liquidation of the ghetto in Tarnów, a local man looked for hiding Jews and denounced them to the Gestapo who, in appreciation of

³² Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006), 40.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40-3.

³⁴ The Special Commission (Komisja Specjalna) was created in May 1946 to organize armed protection of Jews in Poland.

³⁵ Report on the accused in trial proceedings in Tarnów, 16 January 1947, Collection of the CKŻP, the Special Commission, page 68, RG 15.087 M, USHMM.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

his service, shared the “formerly Jewish” property with him.³⁸ All victims of denunciation were shot. Of the ninety-six Poles listed in the files of the Jewish committee in Kraków for denunciation and killings of Jews in the Kraków province during the war, nine were directly motivated by or accompanied robbery of property.³⁹ The remaining cases did not have enough description to judge whether property was the main motivation.

Most of the war spoliation, however, had a more “ordinary” course. Dariusz Stola pointed to black-market trading during the war as one of the channels by which the remaining items of Jewish property ended up in Polish hands.⁴⁰ Most often, however, people just moved into abandoned houses, stores, and farms. Or else they just looted buildings, taking whatever was left without actually taking possession of the premises. How common were such actions? By and large, we are left with speculations at best. Wojciech Lizak estimated that there were about half a million “successors” to Jewish property in Poland in 2004.⁴¹ That would translate into 2.1 percent of the postwar population of twenty-three million. Even having multiplied half a million by five (an average family), as Lizak suggested, we are left with two to three million people who may have been affected by the process.

Slovakia, like Vichy France, Romania, Hungary, and Croatia, was a German ally, experiencing relatively limited Nazi control over its domestic policies. Tatjana Tönsmeier claimed that the expropriation of Jews in Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania

³⁸ List of the accused in trial proceedings in Tarnów, 1947, Collection of the CKŻP, the Special Commission, page 69, RG 15.087 M, USHMM.

³⁹ Reports from district Jewish committees to the Jewish committee in Kraków concerning collaboration with Germans in extermination of Jews during the war, October 1946-January 1947, Collection of the CKŻP, the Special Commission, pages 72-105, RG 15.087 M, USHMM.

⁴⁰ Dariusz Stola, “The Polish Debate on the Holocaust and the Restitution of Property,” in *Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict over Jewish Property in Europe*, ed. Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther (Berghahn Books, 2007).

⁴¹ Lizak’s speculations have limited value since he does not cite any sources for his estimates. Wojciech Lizak, “Z perspektywy ludu,” *Tygodnik powszechny* (7 November 2004).

remained entirely in the realm of domestic affairs.⁴² The three governments carried out expropriation of Jews eagerly since “that was viewed specifically as a ‘social policy,’ taking things from ‘rich Jews’ and handling them over to ‘poor Hungarians’ (Slovaks and Romanians).”⁴³ Tönsmeier attributed this eagerness and sense of “justice” to the intensification of nationalist sentiments, mass political mobilization, and the frustration of young graduates in the interwar period. Young professionals in Slovakia, for example, “had to face competition from Czech professionals who in the early years of the Czechoslovak state were sent to the eastern part of the republic [Slovakia] and still held many of the posts.”⁴⁴ Their frustration and consequent search for “someone to blame” translated into antisemitism. Combined with the predominantly agrarian character of society, the strong Catholic Church, and a weak non-Jewish middle class, the frustration of the elites led to the perception of Jews as the problem to be solved.⁴⁵ Antisemitic policies during the war drew heavily from this atmosphere prevalent in the interwar period and for a while before it.

The expropriation of Jews was thus a domestic approach to an internal problem in Slovakia. Ladislav Lipscher, in his classic study of Jews in the Slovak State, claimed that anti-Jewish measures in wartime Slovakia were motivated primarily by economics and, only secondarily, by ideological concerns.⁴⁶ The elimination of Jews from the economic

⁴² Tönsmeier, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern European States Allied with Nazi Germany," 88. Also see her argument in Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei 1939-1945: Politischer Alltag zwischen Kooperation und Eigensinn* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

⁴³ Tönsmeier, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern European States Allied with Nazi Germany," 90.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 41. The same argument was made by Livia Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jews: A Documentary History*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1961), XLIX-L. Rothkirchen cited high rank German officials who supposedly were “unanimous in their view that in Slovakia it was not ideology that governed the anti-Jewish policy, but greed for property and wealth...”

life of Slovakia enabled the distribution of wealth exclusively among Slovaks.⁴⁷ The amount of wealth was by no means negligible. According to the census of December 1940, Jews, who at the time comprised only three percent of the population, owned assets worth approximately three billion Slovak crowns.⁴⁸ Interestingly, the Slovak government partly succeeded in excluding Germans from the process and, thus, limited their economic influence in Slovakia.⁴⁹ Lipscher quoted the contemporary Slovak press which wrote, “Aryanization which would rely on non-Slovak personnel or funding would conflict with the interests of the state.”⁵⁰

Aryanization of Jewish property – the transfer of property from Jewish to non-Jewish (*Aryan*) hands – started as early as the first months of independence in 1939.⁵¹ The Hlinka Guard presented it as a response to “public unrest” (*nespokojnosť medzi obyvateľstvom*) stirred by delays in the liquidation of Jewish property.⁵² In the spring and summer of 1939, the Slovak government introduced revisions in business licenses and

⁴⁷ Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 43. Also see Tönsmeier, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern European States Allied with Nazi Germany."

⁴⁸ "...of these fourteen percent was landed property and forest, thirty percent houses, twenty-three percent enterprises, and thirty-three percent capital..." See Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jews: A Documentary History*, XIV. Nehemiah Robinson estimated value of Jewish property in Slovakia in 1942 at \$160 million (or 4.5 billion crowns). In entire Czechoslovakia, Jewish wealth amounted to \$415 million when the national wealth of Czechoslovakia reached \$12.8 billion (or 370 billion crowns). The Jewish wealth, thus, made up 3.2 percent of the national wealth, matching the percentage of Jewish population in the country. See Nehemiah Robinson, *Indemnification and Reparations: Jewish Aspects* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the American Jewish Congress and World Jewish Congress, 1944), 67-9; Sidney Jay Zabłudoff, "Estimating Jewish Wealth," in *The Plunder of Jewish Property during the Holocaust: Confronting European History*, ed. Avi Beker (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 58.

⁴⁹ Tönsmeier, "The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern European States Allied with Nazi Germany." Also see Martin Dean, "Slovakia," (working paper, research scholar, the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC, 2005).

⁵⁰ Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 43. *Aryanization* (German *Arisierung*) was a term in the Nazi ideology and praxis which meant expropriation of Jews in occupied territories. In public rhetoric in Slovakia, the term "slovakization" (*slovakizácia*) was also used to describe the process and its effect on the economy.

⁵¹ Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jews: A Documentary History*; Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*; Eduard Nižňanský, *Židovská Komunita na Slovensku Medzi Československou Parlamentnou Demokraciou a Slovenským Štátom v Stredoeurópskom Kontexte* (Prešov: Universum, 1999).

⁵² The state protected approximately 9,600 Jews who were excluded from deportations or detainment due to their role in the economic life of the country. Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 45, 162.

appointed non-Jewish temporary trustees to run large Jewish enterprises.⁵³ In February 1940, the Slovak Assembly issued a new law on land reform guaranteeing the state the right to buy and distribute land among small farmers. Although, theoretically, the law referred to all land in “foreign hands,” in practice it affected Jewish landowners alone.⁵⁴ In June 1940, the First Aryanization Act “regarding Jewish enterprises and Jewish employees” (*o židovských podnikach a židoch zamestnaných*) came into force.⁵⁵ It enabled the revocation of Jewish business licenses and the subsequent liquidation and *aryanization* of their enterprises.⁵⁶ It also authorized “voluntary” *aryanization* based on a purchase agreement at a low price between a former Jewish owner and a Christian claimant (*kresťanski uchádzač*).⁵⁷ These agreements were not new – they had been practiced during the first year of the Slovak State when *aryanization* proceeded at a very slow pace with perhaps a few dozen enterprises *aryanized*.⁵⁸

Elimination of Jewish ownership and Jewish participation in economic life accelerated in September 1940 when the Central Economic Office (Ústredný hospodársky úrad, ÚHÚ) began managing the expropriation of Jews. On September 11, 1940, to simplify and speed up anti-Jewish procedures, the Slovak Assembly authorized the government to issue decrees with the legal force of a statute in all matters concerning Jews. In October 1940, the government issued a decree concerning *aryanization* of

⁵³ Ivan Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), 55.

⁵⁴ A million and a half hectares of land was eligible, of which 100,000 or 6.5 percent belonged to Jews. By 1943, 45,000 hectares of land was distributed of which 44,000 was Jewish. Hence, the land reform disadvantaged Jews alone without solving the problem of land distribution in Slovakia. *Ibid.*, 62-4; Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 85-6.

⁵⁵ The act was valid only for three months, until September 1940, due to persistent critique of its ineffectiveness. Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie*; Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*.

⁵⁶ Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 47-8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie*, 57.

Jewish apartments.⁵⁹ Upon receiving notice, a Jewish owner had two weeks to leave his or her house. The Second Aryanization Act, issued in November 1940, was fundamental to the effective expropriation of Slovak Jews. The act authorized the collective liquidation of Jewish enterprises and the elimination of “voluntary” *aryanization*.⁶⁰ From then on, *aryanization* turned into the compulsory practice of transferring Jewish property to non-Jews appointed by the ÚHÚ without any input from the Jewish owner (formerly appointed temporary trustees were also removed). Appointed *aryanizers* were supposed to, but they rarely did, pay the state a liquidation value. As for the liquidation of enterprises, former owners had fifteen days (from the issuance of a liquidation note) to close down their business – usually small artisanal shops of low value. The majority of these people ended up without any means to support themselves, particularly since they were not allowed to possess any valuables or cash in the first place.⁶¹

Lipscher found that, by the end of 1941, the overwhelming majority of Jewish enterprises were liquidated (9,355) while only 1,888 were *aryanized*.⁶² First, this was due to the substantial difficulty in establishing competent yet “Jewish-free” *Aryan* management. Jews often stayed as specialists and consultants who de facto ran *aryanized* enterprises without drawing profits.⁶³ Liquidation ruled out such arrangements. Second, decisions concerning appointment of *aryanizers* caused conflicts among the authorities competing against one another. Getting access to property required substantial bribing or networking and thus was mostly limited to the affluent and politically well-connected. In

⁵⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁰ Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jews: A Documentary History*; Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 73. Also see Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie*, 102-18.

⁶¹ Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie*, 104-5.

⁶² Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 77. Rothkirchen estimated 10,025 and 2,223 respectively. Rothkirchen, *The Destruction of Slovak Jews: A Documentary History*, XV.

⁶³ For fictional depiction of such arrangements, see Ladislav Grossman, *The Shop on Main Street* (New York, Doubleday, 1970) and Jan Kadar’s Oscar-winning movie under the same title (1965).

1943, state officials mentioned the possibility of allowing “ordinary” people (retired soldiers, among others) to participate in the benefits of *aryanization*. That, however, did not translate into action at the time. The competence of potential *aryanizers* was also a concern since the state economy was at stake. Finally, German residents of Slovakia wanted their share in the property distribution against the will of the Slovak central and local administration. Liquidation, in place of *aryanization*, efficiently solved these problems and also limited the German share in the Slovak wartime economy.⁶⁴

In 1941, the stage was set for the final expropriation of Jews in Slovakia. In September 1941, the Slovak government issued the “Jewish codex” (*Židovský kódex*) which, by defining Jews in racial terms, further aggravated their situation. Deprivation of civil rights left Jews defenseless against economic discrimination. Measures targeting Jewish houses, land, and enterprises only intensified. In October 1941 all Jewish houses and apartments became property of the state.⁶⁵ The resettlement of almost 7,000 Jews from Bratislava to the countryside left hundreds of apartments for redistribution in February 1942. The peak of property seizure came between March and June 1942 during the deportations of Slovak Jews to death camps in Poland.⁶⁶ Between 53,000 and 59,000 deportees left countless items of movable and immovable property. Although the authorities locked and sealed abandoned houses to arrange their “proper” (paid) *aryanization* and to auction valuables, looting became widespread and usually involved the people who carried out and witnessed the deportations (members of the Hlinka

⁶⁴ Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*.

⁶⁵ Kamenec, *Po Stopach Tragedie*, 117.

⁶⁶ On the deportations of Slovak Jews, see Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*; Ivan Kamenec, “The Deportation of Jewish Citizens from Slovakia in 1942,” in *The Tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia 1938-1945: Slovakia and the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question”*, ed. Waclaw Długoborski (Oświęcim, Banská Bystrica: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2002).

Guard). In the end, not much movable property was left to auction. On May 15, 1942, the Slovak Assembly passed a critical law which not only legalized deportations and deprived the deportees of Slovak citizenship but also authorized the government to confiscate all the property (landed and other) they left behind.⁶⁷

By the spring of 1945, about 71,000 Slovak Jews had been deported and their property seized, sold, and distributed by the state. This gave rise to “an army” of profiteers, determined to safeguard their new acquisitions.⁶⁸ In April 1946, Max Gottschalk of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the author of numerous reports from Eastern Europe after the war, estimated that “about seventy percent of the population (in Slovakia) benefited directly or indirectly from the spoliation of the Jews and they certainly had no desire to give back the property to the Jews.”⁶⁹

Restitution in Poland

In his memoir, Lasman claimed that “for now nobody thought of getting their property back.”⁷⁰ His statement was true for the Polish countryside that is villages and small towns. Indeed, in these areas the people who returned preferred to leave without trying to get their houses, workshops, and stores back. Restitution of property in those places was literally a matter of life and death. As Gross powerfully argued, reorganized local communities conceived returning Jewish survivors as a threat to their new material status.⁷¹ Threats and actual killings of Jewish property claimants became a common

⁶⁷ Lipscher, *Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939-1945*, 129-30.

⁶⁸ Deportations from Slovakia resumed in September 1944 transferring another 12,000 Slovak Jews to Auschwitz, Terezín, and Sachsenhausen.

⁶⁹ Report prepared by Max Gottschalk for the AJC on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

⁷⁰ Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski: 1 Sierpnia 1944-30 do Kwietnia 1957*.

⁷¹ Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*.

solution to this “problem.” In small villages and towns, Jews were easy targets; lone individuals without communal or state support to back their claims and to protect them. Abram Berliński in the village of Jastrzębie experienced this personally. He had a mill which he was able to recover in 1945. In April 1945, an armed group broke into his house. Berliński and his two relatives escaped to the forest but unfortunately the relatives were hunted down and killed. The local authorities concluded that the attackers were motivated by ownership of the mill. Soon after, Berliński left the village for good and his property was given to a leaser.⁷² Another example: in March 1947, Maks Holz went to Jarosław (a town in southeastern Poland) to sell his immovable property and never came back. The provincial commissioner wrote two months after his disappearance,

The matter is suspicious since two buyers made a bid to purchase the property of the missing person. One of them is a butcher in Jarosław and the second is a shoemaker in the same locality. From Holz’s words it appeared that the butcher threatened him saying “If you don’t sell me the property, you will regret it.” A middle aged lawyer from Jarosław managed the sale.⁷³

Testimonies indicate that survivors tried and often failed to recover movable property (money, furniture, and jewelry) which they had entrusted to Polish neighbors during the war. It is difficult to estimate how common it was for neighbors to refuse to return valuables. The majority of Jewish survivors, who left an account of their postwar experience in Poland, left the country partly because they encountered this kind of behavior “on every corner” and retained vivid memories of the experience. Those who

⁷² Letter from a starost of Olkusz to the provincial office in Kraków, 19 January 1948, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-1, page 414, APKr.

⁷³ Letter from the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Wrocław province to the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków (Wojewódzki komisarz dla spraw produktywizacji ludności żydowskiej w Krakowie), May 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-1, page 161, APKr.

had less difficulty rebuilding their lives (which may have included recovery of their belongings) stayed and may have never been interviewed nor written a memoir. Their voices are lost. Having said that, a sufficient number of testimonies show that failure of trust between Jewish "entruster" and Polish "trustee" was widespread.

In big cities, Jewish returnees felt safer and hence more eager to struggle for the return of their property. The overall number of Jewish owners who wished to regain their houses and enterprises across Poland was relatively small. First, fewer than ten percent of Polish Jews survived the war. Second, every survivor was not an owner nor did every Jewish owner want to stay and recover his or her property. The percentage of Jewish survivors who planned to stay either in their place of origin, in particular, or in Poland, in general, fluctuated. Third, large-scale domestic migration, repatriation from the USSR, and internal resettlements created circumstances in which property claims became irrelevant, difficult, or impossible at times. For example, a program of resettlement to the western territories, where the majority of Polish Jews ended up after the war, allocated "formerly German" (*poniemiecka*) property to new settlers making the recovery of their former property left in other parts of Poland largely irrelevant. Considering all that, only a very small fraction of survivors, perhaps a few thousand, perhaps less, attempted to go through the pitfalls of restitution.

The July Manifesto of the summer of 1944 read,

Property that Germans robbed from individual citizens, peasants, merchants, artisans, small and medium manufacturers, institutions and the Church will be returned to the lawful owners. German property will be confiscated. ... As economic relations are regulated, the ownership will be restored.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ "Własność, zrabowana przez Niemców poszczególnym obywatelom, chłopom, kupcom, rzemieślnikom, drobnym i średnim przemysłowcom, instytucjom i kościołowi, będzie zwrócona prawowitym właścicielom. Majątki niemieckie zostaną skonfiskowane. Żydom po bestialsku tępiącym przez okupanta zapewniona zostanie odbudowa ich egzystencji oraz prawne i faktyczne równouprawnienie. Majątek narodowy,

Lucjan Dobroszycki, in his article on Jewish restitution in postwar Poland, rightly noticed that it was not “a categorical statement that Jewish prewar property would be restored.”⁷⁵ Two months after the Manifesto, however, the minister of public administration issued a circular which directly addressed property restitution ordering “the return of all confiscated property...taken from all citizens persecuted by the Germans.”⁷⁶ The circular was annulled after three weeks; “the official reason was that restitution required special legislation in the form of decrees ‘which should be thoughtfully considered.’”⁷⁷ Perhaps the Australian Federation for Polish Jews referred to this circular two years later when it claimed that the return of property was “achieved very easily” immediately after the liberation.⁷⁸ The Polish government (the Polish Committee of National Liberation, PKWN) allegedly facilitated the return of property to lawful Jewish owners “through its decisions and through its instructions to administrative officers concerned with these types of cases.”⁷⁹ Even a distant relative of the lawful owner could supposedly regain property without difficulty. It was only later, after the “reorganization of the Judiciary and the taking over by legal courts of all business concerned with recovery of property” that things changed.

skoncentrowany dziś w rękach państwa niemieckiego oraz poszczególnych kapitalistów niemieckich, a więc wielkie przedsiębiorstwa przemysłowe, handlowe, bankowe, transportowe oraz lasy, przejdą pod Tymczasowy Zarząd Państwowy. W miarę regulowania stosunków gospodarczych nastąpi przywrócenie własności.” The July Manifesto, 22 July 1944. Text available in a collection of historical sources, Kozłowski Ryszard and Sziling Jan, ed., *Historia PRL: Wybór Źródeł* (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1978).

⁷⁵ Lucjan Dobroszycki, "The Jewish Community in Poland, 1944-1947: A Discussion on Postwar Restitution," in *She'erit hapletah, 1944-1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle. Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, October 1985*, ed. Israel Gutman and Avital Saf (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 10-1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Internal memorandum of the Australian Federation for Polish Jews concerning Jewish property in Poland, 15 May 1947, Collection of American Federation for Polish Jews, RG 1015, box 4, folder 27, YIVO.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

I can only speculate if indeed there was a period of “easy returns.” The government of the PKWN functioned between July and December 1944, in a period characterized by legislative and administrative chaos, and defined by a sense of urgency, and temporary solutions. The war was not over yet, the Soviet Army had liberated only the eastern borderland of the Polish territory, and the government was only just coming to terms with the totality of the damage caused by the war. In addition, survivors were coming out in very small numbers from hiding and liberated camps in eastern Poland, not yet threatening the new material status quo. In such circumstances, easy and quick returns of individual property may not have been unusual in cities in particular. Later, in January and February 1945, Jewish survivors may have also been able to take over property left by escaping Germans. A Jewish survivor from the city of Łódź reported after his arrival at a DP camp in Germany,

On the day of liberation [January 18, 1945], there were 800 Jews left in the now notorious Łódź ghetto... the original 800 Jews and the newly arrived Jews immediately took over many of the better houses formerly used by the Germans and the great quantities of supplies found there.⁸⁰

Considering the circumstances in the immediate days after liberation, such wild takeovers of German property must have been common among local Jews and non-Jews.

In the summer of 1945, however, when the war was over, the Polish administration more stable and the number of returning survivors much higher, property returns became more problematic. The JOINT reported from Poland in August 1945: “The new economic tendency of the Polish Government is first of all detrimental to our society as it is against, or at least makes difficulties in, getting back the Jewish property

⁸⁰ Copy of letter from Joseph Levine in Germany to Moses A. Leavitt in the New York office of the JOINT, 24 October 1945, Collection of the JOINT, File 736, JOINT Archives.

robbed by the German authorities....”⁸¹ At the meeting of representatives of Polish Jews in England, also in August 1945, restitution in Poland was reported as follows,

Restitution of Jewish property is not so real a prospect as it may appear in theory. Most of the mobile Jewish property had been sold out to peasants or on the black market in the first few years of the German occupation for food to supplement the starvation rations, or rather, the non-existent rations. The remainder of the property was destroyed, burnt, or pillaged in the subsequent “actions” (the terror raids by the SA and their Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian henchmen, which preceded mass expulsion and mass deportation and were usually accompanied by mass slaughter in or outside the ghettos) or in the risings. As to immobile property, all larger landed property, as well as heavier industry plants in the country have either been parceled out by the Government or virtually taken over by the State in this or another form. Besides, the existing antisemitism makes restitution of Jewish property extremely difficult, and sometimes dangerous. Houses in the former Jewish quarters have either been totally destroyed or heavily damaged. They require much repair. Where they are inhabited, the law which keeps in existence pre-war rents reduces their income to next to nothing. It is similarly extremely difficult to carry on litigation in the case of property which has changed many hands...⁸²

The entire postwar legislation on property restitution applied exclusively to abandoned Jewish and German property since these two groups were the largest missing segments of society with the most property left unaccounted for. The “Bierut decrees” (*Dekrety Bieruta*) concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*majątki opuszczone i porzucone*) were supposed to regulate restitution of property.⁸³ In the legal acts from

⁸¹ The Provisional Government of National Unity was in power between June 1945 and February 1947. Short report of the Jewish committee in Kraków, 24 August 1945, Collection of the JOINT, File 736, JOINT Archives.

⁸² Discussion “On the situation of Polish Jewry” at the meeting of the representatives of Polish Jews at the World Zionist Conference in England, 7 August 1945, Collection of the AJC, AJC- FAD, FAD-1, box 92, YIVO.

⁸³ Bolesław Bierut – chairman of the National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa, KRN – a temporary legislature set up by the communists) from 1944 to 1947 and president of Poland from 1947 to 1952. Decree no. 45/1945 concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Dekret z dnia 2 marca 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 2 March 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 9/1945 and law no. 97/1945 concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Ustawa z dnia 6 maja 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 6 May 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 17/1945. Minor changes to law no. 97/1945 passed as law no. 179/1945 on July 23, 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 30/1945. The decree and both laws were annulled on March 8, 1946 in accordance with law

March and May 1945 and March 1946, “abandoned” (*opuszczone*) stood for movable and immovable property which, due to the war, was no longer possessed by the former owner, his lawful successors, or their legal representatives. Additionally, property confiscated by the Germans was considered abandoned. “Left behind” (*porzucone*) included movable and immovable property which belonged to the German state but had not yet been secured under national management, or belonged to German citizens and others who had “fled to the enemy” (*zbiegły do nieprzyjaciela*). Law no. 87 of March 1946 largely emphasized and expanded the section on property “left behind” – now termed “formerly German” (*poniemiecka*).⁸⁴ The March law of 1946 annulled all previous decrees and became the single fundamental legal act concerning restitution in Poland.

The decree pronounced null and void all property agreements made under occupation. Those who acquired property from or on behalf of Germans were considered as acquirers in bad faith and could make no claims to property.⁸⁵ Those who during the war took over abandoned or left behind property as well as those who witnessed such acts were now obliged to report the seizure and profits so gained. Failure to do so would result in imprisonment. The March law of 1946 authorized the establishment of liquidation offices (*urzędy likwidacyjne*) to allocate management of abandoned property. Public and

no. 87/1946 concerning “abandoned and formerly German property.” In turn, law no. 87/1946 was abrogated in 1985. Texts available on the official website of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland at <http://isip.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/index.html> (accessed June 26, 2008).

⁸⁴ Law no. 87/1946 concerning “abandoned and formerly German property” (*Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1946 o majątkach opuszczonych i poniemieckich*), 8 March 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) 1946. Also compare to “Survey of Reconstruction (Laws) in Europe” prepared by the Legal Secretary of the Research Department of the World Jewish Congress (hereafter cited as WJC), British section, Dr. P. Weis, 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-General (hereafter cited as GEN)10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

⁸⁵ “Survey of Reconstruction (Laws) in Europe” prepared by Legal Secretary of the Research Department of the WJC, British section, Dr. P. Weis, 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

social institutions and relief organizations could apply to manage abandoned property.⁸⁶ If, after a period of time (ten years for immovable and five years for movable) property remained “heirless,” the managing institutions (or State Treasury) could acquire ownership by the right of occupation (*zasiedzenie*).⁸⁷ The law also authorized the relevant authorities to distribute “formerly German” property among settlers and repatriates in western Poland.⁸⁸

District courts (*sądy grodzkie*) were authorized to restore ownership.⁸⁹ Some property, however, was by law exempted from restitution. These included property subjected to nationalization or intended for distribution in land reform. In January 1946, the assembly passed the nationalization law “concerning the state takeover of basic branches of national industry” (*przejęcie na własność państwa podstawowych gałęzi gospodarki narodowej*).⁹⁰ The nationalization law authorized confiscation of all “formerly German” industry and enterprises without compensation. The enterprises that would be compensated were the remaining non-German mining, oil and heavy industry, arms, textile, and food industries, and all other businesses which employed (importantly) more than fifty workers.⁹¹ This criterion of fifty employees was to play an important role in restitution proceedings.

Land reform also constituted an important legal backdrop for restitution of Jewish property in postwar Poland. The law from September 1944 (revised in January 1945)

⁸⁶ Law no. 87/1946 concerning “abandoned and formerly German property” (*Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1946 o majątkach opuszczonych i poniemieckich*), 8 March 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) 1946.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Decree concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Dekret z dnia 2 marca 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 2 March 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 9, law no. 45/1945.

⁹⁰ Nationalization law no. 17/1946 “concerning the state takeover of basic branches of national industry” (*Ustawa z dnia 3 stycznia o przejęciu na własność Państwa podstawowych gałęzi gospodarki narodowej*), *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 3/1946.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

authorized distribution of land – enlarging small farms and creating numerous medium-sized self-sufficient farms – by breaking up land estates. All estates larger than a hundred hectares or consisting of more than fifty hectares of arable land, regardless of ownership, were subject to nationalization. The state would also confiscate the landed property of “citizens of the Third Reich, non-Poles (*nie-Polacy*), and Polish citizens of German nationality,” convicts (for betrayal, desertion, evasion of military draft, and aid to occupiers), as well as a large and flexible category of political enemies.⁹² Confiscation was to take place “without delay (*bezwłocznie*), without compensation, and in its entirety.”⁹³ For Jews as for everyone else, laws on nationalization and land reform meant that if they had owned agricultural land over fifty hectares they would lose it without compensation.⁹⁴ If they had owned enterprises which employed more than fifty workers they would also lose those but with compensation “based upon principles yet to be worked out.”⁹⁵ The properties that did not fit the criteria could be, at least in theory, the subject of individual restitution.

Those who had lost their property in the war and had not yet repossessed it could file their claims in court. The local court would hear the main and additional claimants as

⁹² Decree no. 13/1945 concerning land reform (*Obwieszczenie Ministra Rolnictwa i Reform Rolnych z dnia 18 stycznia 1945 w sprawie ogłoszenia jednolitego tekstu dekretu Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 6 września 1944 o przeprowadzeniu reformy rolnej*), 18 January 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 3/1945. Text is available on official website of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland at <http://isip.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/index.html> (accessed June 26, 2008).

⁹³ *Ibid.* The state would establish national management on confiscated property. The management had to secure the property, record all items, and force the former owner out within three days. For that, special land reform commissions (*komisje reformy rolnej*) were established across the country. The same commissions managed the distribution of confiscated property. They made up lists of the properties eligible for land distribution. One can only imagine how arbitrary these lists were. Again, people sentenced for any crimes mentioned above were formally excluded from the benefits of the reform. Participants of the war – soldiers, invalids, and partisans – were privileged. Land, however, was not given for free. Prices were fixed by the average crop-value of the land and then paid off in ten to twenty years following a down-payment of ten percent.

⁹⁴ Annual JOINT report on Poland, 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

well as the regional liquidation office which had administered the property since liberation.⁹⁶ “Restoration of ownership” (*przywrócenie posiadania majątków*), however, meant only the return of physical property without any legal title (*prawo własności*).⁹⁷ In other words, a claimant would obtain a provisional title and actual possession of the property but could request a full title only after ten years of occupation.⁹⁸ If, however, a closer relative emerged and filed claims during these ten years, the original claimant would need to relinquish the property.

The original deadline for filing claims was December 31, 1947, but, after several interventions from the CKŻP, it was moved to December 31, 1948.⁹⁹ The deadline for property claims gained urgency after 1947 but it had a limited effect on those who stayed in Poland as they usually went through every possible channel to regain their property before 1947. Émigrés were the ones who rarely managed to claim their property before departure and found the deadline problematic. In Czechoslovakia, heirless property became the subject of controversy in 1947 when the state withdrew from earlier pledges

⁹⁶ If the restituted property was being rented or leased, the claimant would need to wait until the rent or lease period expired (while continuing to receive the payments).

⁹⁷ Decree no. 45/1945 concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Dekret z dnia 2 marca 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 2 March 1945, and law no. 97/1945 concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Ustawa z dnia 6 maja 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 6 May 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 9 and no. 17/1945.

⁹⁸ Ten to twenty years later, when owners could close legal matters, the full legal title lost its potency since the sanctity of private property had already been abolished. More importantly, the owners had already left Poland or passed away before being able to clarify the legality of their property. Today Poland's problems with restoration of Jewish property stem partly from the mess in mortgage registers from the late 1940s. Stola, “The Polish Debate on the Holocaust and the Restitution of Property.” Also see law no. 97/1945 concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Ustawa z dnia 6 maja 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 6 May 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 17/1945.

⁹⁹ Correspondence and published articles on filing property claims in Poland, March -November 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO. Also see decree no. 402/1947 concerning extension of deadline for “heirless property” claims, 28 October 1947, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 66/1947. Text is available at <http://isip.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/index.html> (accessed June 26, 2008).

to use unclaimed property to aid Jews in the country.¹⁰⁰ In Poland, no such promises were made except for article XII of the March decree, which authorized the government to transfer unclaimed (heirless) property to, among others, relief organizations for “groups of population suffering *more than average persecution* at the hands of the Germans [my emphasis].”¹⁰¹

If a former owner was dead or missing, only immediate family (children, parents, grandparents, siblings, and spouses) could inherit the property without regular inheritance procedures (without need for probate).¹⁰² The March decree stated that “the restoration of property can be demanded by [owner’s] relatives in straight line (descending and ascending, and also children out of wedlock) and brothers and sisters as well as a spouse ...”¹⁰³ Thus, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, and cousins were all excluded from the right of possession. They could lodge a claim on property only after obtaining a court confirmation of their hereditary rights (after December 31, 1949 distant relatives lost all the rights of heirs).¹⁰⁴ Legal advisors to the JOINT and to the CKŻP in Warszawa said that “it was practically impossible to win restitution cases if questions of inheritance were

¹⁰⁰ Elazar Barkan noted that Jewish organizations in Germany (the Council for the Protection of Rights and Interests of Jews from Germany) and the US (the World Jewish Congress) after the war introduced the novel idea of national claims in restitution demands: “As World War II was winding down, the national claim for reparation emerged as a dual demand: first, that the Jewish community as a whole be considered the primary victim and, by moral imperative, the rightful beneficiary of compensation for confiscated heirless and communal Jewish property; and second, that restitution be directed toward the building of a Jewish state. This formulation constructed a fundamental connection between all Jews and Zionist ideology, thereby creating a modern national Jewish identity that had not existed previously.” Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*.

¹⁰¹ Law no. 87/1946 concerning “abandoned and formerly German property” (*Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1946 o majątkach opuszczonych i poniemieckich*), 8 March 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) 1946.

¹⁰² Stola, “The Polish Debate on the Holocaust and the Restitution of Property,” 244.

¹⁰³ Decree no. 45/1945 concerning “abandoned and left behind property” (*Dekret z dnia 2 marca 1945 o majątkach opuszczonych i porzuconych*), 2 March 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 9/1945.

¹⁰⁴ Memorandum on property rights, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

involved...No restitution claims should be made unless the claims are made by persons up to the fourth degree.”¹⁰⁵

Stola found that the restrictions on inheritance had been thought out specifically with Jewish property in mind. Considering the low survival rate of Jewish owners and their immediate families, the state administration had an opportunity to take over most Jewish property as “abandoned.”¹⁰⁶ At the same time, proponents of the restrictions feared “enormous wealth being concentrated in a few hands...” if the few survivors regained their prewar property. They thought that such an outcome would “first be unjust and economically unproductive and, second, [would] cause a rise in antisemitism.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the Jewish legal advisors, quoted earlier, confirmed that,

A very ticklish political question arises with respect to Jewish property in Poland. It should be borne in mind that in pre-war Poland, the Jews owned over thirty percent [should be ten percent] of all property in Poland. If, of course, all such property was restituted, either to individual Jews or to a successor organization, Jews would be the largest property holders other than the state....¹⁰⁸

Dobroszycki also pointed to the government’s fear that distant relatives, perhaps citizens of other countries, would claim rights to abandoned property. He quoted the Polish

¹⁰⁵ Memorandum “Handling of Individual Claims in Poland,” prepared by Kobriner and Ludwig Gutmacher, 4 April 1948, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Stola, “The Polish Debate on the Holocaust and the Restitution of Property.”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum “Handling of Individual Claims in Poland,” prepared by Kobriner and Ludwig Gutmacher, 4 April 1948, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives. Poland’s wealth was estimated at nineteen to twenty-two billion dollars in gold in the late 1930s and the Jewish ownership did not surpass ten percent of all property in Poland. After the war, the chairman of the department of compensations at the World Jewish Congress, Nehemiah Robinson, calculated Jewish share of national wealth in prewar Poland at \$2.2 billion, or \$700 per capita. Later calculations placed that share at two to three billion dollars for Jewish assets and \$700- \$900 per capita. Robinson, *Indemnification and Reparations: Jewish Aspects*; Dobroszycki, “The Jewish Community in Poland, 1944-1947: A Discussion on Postwar Restitution,” 2; Zabludoff, “Estimating Jewish Wealth.”

minister of foreign affairs, who supposedly said, “We will not permit some foreign Jews, for instance Argentinean Jews, to inherit property in Poland.”¹⁰⁹

A contemporary observer, a correspondent for the American Jewish Committee, characterized the Polish restitution law as follows,

While it [the law] leaves a wide opening for the nationalization of more substantial industrial property and for the retention of properties of special importance to the state, *on paper it is as generous to the surviving victims of Nazism as most restitution laws in Eastern Europe* – at least insofar as small and middle-sized property is concerned. The law provides for the return of communal property to existing Jewish communities and the use of the property of Nazi collaborators for the relief of victims of Nazism. On the other hand, the law fails to provide for heirless property and the property of the many extinguished Jewish communities and institutions [my emphasis].¹¹⁰

Undoubtedly, the Polish restitution law was as generous on paper as it could have been at the time in an East European country. Policies of nationalization and redistribution of land swept Eastern Europe, gradually undermining the sanctity of private property which was to be rendered irrelevant for the system in-the-making. That there was the legal possibility of restitution was in itself a sign of generosity.

As generous as it was, was it ever implemented? The obligation to report the takeover of property remained obviously on paper. The threat of penalty may have caused little anxiety at best among those who had occupied “formerly Jewish” houses. Yet it is hard to imagine that a peasant or a small town artisan would voluntarily go to a local official and say, “*I took this house. What should I do now?*” Admittedly, however, restitution law opened more opportunities for city dwellers than for villagers. In cities, with little or no damage (like Kraków), survivors had a better chance to recover their

¹⁰⁹ Dobroszycki, “The Jewish Community in Poland, 1944-1947: A Discussion on Postwar Restitution.”

¹¹⁰ Report on restitution of property prepared for the AJC Committee on Peace Problems, 23-24 January 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 276, YIVO.

property in the immediate weeks after liberation. Non-Jewish residents of these cities were less hungry for “a roof over their heads” leaving more houses empty. Also some tenement houses taken over by Germans were now left and could, at least theoretically, return to their rightful owners. All that, however, must be understood in relative terms and in comparison to villages and small towns where restitution was almost impossible. It should be noted that the better chances of regaining property in a city did not automatically translate into possession. Also, intact cities like Kraków inevitably became overcrowded when thousands of repatriates and survivors flowed into the city from the countryside and abroad looking for a shelter.

Overall, until the pogroms broke out, Jewish survivors in cities had a greater sense of security, knowing that there was a network of assistance (Jewish committees) which offered material support and (the illusion of) physical protection. Anonymity in numbers also helped to build up the courage required to enter one’s home and repossess it. Even in completely ruined cities like Warszawa, restoration of ownership was not unthought-of. For example, an apartment house at the corner of Jagiellońska and Zygmuntowska Street survived the war and now was managed by a brother of the prewar Jewish owner.¹¹¹ The central government offered to purchase the house in April 1946.¹¹² Understandably, however, it was an exception, not the rule.

What was a practical way to recover one’s property? The luckiest prewar owners could repossess their belongings immediately upon return if a house or an enterprise had not yet been taken over by a private person or a liquidation office. He or she would not

¹¹¹ Correspondence between Jacob Kaliski and Moses A. Leavitt (JOINT New York) concerning property transfer, April-September 1946, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 795, JOINT Archives.

¹¹² The Presidium of the Ministers’ Council (Prezydium Rady Ministrów) was willing to legalize any transfer in which “a person or an institution that needs zlotys in Poland” would receive the amount for the house and pay its equivalent to the owner in dollars. Ibid.

need to be recognized by the court, pay hereditary taxes, or be inscribed as a legal owner. Such stories, however, were rare and mostly limited to large cities. More frequently, the property had been occupied by the time its original owner reappeared. If it was a local liquidation office which had assigned management of the property to a public institution, the owner had to file a claim to the liquidation office and wait for the final decision on restitution. If a private person occupied the property, the owner had to go through court proceedings to prove primary right of ownership. The former (liquidation office) was considered to be an easier way than the latter (court proceedings).

By and large, municipalities were the single most affluent administrators of abandoned, or not yet claimed, property immediately after the war. They assigned management of such property with the consent of a district liquidation office. Gross illustrated how liquidation offices assigned abandoned property, in particular, prewar Jewish communal property. The described model of operation applied to communal as well as individual property:

In principle, the local official who made the determination of how to assign “abandoned” property (a county prefect or a town’s mayor) had to consult with the Ministry of Public Administration. He...would write for permission either directly, or through the Trusteeship Bureau of the Main Liquidation Office... Now, the reality on the ground was much more layered and confusing. What used to be a synagogue or a Jewish community building might have been put to different use during the German occupation – as a warehouse for the local agricultural cooperative, for example, or a firehouse, or whatever – and if it suited everybody around all would remain as before. Or else, powerful actors on the scene could elbow their way into a choice piece of “ownerless” real estate no matter what....¹¹³

For example, the city of Kraków used all the synagogues, except for one, for warehouses and workshops until the beginning of 1947. Only in February 1947, after a meeting

¹¹³ Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, 48-9.

between representatives of Kraków Jews and the provincial authorities, did the latter agree to return all the synagogues to the Jewish committee for use but reserved the right to control the preservation of their historic value.¹¹⁴ The provincial authorities also implied that the Jewish organizations “could have” recovered these synagogues before but never did, being preoccupied with other problems and lacking the funds needed for repairs.¹¹⁵

Similar to the synagogues, all the prewar Jewish school-buildings in Kraków were now taken over by the city and reestablished as public schools.¹¹⁶ After the war, there were only two Jewish schools left: an elementary school and a gymnasium (junior high school). The elementary school was located in a building at Estera Street – the building “old, confined, and dark, and completely not suited for educational purposes; besides the street was full of prostitutes, the surrounding was heavily antisemitic.”¹¹⁷ Also the building of one of the two prewar Jewish hospitals was now made into a public hospital. The city also took over all the buildings which belonged to various Jewish associations and organizations before the war.¹¹⁸

The Association of Jewish Artisans (Stowarzyszenie Żydowskich Rzemieślników), for example, struggled to take actual possession of their building which was now used for the municipal department of social welfare, and housed *Caritas* (a

¹¹⁴ Protocol from the meeting with the representatives of Kraków Jews and the provincial authorities in Kraków, 19 February 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-12, pages 11-2, APKr.

¹¹⁵ Report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 145, APKr.

¹¹⁶ Letter from the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków to the commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Poland, Warszawa, 25 February 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-12, pages 25-6, APKr.

¹¹⁷ Report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 145, APKr.

¹¹⁸ For example, *Bet Lechem* at Skawińska Street. See report on the activity of the commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 149, APKr.

welfare organization), nuns running an educational institution for girls.¹¹⁹ The Association had official decisions on restitution of the building from the district court, approved by the appropriate municipal department. The only problem was that none of the institutions occupying the building were willing to leave. The Association needed the place to provide a network of support and to organize workshops for its 200 members. At the same time, the Association was reluctant to use force for obvious reasons. They rightly feared a reaction of the surrounding population of Kraków if “*the Jews kicked out*” nuns and welfare organizations.¹²⁰ So, the Association sent petitions to the president of Kraków, the presidium of the ministers’ council in Warszawa, and the prime minister of Poland. It also used personal pressures and influences, asking, for example, the provincial governmental commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków to intervene on their behalf.¹²¹

A fascinating document survives listing the interventions of the Kraków governmental commissioner on behalf of local Jews.¹²² A great number of interventions concerned restitution of property, mostly enterprises. Some interventions failed.

¹¹⁹ Report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 147, APKr.

¹²⁰ “Toward these institutions we do not want to use coercion, considering that our action would produce negative sentiments toward the Jewish population...” Letter from the Association of Jewish Artisans and Petit Industrialists *Szomer Umonim* in Kraków to the Presidium of the Ministers’ Council in Warszawa, 2 September 1947, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹²¹ Report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 147, APKr. On July 25, 1946, the Polish government established an office of the government commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Poland in order to supervise and facilitate economic rehabilitation of Jews in Poland. The government originally appointed six provincial commissioners in major cities of Poland. In practice, the commissioners acted as intermediaries between the government and local Jewish committees, particularly in economic matters. See collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹²² “Interventions and complaints” on behalf of Kraków Jews, the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, undated, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-13, pages 19-24, APKr.

Maksymilian Reder, for example, unsuccessfully struggled to regain his café in the very center of Kraków. During the war, the café was taken over by German *Treuhänder*. After the Germans left the city, a certain Skotnicki grabbed the place. Eventually, despite the commissioner's interventions, the city council decided to allocate the rooms to the Cooperative Bank (before the court's ruling on restitution of Reder's property).¹²³ In another case, Ichud made an agreement over an enterprise which had been "taken by force" (*przemocą zajęty*) by one of Kraków's cooperatives. Decisions in four other cases of individual restitution were supposedly pending. The commissioner claimed that the following six interventions ended "with a positive result": Gutman's factory of bricks and concrete, Wolf's roofing paper factory *Wawel*, Goldberger's factory *Viennese* of transmission belts (*pasów transmisyjnych*), Steinhaus' fur-processing enterprise *Krawar*, *Firm L. Baranowski* of chemicals belonging to Federgruen, and Zerykier's brick-yard. However, the report of the commissioner's activity from 1947 stated that only one case – the completely devastated concrete Gutman's factory – ended in full restitution.¹²⁴ Apparently, the commissioner's "interventions" were limited to a presentation of the office's standpoint and the sending of paperwork. As a result, "an intervention with a positive result" did not necessarily mean actual restitution or administrative approval thereof.

¹²³ Letter from the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków to the government commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Poland, 31 March 1947, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM. Also see report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 142, APKr.

¹²⁴ Report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, page 142, APKr.

Municipalities were often interested in selling property if its maintenance was too expensive.¹²⁵ Kobriner and Gutmacher – legal advisors to the JOINT and the CKŻP – pointed out that “certain townships have been known to insist upon selling property in order to obtain the proceeds to cover their expenses....The selling price of real property in Poland was about ten percent of its pre-war price in dollar equivalent [in April 1948].”¹²⁶ However, the following procedure described in an annual report of the JOINT was more frequent,

[T]he Municipality of Warszawa [took over] lots in the Warszawa area with compensation to the owners. Present owners may have retained their ownership rights only for a limited period of time, restricted to six months from the time of notification. Owners of such property in Warszawa, residing outside of the country, were liable to lose their property, and may only have had the right to claim compensation.¹²⁷

Importantly, after the elapse of the ten-year period, beginning from the moment of possession, the municipality may have acquired the property title by stay.¹²⁸ The municipalities were thus a primary “danger” for owners or their heirs seeking to restore ownership.

But what if surviving children, spouses, or siblings were determined enough to struggle for restitution? For example, what did the children of Israel and Malka

¹²⁵ Memo from JOINT office in Paris to JOINT office in New York, 8 April 1948, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

¹²⁶ Memorandum “Handling of Individual Claims in Poland,” prepared by Kobriner and Ludwig Gutmacher, 4 April 1948, Collection of JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

¹²⁷ Annual report of the JOINT on Poland, 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹²⁸ Reply from JOINT office in Warszawa to JOINT office in New York concerning property in Białystok, 7 December 1948, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 778, JOINT Archives. After the deadline, claims were still possible since only “uninterrupted ten-year possession by the state of abandoned property result in the right to ownership. Following December 31, 1948, owners or heirs, having proven their right to the inheritance and having paid the inheritance tax, can demand the estate, which had not been restored to them.” In JOINT’s memo, 26 May 1949, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

Dorotinsky from Białystok have to do in order to recover their property (regardless of whether their present residence was in Poland or abroad)?¹²⁹ First, they needed to find a lawyer, preferably from the same area as the property; second, they needed to get their parents' death certificates and restore their own birth records; and finally, they had to pay fees. While finding a lawyer did not pose much difficulty, paperwork and fees did.

Certificates were necessary to prove that claimants were the only surviving persons entitled to inherit. That, however, was not an easy matter since most official records were systematically destroyed by the Germans during the war and the chances of finding an original birth, marriage, or death certificate were close to zero. Only in August 1946, did Polish legislation provide a special procedure for the restoration of these documents.¹³⁰ According to the new law, an applicant was required to raise a claim to the Court of Justice and provide name, date and place of birth, and place of last residence. As for people missing in connection with World War II (participation in war activities, residence in the battle areas, and deportation to jail, camp, or abroad), a one year period – valid from May 1945 – was prescribed for presuming death.¹³¹ Bans had to be inserted in an official periodical summoning a missing person to appear before court. Finally, when lodging the claim, the heir had to produce an official declaration certified by a public notary which “justified his claim and proved that no other heir had survived.”¹³² Stola wrote that

¹²⁹ Reply from JOINT office in Warszawa to JOINT office in New York concerning property in Białystok, 7 December 1948, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 778, JOINT Archives.

¹³⁰ JOINT's memorandum on restoration of birth, marriage, and death certificates in Poland, 8 October 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

one way of getting around this obstacle [of missing records] was to produce an (alleged) witness who would confirm that the last owner had, before his death, bequeathed his property to the applicant who had survived the war and was now applying for recognition of their rights before the court, or confirm that the other family members entitled to inherit had definitely all been killed.¹³³

Fees were also problematic, for many becoming a major obstacle in the property restitution in Poland. The cost of inserting bans alone was 800 Polish złoty – the equivalent of eight dollars (the official exchange rate was one to a hundred) or a quarter of the average wage at the time. Additionally, typical costs of court proceedings on restitution of hereditary rights amounted to “three per mille” of the present value of the property “as estimated by experts.”¹³⁴ Hereditary taxes and lawyers’ fees had to be paid as well. A certain Natan Goldberg asked the provincial commissioner in Kraków for financial aid of 4,000 złoty (forty dollars) to pay a lawyer in a restitution case in April 1947.¹³⁵ All together the expenses usually amounted to 20,000 złoty (200 dollars).¹³⁶ Of course, the absolute majority of Jewish claimants residing in Poland could not afford to pay the fees, without the help of the CKŻP (which also offered gratis legal aid) or without obtaining an exemption from the court and lawyer fees called “poor man’s benefit” – court’s exemption based on the administrative certification of claimant’s lack of means.¹³⁷

¹³³ Stola, "The Polish Debate on the Holocaust and the Restitution of Property," 245.

¹³⁴ JOINT’s memorandum on restoration of birth, marriage, and death certificates in Poland, 8 October 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

¹³⁵ Letter from the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków to the KWŻ (the department of productivization), 9 April 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-1, page 127, APKr.

¹³⁶ Minutes from a JOINT meeting on Poland, 22 September 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹³⁷ Only Polish citizens were eligible. Correspondence concerning individual claims on property, 1948-49, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

Having found the necessary records and witnesses, hired good lawyers, and paid enormous fees, and even having won the case in court, a claimant could not be certain that the property was his or hers. Sabina Hirschhaut in Kraków experienced this first hand. In May 1946, the local court ruled in her favor, approving the restoration of fifty percent ownership – which exactly matched her prewar share – of an enterprise *Tartakstal* located in the city of Bielsko.¹³⁸ At the time of the court ruling, the business, as an abandoned property, was run by the state appointed provisional public management (*tymczasowy zarząd państwowy*) which now, in accordance with the sentence, had to relinquish fifty percent of its ownership. Unsatisfied with the court ruling, the current management appealed against the verdict and carried its suspension into effect. As grounds for appeal, the management cited state interest in the property, the enterprise being an “important branch of national economy” (*ważna gałąź gospodarki narodowej*), thus subject to future nationalization.¹³⁹ Hirschhaut argued that the business employed ten workers and thus was not subject to nationalization.

Similarly, Rudolf Mestel from Sosnowiec initially received a positive court ruling on the restoration of his movable property – industrial machinery from his prewar hardware-company *Romestal*.¹⁴⁰ During the war, a local collaborator with the Germans took over Mestel’s plant, robbed its machinery, and moved it to another factory *Galmet*. When *Galmet* restarted after the war, it did not use Mestel’s machines, which it deemed

¹³⁸ Verdict of the district court in Bielsko concerning fifty percent share of Sabina Hirschhaut in *Tartakstal*, 11 May 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹³⁹ Letter from Sabina Hirschhaut to the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Katowice, undated, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹⁴⁰ Documentation on restitution of movables of Rudolf Mestel in Sosnowiec, September 1945-May 1947, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

unfit for its production needs. When the court ruled in Mestel's favor in September 1945, Mestel expected the quick recovery of his property. Unfortunately for Mestel, the prosecutor, on behalf of the provisional public management of *Galmet*, appealed the verdict. As in Hirschhaut's case, the state-appointed management called for suspension of the execution of the court's ruling on the grounds of potential "irreparable losses" (*niepowetowane straty*) to the State's Treasury as well as the lack of proof that the machinery had in fact belonged to Mestel.¹⁴¹ Two years passed and Mestel still had not recovered his property. Moreover, in May 1947, the minister of trade and industry in Warszawa informed local authorities that *Galmet* with all its machinery would be nationalized and thus Mestel's claims would be groundless.¹⁴²

The unwillingness of the state-appointed provisional public management to relinquish property on the basis of alleged "interest of the state economy" was perhaps the most common obstacle to Jewish restitution in Polish urban areas after the war. Here is yet another story to illustrate the point. Before the war, Henryk Rozenes had an enterprise of clips and staples, *Kartodruk-Automatyk*, in Sosnowiec.¹⁴³ During the war, German *Treuhänder* took it over but kept Rozenes as a regular worker. In 1943, Rozenes was taken to Auschwitz. When he came back, his property had been already taken by public management. In the summer of 1945, Rozenes claimed right to his property in

¹⁴¹ Appeal of the provisional public management in Katowice to the district court in Sosnowiec, 17 September 1945, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹⁴² Letter from the minister of trade and industry in Warszawa to the government commissioner for productivization of the Jewish population in Poland, 20 May 1947, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹⁴³ Claim of Henryk Rozenes in Sosnowiec to the district court in Sosnowiec, 16 June 1945, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

court in accordance with the May restitution law of 1945.¹⁴⁴ The provisional public management made a parallel claim two weeks later, based on “special significance” of the enterprise for the interests of the state (*szczególne znaczenie dla interesów państwa*).¹⁴⁵ More than a year later, in December 1946, when Rozenes still had not recovered his property, he wrote to the provincial government commissioner in Katowice stating that the claim of “special significance” of his enterprise was blown out of proportion since his firm

had been closed for many months, the machinery stood unused and deteriorating, being not properly secured or preserved; not mentioning that the production of pins and clips, which had been the exclusive and only focus of production, could not and does not have “special significance for the interests of the state.”¹⁴⁶

Throughout the restitution process, abuses of power and bribery were common, be it in a liquidation office, a city officials’ office, or court chambers. In 1947, activists in the Jewish committee in Kraków claimed that the lower level of administration was most responsible for hampering the restitution of Jewish property, “The intentional prolonging of the proceedings often led to the claimant’s departure abroad.”¹⁴⁷ The story of Kraków repatriates who fought against eviction illustrates the problem. In November 1946, they wrote to the commissioner for productivization of Jewish population in Kraków requesting at least the suspension of eviction and an allocation of an apartment.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Claim of the provisional public management in Katowice to the district court in Sosnowiec, 2 July 1945, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Henryk Rozenes to the provincial government commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Katowice, 6 December 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

¹⁴⁷ The committee apparently negotiated a solution to this problem with the “competent” authorities (*kompetentne czynniki*). Annual report of the department of productivization at the provincial Jewish committee, 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-1, page 349, APKr.

Apparently, their application, once approved, was eventually rescinded in benefit of a claimant Dregiewicz (non-Jewish) who had already had a two-bedroom apartment in the center of Kraków. Repatriates (three families of eight) wrote the following:

The only motivation to deny us [stay in the apartment] was our allegedly “illegal” takeover of the apartment. The term “illegal” is a subterfuge, calumny, and a misrepresentation of facts. Can one call “illegal” the fact that as repatriates, the prewar residents of Kraków, after seven years of wartime exile, and on our return to country, we found ourselves without a roof over our heads because our prewar apartment was fully occupied and we were not let in. In this tragic moment for us, our *sisters*... took us under their roof in an *apartment which they* [sisters, the closest relatives] *occupied right before the war* and which they occupied again after their return from concentration camp, having received an allocation [official decision from the city]... Nor can one call illegal the fact that, as subtenants of our own sisters, we applied for [official] allocation of this apartment to us on the basis that as repatriates, working people..., prewar residents of Kraków, parents of children attending schools..., and registered tenants we have *full right* to the allocation of the apartment ... [emphases in the original text].¹⁴⁸

What the signatories were most concerned about was eviction in the middle of winter:

“Physically and mentally exhausted, facing the tragedy of the loss of almost all relatives, now in the winter time, with school-attending children, [the repatriates] would find themselves homeless.”¹⁴⁹ Handwritten by the city official under the letter was the following, “...as a result of the intervention, eviction was suspended for winter season.”¹⁵⁰

Jewish claimants also occasionally abused the process. At one of the meetings of the CKŻP in August 1946, the following comment arose “general cheerfulness” (*ogólna wesolość*), “News travels to Kraków from smaller Jewish communities that Jews started to sell houses which were not theirs.... Jews sell houses of those who live abroad. I

¹⁴⁸ Letter signed by three tenants of the apartment to the commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków, 12 November 1946, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-13, pages 91-2, APKr.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

[speaker Horowitz] think that this issue is pressing and needs to be solved immediately. Continuation of these practices would demoralize our community.”¹⁵¹ In 1948, lawyers Kobriner and Gutmacher pointed out that, “The Polish courts have become increasingly alerted to the “racket” of some Jews in going around making a business of making claims for the restitution of property belonging to people they know or did know, alleging that they are relatives or that they are the persons to whom the property belongs...”¹⁵²

Finally, there were isolated property takeovers which could have happened only after the war when workers’ cooperatives – not yet state-owned – mushroomed across Poland. The *Ontax* plant in Warszawa was an example. Three Jewish entrepreneurs, Henryk Zylberman, Henryk Lerer, and Salo Scharfspitz, founded *Ontax* – a high quality cosmetics’ plant – in 1933.¹⁵³ When the war broke out, they leased the factory to Stanisław Skrzywan, a non-Jew, for two years. That made Skrzywan a rich man but also saved the factory from German management and damage until 1941. In the meantime, the three owners left Poland and emigrated to North and South America. In 1941, a German entrepreneur took over *Ontax* and managed it until August 1944. During the Warszawa uprising, the factory was destroyed, the machinery damaged or stolen, “so that only the bare walls remained.”

Ignacy Mirel had been employed in the plant since its foundation. He survived the war in the Majdanek camp and came back to Warszawa in June 1945.

¹⁵¹ Minutes from the meeting of the CKŻP, 31 August 1946, Collection of the CKŻP, 303/I/5, pages 23-4, AŻIH.

¹⁵² Memorandum “Handling of Individual Claims in Poland,” prepared by Kobriner and Ludwig Gutmacher, 4 April 1948, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 779, JOINT Archives.

¹⁵³ Confidential memorandum concerning *Ontax* in the files of the US Embassy in Warszawa, 22 January 1946, Collection Poland, Warszawa Embassy, General Records 1945-48, RG 84 350/67/6/1, E 3114A, box 20, NA.

He managed to collect about fifteen ex-employees of *Ontax*, form an employees' co-operative, pooled their funds, repaired one of the four floors of the factory and some machinery and commenced production. All the fifteen members of the co-operative actually work in the factory and they have five additional employees so that the total staff is now about twenty... They make all the pre-war products, about sixty in number and have reached about ten percent of pre-war production. The quality of the products is inferior to the pre-war product due to lack of proper ingredients.¹⁵⁴

The plant was not nationalized since it employed less than fifty workers. However, there remained a danger that *Ontax* could be “forced into a trade association and required to change its production in conformity with Government plans, as is the case with some other industries....”¹⁵⁵ Another concern was the relationship with the mother firm,

The property on which the present building stands belongs to prewar *Ontax*. The same applies to the building in its damaged condition. However, the repairs effected on the building, the reconstructed machinery, and the present capital, raw materials and finished merchandise are the property of the employees united in the co-operative. It will be quite an accounting problem to unravel accounts between the prewar firm, the mother firm, and the employees in the co-operative and no attempt has as yet been made in this direction.¹⁵⁶

Nonetheless, Mirel was willing to pay royalties on “processes which they used and which belonged to the mother firm.”¹⁵⁷ By the beginning of 1946, it was clear that the founders of the plant had no intention of returning to Poland.

To conclude, I have no statistics of how many houses and enterprises returned to their rightful Jewish owners after the war. However, considering the small number of survivors, the structural damage suffered by buildings, the fear of backlash in the Polish countryside, the general devaluation of private property accompanying the gradual

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

nationalization, and the government's hesitancy to facilitate the process, the actual number of restituted properties must have been quite small. In a report prepared for the AJC concerning restitution of property, an unknown correspondent wrote in the beginning of 1947,

It is a highly characteristic feature of the situation of the Jews in Poland that within the huge mass of information available on the various aspects of their plight, there is almost no item indicating progress in regard to the restitution of their property¹⁵⁸

Restitution in Slovakia

One of the first laws attempting to regulate the restitution of property in postwar Czechoslovakia was presidential decree no. 5/1945 on the annulment of property transactions, issued on May 19, 1945. The decree invalidated any transactions on movable and immovable, private and public property made after September 29, 1938 (the Munich Agreement) since they were made "under duress of occupation and threat of national, racial, and political persecution."¹⁵⁹ It also authorized the government to establish national management (*národná správa*) of property confiscated from the "politically unreliable." However, as with any legislative act made in Prague, this act did not legally bind Slovakia unless it was confirmed by the SNR and the Board of Commissioners. This practice resulted from an ongoing political competition between Prague and Bratislava and from attempts of the latter to preserve political autonomy.

¹⁵⁸ Report on restitution of property prepared for the AJC Committee on Peace Problems, 23-24 January 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 276, YIVO.

¹⁵⁹ Presidential decree no. 5/1945 "concerning the annulment of certain property transactions effected in the period of restricted liberties and the national management of property assets of Germans, Hungarians, traitors and collaborators and of certain organizations and associations," 19 May 1945, digital collection of the historical legislation of the ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic, http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1945/zakon_2q.html#castka_4 (accessed June 26, 2008).

Jelinek wrote that decree no. 5/1945 was not authorized in Slovakia because it “fell victim to the Slovaks’ battle for their country’s prerogatives within the Republic.”¹⁶⁰

The Slovak Assembly adopted only those articles of the presidential decree that concerned national management.¹⁶¹ Slovak decree no. 50/1945 authorized the establishment of national management on property confiscated, abandoned, or taken over after the Munich Agreement¹⁶² National committees were responsible for establishing national management, except for banking, mining, large industry, and large estates, which were left to the Slovak National Council.¹⁶³ National managers (*národní správcovia*) of property were supposed to be “nationally and politically reliable, with appropriate professional and practical knowledge.”¹⁶⁴ A manager would pledge to fulfill his duties “conscientiously (*svedomito*), with the solicitude of a righteous landlord, and with regard to the economic welfare and other public interests.”¹⁶⁵

From the Jewish perspective, the Slovak legislation or lack thereof had multiple fatal flaws that affected restitution of their property. First, in contrast to the Czech lands, the Slovak central administration failed to invalidate all property transactions made after the Munich Agreement, which meant that *aryanization* of Jewish property maintained its legality in Slovakia. The Slovak Assembly did not annul *aryanization* for reasons that

¹⁶⁰ Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "The Jews in Slovakia, 1945-1949," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 8, no. 2 (1978).

¹⁶¹ Text of decree no. 50/1945 in Štefan Šutaj, Peter Mosný, and Milan Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku* (Bratislava: Veda, 2002), 108.

¹⁶² Decree of the Slovak National Council no. 50/1945 concerning national management (*Nariadenie Slovenskej národnej rady č. 50 zo dňa 5. júna 1945 o národnej správe*), 5 June 1945, in *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ The decree authorized the SNR to institute national management on industries employing more than fifty workers, and forestry, agricultural land, or any property worth more than 500,000 crowns as well as on commercial and other public organizations and associations. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ In contrast to the presidential decree, the Slovak decree ignored “uncorruptedness” (*mravně bezúhonná*) as a required character trait of a potential administrator. Both documents banned debtors and creditors from national management of an enterprise. Neither member of a national committee nor any other authority could be elected for national management. Both decrees suggested that a national manager may be appointed from among “able employees” of the enterprise. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Decree no. 50/1945 in Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku*, 108.

underlined all Slovak politics immediately after the war. The Slovak government sought a political *comfort zone* in the face of the uneasy legacy of the Tiso regime. As long as the wartime Slovak State was considered legal, its decisions had to be considered valid, including *aryanization*. Grievances of the *aryanizers*, who had taken over Jewish property, were thus as legitimate as grievances of Jewish survivors. Fearing social unrest of frustrated beneficiaries of the Tiso regime, the new government avoided targeting the material interests of this group while at the same time attempting to disassociate itself from fascism.¹⁶⁶ For Slovak Jews, it created a no-win situation.

Second, the Slovak legislation ignored article XXIV of the presidential decree; this was the article critical for Jewish material interests. The article stated that property under national management, which had belonged to “blue-collar workers, farmers, businessmen, small and medium entrepreneurs, clerks, members of free professions, and people in similar social positions, and had been taken over due to national, political, and racial persecution, should be returned to their previous owners or their heirs.”¹⁶⁷ In accordance with the presidential decree, evidence of suffering political or racial persecution and loyalty to the “democratic-republican state ideas of the Czechoslovak Republic” sufficed to demand the annulment of national management of the property.¹⁶⁸ The absence of this article in the Slovak legislation meant that the restitution of Jewish property in Slovakia was still not prescribed or regulated by law.

¹⁶⁶ Significantly, the Democrats (DS), who won the Slovak elections, had many former right-wing activists in their ranks.

¹⁶⁷ Presidential decree no. 5/1945 “concerning the annulment of certain property transactions effected in the period of restricted liberties and the national management of property assets of Germans, Hungarians, traitors and collaborators and of certain organizations and associations,” 19 May 1945, digital collection of the historical legislation of the ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic, http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1945/zakon_2q.html#castka_4 (accessed June 26, 2008).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Finally and most importantly, the Slovak Assembly authorized the establishment of national management not only of property confiscated from German and Magyar “traitors and politically unreliable people” but also of abandoned property, often Jewish. Although individual Jewish owners secured national management of their own businesses, it was, by and large, non-Jewish partisans and combatants who held these posts. The Organization of Victims of Racial Persecution at the hands of the Fascist Regime in Bratislava (Sdruženie fašistickým režimom rasove prenasledovaných v Bratislave, SRP) argued that it was illogical that Jewish property had national management even when the former owner or his heirs were still alive, considering the abundance of vacant properties formerly owned by “Germans, Magyars, and traitors.” The Central Union of Jewish Communities in Slovakia (Ústredný sväz židovských náboženských obcí na Slovensku, ÚSŽNO) and the SRP repeatedly protested against a situation in which many Jewish properties remained vacant at the state’s disposal, without national management, while those which had national managers had non-Jews appointed for this function – people who were unfamiliar with the specific property (*cudzí národné správcovia*).¹⁶⁹ The commissioners in Bratislava apparently approved of such appointments in the name of “the public interest.”

However, it should be noted that national committees occasionally appointed Slovak Jews to national management posts. Three months after the Slovak legislation on national management, the district national committee (okresný národný výbor, ONV) in Nitra informed all local committees that the authorities in Bratislava had instructed them

¹⁶⁹ Report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS. Many documents of Slovak Jewish provenance reiterate the same point. For example, see letter from the Slovak Jewish leaders to the chairman of the SNR, 19 March 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

to appoint former Jewish owners, co-owners, or their relatives as national managers of their abandoned houses.¹⁷⁰ Some Slovak Jews were also appointed national managers on property that had never been theirs. Keleti, a Jewish survivor from Spišská Nová Ves, remembered how young Jewish men took over national management of confiscated Hungarian property after the war.

Fredi, as a Jewish boy from a so-called “good family” was a big loiterer and never even finished high school. He was successful in escaping to the west and he returned after the war to his homeland. He fought during the war in the Czechoslovak Army in Great Britain. Now, at home, he was looking for a good job, as the gold miners in Alaska or California. The Klattiks, a Hungarian family, owned a relatively nice grocery in Spišská Nová Ves where they also owned a delicatessen. Because Fredi participated in the fight against the Nazis as a Czechoslovakian soldier in a foreign army, and Klattik was “nationalized” because he was a Hungarian, Fredi was named “national administrator” of the store. The whole city was jealous that such a “loiterer” got such a good position. He stole a little, as all “national administrators” did after the war...He worked really very hard this time and brought a lot of profit to the city and government (the national administrators had only a salary). One day the so called “brave” gentile boys waited for him when he left and he got a terrible beating. He had to go in an ambulance to the hospital to be treated, although he was not hospitalized... The next victim was a very handsome young Jewish man, named Engländer. He was a strong, tall man, survived the holocaust, so that he participated as a partisan during the Slovak national uprising. He was a skilled electrician and similar to Fredi he was working as the “national administrator” of a Hungarian electrical workshop – *Tandžák*. He was dating a beautiful gentile girl...Again, this was “too much”... Engländer was the national administrator of a prosperous company and was the boyfriend of a beautiful Christian girl. This could not last...The Slovak “heroic” boys...beat up Mr. Engländer.¹⁷¹

Some Jewish national managers, although not beaten, had to deal with other unpleasant consequences of their appointment. For example, Artur Langer, a national manager of an alcohol industry, employing forty-two workers in Levoča, was arrested and stood trial for

¹⁷⁰ Memorandum of the district national committee (ONV) in Nitra to local national committees (miestný národný výbor, MNVs) concerning national management of houses as prescribed by decree no. 50/1945 and approved by the commissioner of trade and industry, 25 September 1945, Collection ONV Nitra, presidium 1945, box 3, State Archives, Nitra (Štátny archív v Nitre, hereafter cited as SAN).

¹⁷¹ Testimony of Georg Keleti, Collection of testimonies, Acc.1995.A.564, USHMM.

black marketeering and profiteering from the illegal sale and distribution of alcohol.¹⁷²

He was fined and sentenced to imprisonment. Regardless of whether he was guilty or not, Langer made a few personal enemies among the enterprise's stockholders, the authorities in Bratislava, and members of the works council, which did not help his case. Apparently, members of the works council were heard to say, "This Jew needs to be taken off."¹⁷³

Overall, national management proved particularly detrimental for Jewish safety and their relations with non-Jews. When the anti-Jewish riots broke out in Bratislava in August 1946, Jewish organizations blamed the conflict surrounding national management of Jewish property. In a letter to the National Legislative Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic (Ústavodárné národní shromáždění republiky Československé, ÚNS), the SRP pointed out that partisans, who happened to be particularly active in the riots, were also well represented among national managers and co-managers of Jewish enterprises.¹⁷⁴ Once partisans – national managers – had to return their newly acquired property, they would blame Jews for their loss. That is what happened in August 1946, "As a result of the restitution law, some of the partisans fell by the wayside (*vypadli*), some felt threatened and thus became welcome tools in the hands of elements hostile to us."¹⁷⁵ The Jewish organizations pointed to Slovak decree no. 50/1945 on national management and the subsequent lack of preventive measures as indirectly responsible for the trouble.

Slovak degree no. 50/1945 based the determination of German and Magyar nationality primarily on "language used in the family" (*jazyk užívaný v rodinnom styku*)

¹⁷² Intervention letter from the Slovak Communist Party (KSS) in Levoča to the KSS in Bratislava concerning sentencing of Artur Langer to fine and imprisonment on March 4, 1946, 11 April 1946, Collection of PV – Secretariat 1946, box 77, SNA.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from the circles of the SRP to the National Legislative Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic (ÚNS), August/September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

which, as I discuss in a later chapter, put German and Magyar-speaking Jews in the category of “German and Magyar traitors.”¹⁷⁶ As a consequence, confiscation of property belonging to Germans and Magyars came to pose one of the central dilemmas for Jews in postwar Slovakia. In June 1945, President Beneš signed decree no. 12/1945 authorizing the confiscation of landed (agrarian) property for the land reform.¹⁷⁷ All Germans and Magyars (regardless of citizenship), traitors and enemies of the state in the years 1938-45 regardless of their nationality and citizenship, and joint-stock companies which served German and fascist aims during the occupation would lose their land “with immediate effect and without compensation.”¹⁷⁸ Only Germans and Magyars who “actively participated in the fight for liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic” would be exempted. As in all critical matters concerning citizenship and property, the national committees would decide on exemptions as well as on land distribution.¹⁷⁹

The SNR soon approved this legislation. Following the presidential decree, it also exempted loyal Germans but it completely ignored loyal Magyars, leaving hundreds of

¹⁷⁶ Additionally, authorities were to consider membership in political parties after the Munich Agreement and/or declaration of German or Magyar nationality in any census after 1929. See Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku*.

¹⁷⁷ Presidential decree no. 12/1945 “concerning confiscation and acceleration of distribution of landed (agrarian) property of Germans, Magyars, traitors, and enemies of the Czech and Slovak nation” (*Dekret presidenta o konfiskaci a urychleném rozdělení zemědělského majetku Němců, Maďarů, jakož i zrádců a nepřátel českého a slovenského národa*), 21 June 1945, digital data of the historical legislation of the ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic, <http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1945/sb07-45.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ The presidential decree defined landed property (*zemědělský majetok*) as “agricultural or forestry land with adjacent house and other similar establishments, plants of the agricultural industry which served proprietary agricultural and forestry farming/economy, including facilities (dead and live stock) and all claims related to tenure of this land or its part.” Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ As for land distribution, first, a local farming commission would make an initial plan, which would then go to a district farming commission. A district national committee would present the distribution plan to the ministry of agriculture for final approval and correction. Only people of “Slavic” (*slovanska*) nationality would get the confiscated property. Laborers (manual workers), smallholding farmers, multimember families, districts (for public purpose), and agricultural societies, among others, had priority. In districts with a majority of Germans, the confiscated property was to be held for “internal settlement.” Recipients with priority were those who merited by their fight for liberation of the country, especially soldiers and partisans, political prisoners and the deported, their family members and legal heirs, as well as farmers impaired by the war. Ibid.

Magyar-speaking Jews without legal protection. Furthermore, the Slovak legislation reaffirmed the practice of using “language used in the family” to determine German and Magyar nationality.¹⁸⁰ That consequently spelt trouble for numerous Jewish land-owners in southern Slovakia (formerly occupied by Hungary) whose primary language of communication at home was Magyar. Under the occupation, the Hungarian state expropriated them and allocated their property to non-Jewish Magyars. When this territory returned to Slovakia after the war, the ownership of Magyar-speaking Jews became highly vulnerable. Every time a local authority determined Magyar nationality, the owner faced confiscation.

“Internal colonization” (*vnútorná kolonizácia*) of southern Slovakia further aggravated the situation in the region. The Slovak “colonization” was closely intertwined with land reform and resembled the process of resettlement of the Recovered Territories in western Poland. The colonization aimed at inhabiting the region – now preferably “clear” of Hungarians – with a purely “Slavic” population. The confiscation of Magyar-owned land and its distribution among medium, small, and landless Slovaks was to serve that purpose. National committees and resettlement commissions were authorized to appoint “colonizers” for landed property abandoned or under confiscation, occasionally smaller than the fifty hectares prescribed by law. The process affected not only “enemies and traitors of the Slovak nation” but also regular war returnees, among them Jews, who found a “colonizer” in their houses upon their return. In January 1946, the SRP

¹⁸⁰ Decree of the Slovak National Council no. 104/10945 “concerning confiscation and acceleration of distribution of landed (agrarian) property of Germans, Magyars, traitors, and enemies of the Slovak nation (*Nariadenie Slovenskej národnej rady č. 104 zo dňa 23. augusta 1945 o konfiškovaní a urýchlenom rozdelení pôdohospodárskeho majetku Nemcov, Maďarov, ako aj zradcov a nepriateľov slovenského národa*), 23 August 1945, Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku*, 121.

complained to the Slovak National Council that Jewish “owners who came back from concentration camps or from the Czechoslovak army could not get into their houses because colonizers were there.”¹⁸¹

By 1946, there were at least twenty-five cases of confiscation of Jewish property in southern Slovakia.¹⁸² Júl'ius Szalvendy and his wife came back to their house in Rokytnik after the war. They had succeeded in reviving their land when, in early October 1945, colonizers showed up without warning, armed with a decision from the commissioner of agriculture to take over and break up Szalvendy's land. The Lustig family in Rimavská Sobota received a confiscation order despite the family's declaration of Slovak nationality, a “farmer of profession” in their midst, and another one “injured in the fight for liberation.” When Lustig applied for national management of his property, his application was denied because the property was already under motion for confiscation. Magdalena Reinitzova from Gortvapusta was on welfare because her property was broken up and colonized. Her appeal got lost in a bureaucratic mess for more than half a year. Pavel Salvendyho served as lieutenant in the Czechoslovak Army and participated in the partisans' fights. After the war, a fellow partisan applied for a motion to confiscate Salvendyho's property. When František Schwarc came back from Mauthausen to his land in Ožďany, his property had already been confiscated, broken up, and colonized. Schwarc was not let into his house. His application for the attestation of political reliability was denied due to “voluntary draft in to the Magyar Army.”¹⁸³ Also in

¹⁸¹ Letter from the SRP to the presidium of the Slovak National Council on the confiscation of Jewish property, 8 January 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁸² List of confiscated Jewish property reported in Slovakia, 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁸³ Letter from the SRP to the presidium of the Slovak National Council on the confiscation of Jewish property, 8 January 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

Ožďany, Vojtech Schreiber's house was under confiscation although it should have been exempted from the process, having no land attached.¹⁸⁴

In October 1945, President Beneš spoke indirectly to Jewish fears of property loss in yet another decree on confiscation of enemy property.¹⁸⁵ He referred to what became the standard basis for protection of German- and Magyar-speaking Jews in postwar Czechoslovakia. The document specified that Germans and Magyars who “remained loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic, never betrayed the Czech and Slovak nation, and either actively participated in the fight for liberation or suffered under the Nazi or fascist regime” would keep their property.¹⁸⁶ Exempted from confiscation was property lost due to national, racial, or political persecutions after the Munich Agreement.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, the decree declared that those who supported (*nadržovat'*) germanization or magyarization in the Czechoslovak Republic would lose their property.¹⁸⁸ As I discussed earlier, accusations of magyarization have been historically and consistently troublesome for Magyar-speaking Jews.

The exemptions must not have been properly enforced if the ÚSŽNO and the SRP complained about confiscation and colonization at the expense of Jewish owners throughout 1946 and 1947. Every month or couple of months, the two organizations drafted letters to Bratislava and Prague reminding the authorities of the problem. The

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Presidential decree no. 108/1945 “concerning the confiscation of enemy assets and the establishment of the National Restoration Funds,” (*Dekret presidenta o konfiskaci nepřátelského majetku a Fondech národní obnovy*), 25 October 1945, Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku*, 141.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Presidential decree no. 108/1945 also regulated allocation and distribution of confiscated property. Similar to previous legal acts on confiscation and land distribution, it prioritized participants in the fight for liberation along with their families, those impaired by warfare and national, racial, or political persecution, those who were forced to go abroad and had now returned, as well as those who had to transfer due to border changes. National committees and the SNR would take responsibility for implementing the process.

ÚSŽNO and the SRP complained not only about the use of language as the criterion for the determination of nationality in Slovakia but also about the national committees' greed for land.¹⁸⁹ In Slovakia, as opposed to Bohemia and Moravia, any doubt about the nationality of an owner led the local administration to "simply declare him a traitor only so confiscation could take place."¹⁹⁰ "Formerly German" property in western Poland and "formerly Magyar" property in southern Slovakia seemed too tempting to leave their distribution to mere "justice" or chance, "If one wanted to confiscate, substantiation could be found or made up" (*konfiškovať sa chcelo a dôvod sa našiel, alebo sa urobil*).¹⁹¹ The determination of the former owners' "wrong" nationality sufficed to get the desired piece of land. Slovak Jewish leaders observed with sarcasm that "such confiscation proceedings suggested that a great many Magyars, Germans, collaborators, and traitors in Slovakia were Jews, including foreign soldiers and partisans of Jewish origin, and those who did not know the Magyar language at all."¹⁹²

Furthermore, many confiscations took place without a formal decision and, when such confiscation was eventually annulled, restoration of previous ownership was difficult to process. Also, during "internal colonization," land was allocated to "economically weak people, especially farmers," which made restitution claims even more problematic. For example, the Czechoslovak government gave Jewish land near Nitra, Hlohovec, and Topoľčany to landless farmers from Orava, expelled from their land

¹⁸⁹ Letter from the SRP to the presidium of the Slovak National Council on the confiscation of Jewish property, 8 January 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹⁰ Letter from the ÚSŽNO and the SRP to the National Legislative Assembly in Prague (ÚNS) concerning confiscation of Jewish agricultural properties, 19 July 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS. Also see report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

after the Polish annexation of the region.¹⁹³ Taking property away from these non-Jewish farmers was not only morally ambiguous but also had the potential to antagonize them.¹⁹⁴ Jewish leaders argued that the farmers had already paid for this land, so asking more of them would be unfair. The Slovak Jewish leaders suggested that only state-administered compensations could solve the problem.¹⁹⁵

During the fall of 1945 and throughout 1946, the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP were in constant contact with the Bratislava and Prague governments, demanding effective restitution of Jewish property. They sent letters, project ideas, complaints, and suggestions. In December 1945, for example, the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP protested against the most recent plans for the legislation of restitution.¹⁹⁶ One of the most controversial points was the projected partial return of property to guarantee merely “adequate existential security” (*primerané existenčné zaistenie*). The authors asked on what moral and legal grounds could an owner receive less than he had come to own with his “diligence and honest toil” while other “parasites” could retain what they had taken over.¹⁹⁷

In March 1946, the SRP asked why the SNR had not approved the presidential decree annulling all transactions made during the war despite the fact that it was prescribed for the entire country (*celoštátne*) and was successfully executed in Bohemia

¹⁹³ Ibid. For example, the Board of Commissioners in Bratislava decided in April 1946 that four Jewish landed properties, totaling more than 1,000 hectares, would be used for the resettlement of expellees from Orava. See letter from the district national committee in Hlohovec to the Board of Commissioners in Bratislava concerning the allocation of Jewish property for settlement of expellees from Orava, 8 May 1946, PV – Narodne Vyborý, box 490, SNA.

¹⁹⁴ Letter from the SRP to the presidium of the Slovak National Council on the confiscation of Jewish property, 8 January 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹⁵ Report from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), undated 1946/47, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP to the presidium of the Slovak National Council in Bratislava concerning restitution, 7 December 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

and Moravia. Moreover, the SRP suggested that since the Slovak State passed all laws concerning Jewish property during the war, it seemed “morally justifiable” that its successor, the SNR, should undo the wrongs of the previous regime.¹⁹⁸ Further, they criticized governmental restitution plans from December 1945 and their implementation.¹⁹⁹ Apparently, the state was supposed to first return what it possessed to private owners and then pass appropriate restitution law. In the end, the SRP claimed, the commissioner of finances was willing to give back some “crumbs from Jewish property” while the restitution law was nowhere in sight.²⁰⁰

In the same letter, Slovak Jewish leaders pointed to the difference between Jews and other victims of war as far as restitution was concerned.²⁰¹ They argued that Jews should get their property returned whereas non-Jews should be compensated since the damage suffered by the latter was due to “a common enemy” while Jews were wronged by the system and by individuals who benefited from anti-Jewish discrimination. Such beneficiaries should take responsibility for their actions and return their ill-gotten property to the Jews. Moreover, the authors complained that when other victims were compensated with money, Jews were not. The authors also suggested that separate laws for Jews and non-Jews should be passed as far as the confiscation of landed property was concerned. The main point was that the Jewish material situation was getting worse and required the intervention of the state, especially considering the active promotion and

¹⁹⁸ Letter from the Slovak Jewish leaders to Chairman of the Slovak National Council, 19 March 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

support for the Slovak cause on the international arena by the Slovak Jewish community.²⁰²

Finally, on May 16, 1946, the Provisional National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic passed a law on restitution.²⁰³ Act no. 128/1946 on “annulment of certain property transactions effected in the period of restricted liberties and other interference with property,” was supposed to regulate restitution in Czechoslovakia.²⁰⁴ First, the law declared null and void all property transfers made after September 29, 1938 (Munich) “under occupation or national, racial, and political persecution.” That referred to movable and immovable as well as public and private property. Exempted from the law was property transferred to politically reliable individuals who acted in the former owner’s interest with his consent and for adequate compensation.²⁰⁵ Restitution law enabled the return of property, restoration of property title, and restitution of any other previous state of affairs of aggrieved persons and their legal successors unless found to be politically unreliable, Germans, Magyars, or traitors. Importantly for Magyar-speaking Jews, the language used in the family as a criterion for the determination of nationality was completely ignored although “support of germanization or magyarization” was listed as an obstacle to restitution. Those who had declared Magyar and German nationality in

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ The Provisional National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic (Prozatímní národní shromáždění republiky Československé) had its first meeting on October 28, 1945. The National Front appointed its members. The establishment of the Czechoslovak parliament – the central legislature – diminished the political role of the SNR which now was more dependent on Prague. In 1946, the Provisional National Assembly was replaced by the National Legislative Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic (ÚNS).

²⁰⁴ Decree no. 128/1946 “concerning the annulment of certain property transactions effected in the period of restricted liberties and other interference with property,” 16 May 1946, Knapp Viktor and Berman Tomáš, *Vrácení majetku pozbytého za okupace: Restituční zákon* (Prague: V. Linhart, 1946). Also compare to “Survey of Reconstruction (Laws) in Europe” prepared by the Legal Secretary of the Research Department of the WJC, British section, Dr. P. Weis, 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

²⁰⁵ Viktor Knapp and Tomáš Berman, *Vrácení majetku pozbytého za okupace: Restituční zákon* (Prague: V. Linhart, 1946).

the past but “never betrayed the Czech and Slovak nations, participated in the fight for liberation, or suffered under the Nazi regime” could claim property return. If, for some reason, the return of property was impossible or the former owner lacked interest, compensation equivalent to the current value was an option.²⁰⁶ If the minister of justice (and the equivalent commissioner in Slovakia) declared the return of a particular property to be a danger to “important public interests” (*důležité zájmy veřejné*), such restitution would be halted. District courts were authorized to enforce restitution. Importantly for Slovak Jews, article IX stated that district courts could enforce recovery of property even when the local authority refused to annul national management.²⁰⁷

In Slovakia, the pressure not to carry out restitution was overwhelming.²⁰⁸ Jewish leaders were possibly the only group that thought of the restitution law as necessary and fair (“*not generous but fair*”).

The local institution charged with executing the laws and orders on restitution was not particularly eager to act... Offices in Slovakia boycotted the law or evaded it under the pretext of bureaucratic procedures. The Office of the Commissioner of Justice and the Courts, charged with enforcing the law, was particularly resourceful in circumventing it. Jewish enterprises and stores were not restored to their legal owners, but given over into the custody of a “national manager.” The manager could be the original owner, but this was not necessarily so. Cancellation of the “national management” and transfer of the enterprise to the owner involved enormous difficulties.²⁰⁹

In September 1946, the ÚSŽNO and the SRP listed the most conspicuous activities aimed at evading the restitution law. The commissioner of justice did not authorize the implementation of restitution. On the contrary, it issued a directive which violated the

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Jelinek, "The Jews in Slovakia, 1945-1949," 49.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

sovereignty of the justice system by suggesting that courts should be “particularly cautious when handling” those articles of the restitution law which referred to settling a Jewish owner in his old property before the case was processed.²¹⁰ The commissioner of finances did not return Jewish valuables stored in the Treasury. Neither did the commissioner of agriculture return land to the Jews. The commissioner of trade and industry informed the Slovak Jewish community that the Jews would never regain property as had been prescribed in the restitution law. Instead, the commissioner vowed to use the “public interest” clause to protect property from enforced restitution. Small private enterprises like stores and workshops would be returned only under specific conditions.²¹¹

The story of Leopold Reiss from Trnava illustrates some of the pitfalls of the restitution of Jewish property in Slovakia in 1946, after the law had already been implemented in the Czech lands. Reiss left Slovakia for the United States in 1940 and returned in 1946.²¹² His parents and three brothers perished during the war. After his return, Reiss wanted to regain his parents’ house and their prewar enterprise – a hardware store attached to the house. Reiss easily received national management of his house but the store had already had three national managers, two of them partisans. As for the house, Reiss’ management remained on paper. He could not move in because it had already been occupied by one of the three national managers of the store and by an officer of the local gendarmerie.²¹³ When Reiss brought up the restitution law from May

²¹⁰ Report of the ÚSZNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹¹ Ibid. Also see letter of Vojtech Winterstein concerning an article in *Budovateľ*, “Nebude sa novelizovať reštitučný zákon?” undated, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹² Documentation on Leopold Reiss’ case, August-October 1946, PV – Secretariat 1946, box 77, SNA.

²¹³ Letter from Leopold Reiss to the commissioner of trade and industry in Bratislava concerning return of property, 19 August 1946, PV – Secretariat 1946, box 77, SNA.

1946, he was told that the law was a mere piece of paper (*restitučný zákon je iba kus papieru*).²¹⁴ As for the store, obviously, regaining it at this point was impossible without a decision from the commissioners in Bratislava. Reiss sent requests for intervention to the commissioners of industry and internal affairs. Internal correspondence between the departments of the office of the commissioner of internal affairs made it clear that Reiss had little or no chance of getting the store. The officials argued, first, that Reiss had gone to America and had no proof that he had participated in the fight against fascism and for the liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic.²¹⁵ Second, he became an American citizen and, as a “foreigner” (*cudzinec*), he could not hold national management. Third, the restitution law that Reiss referred to had not yet been carried out in Slovakia (October 1946). Fourth, his wife had never been nor was Slovak. And, finally, the store’s national managers were deserving partisans who had managed the store in exemplary fashion.²¹⁶ All that was said in October 1946 – almost half a year after the restitution law passed in Prague and two months after the Assembly of Partisans and anti-Jewish riots in Bratislava.

The anti-Jewish riots, which followed the Assembly of Partisans (Partizánsky zjazd v Bratislave) held on August 2-5, 1946 in Bratislava, marked a significant setback in Slovak-Jewish efforts at restitution. Until the summer of 1946, agreements between national managers and former Jewish owners were not uncommon. Two parties made an arrangement, routinely approved by the commissioner of trade and industry, which led to

²¹⁴ Letter from Leopold Reiss to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, 2 September 1946, PV – Secretariat 1946, box 77, SNA.

²¹⁵ Memo from the fourth department of the commissioner of internal affairs to the secretariat of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, 7 October 1946, PV – Secretariat 1946, box 77, SNA.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

cancellation of national management of the property.²¹⁷ After the Assembly and riots, the commissioner “explicitly forbade” the making of such agreements. In some cases, the commissioner allegedly reinstated national management of the property, without sufficient substantiation.²¹⁸ The same commissioner also annulled a directive allowing the return of houses which were “in the hands of the state.”²¹⁹ Finally, he closed down the department which held all *aryanization* material and managed *de-aryanization*. Jewish employees of the department were asked to resign.²²⁰

Most importantly, after the anti-Jewish violence in August 1946, the Board of Commissioners suspended the execution of the restitution law.²²¹ The Board announced that the law required an executive decree and should be suspended in the meantime.²²² The Jewish community found the suspension to be an act without precedence in the history of the pre-Munich Republic and postwar Czechoslovakia. First, the restitution law did not require any executive decree and, second, the Board of Commissioners – as the executive power – had no prerogative to change the existing law.²²³ Finally, the Jewish leaders argued, interpretation of the restitution law was not the prerogative of the central executive and needed to be handled by the courts.²²⁴

The Assembly of Partisans became a turning point in the history of restitution in postwar Slovakia and this was not by coincidence. Many partisans – veterans of the

²¹⁷ Report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Letter from the circles of the SRP to the National Legislative Assembly in Prague (ÚNS), August/September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²² Report from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), undated 1946/47, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²³ Letter from the circles of the SRP to the ÚNS, August/September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²⁴ Report from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), undated 1946/47, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

Slovak uprising in 1944 – were granted national management of confiscated and abandoned property as a reward for service to the country. Obviously, restitution and the return of property to prewar owners meant significant material loss for these people. Attacks against Jews on the streets of Bratislava were attacks against those who threatened partisans' economic well-being. Here, Gross' thesis on the correlation between the population's fear of Jews coming back to take their valuables and the heightening of violence against Jews finds conspicuous confirmation. The Slovak central authorities must have been fully aware of this connection if they suspended the restitution law immediately after the riots. Moreover, apparently national committees issued a statement in August 1946 (before the official suspension of the restitution law) to calm anxiety among partisans, "According to our credible information the restitution law will be changed shortly or annulled, thus a court is not authorized to pass resolutions (*uznesenia*)...and if a court passes such resolution we will never recognize it."²²⁵

Although the suspension was soon called off, it did create a lot of "bad blood" between the Slovak administration and the Jewish community.²²⁶ ÚSŽNO and SRP's September report, drafted almost immediately after the anti-Jewish riots in Bratislava, questioned restitution in Slovakia. Land was not being returned nearly "*per absolutum*;" small enterprises had mostly been liquidated during the Slovak State so there was nothing to return; the majority of medium enterprises would not be returned due to the so-called public interest clause; big firms were nationalized; a great portion of houses would not be returned due to "public interest"; movables could not be returned because they had

²²⁵ As quoted in report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²⁶ Letter of Vojtech Winterstein concerning an article in *Budovateľ* "Nebude sa novelizovať reštitučný zákon?" undated, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

disappeared or were bartered away or disposed of otherwise. How was it supposed to “undo the harm that the Slovak State did (*napáchal*) to the Jews?”²²⁷ Such practices, the authors argued, challenged the courts’ “moral right” to try fascists for the crime of Jewish expropriation. To stress the point, they even came up with an imaginary monologue of Tiso,

You judge me because I have seized [property] for myself. But I say that I acted in agreement with the people’s will and today’s regime since you do not return [property] either; you merely threw us out of a saddle; and now you give Jewish property to the state, to partisans, and others, you again *aryanize*, merely changing the recipients.²²⁸

This fragment shows that the Slovak Jewish organizations considered property restitution a major stumbling-block (*kameň úrazu*).²²⁹ For Slovak Jews, restitution was not merely a matter of material survival. Rather, it carried the symbolic load of blame and victimhood. Restitution was about undoing the harm inflicted by the Slovak State, about compensation for suffering and losses, about justice.²³⁰ The Slovak Jews believed that the SNR should be an un-doer since it took over power after the wartime Slovak polity becoming its successor and continuator. Although single Slovak politicians may have developed a sense of guilt for the “sins” of the Slovak regime, postwar Slovak politics as

²²⁷ Report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²⁸ Further, the report read that many Slovak Jews were now “locked up in labor camps as black marketers and idlers because they believed in justice and waited for the restitution of their property and profession instead of going into manual labor still available for them regardless of their health, age, and education...” I have not found confirmation of Jews being detained for black marketeering immediately after the war. Ibid.

²²⁹ Report from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), undated 1946/47, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²³⁰ “Undoing of harms” reappeared over and over again in the rhetoric of Jewish organizations. In 1947, the SRP argued, for example, that economic rights should not be granted as a reward for merits for partisans from the Uprising but as “undoing of harms done under fascism.” Letter from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), no title, undated 1947, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS. More on compensation and restitution as a way to redress the past, see Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*; Dan Diner and Gotthart Wunberg, ed., *Restitution and Memory: Material Restoration in Europe* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

a whole was not driven by this sentiment.²³¹ Legal documentation from the time reveals that Slovak political elites were preoccupied with rebuilding the political equilibrium with Prague and a social equilibrium at home. The latter meant finding ways to minimize the demands of fighters against the regime and the resentment of its beneficiaries by rewarding those who fought against fascism without severely punishing those who served it. In this equation, there was very little room to hear and satisfy Jewish claims.

Data collected by the ÚSŽNO and the SRP showed that by May 1947, there were still about twenty enterprises in Slovakia where national management had failed to resign despite the court's decision on its annulment.²³² Slovak Jewish leaders blamed the commissioner of trade and industry in Bratislava, which refused to fire national managers from the contested enterprises. Scattered across Slovakia, these businesses varied in size (employing from five to 135 workers) and profile. For example, *Weltson* in Bratislava produced straps and leather belts (seventy-six employees), *Robert Quitt* in Leopoldov made furniture (thirty employees) while *Gustav Burg & Son* in Bánovce traded lumber and plywood (five employees).²³³

The story of *Weltson* is particularly well documented. Its owners, Armin and Alžbeta Brüll, perished during the war.²³⁴ *Weltson* was *aryanized* in 1940. After the liberation of 1945, the Slovak authorities established national management of the

²³¹ Only now is the Slovak society coming to terms with the legacy of the Tiso regime. They are not exceptionally slow in this process. Poles, for example, are still coming to terms with the legacy of Jedwabne and the Swiss wrestle with their dubious wartime “neutrality,” just to mention the two most publicized cases of recent years.

²³² I have no statistics to estimate the percentage that the twenty enterprises made up in Jewish and general ownership in Slovakia at the time. Letter from the ÚSŽNO and the SRP to Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald, 15 May 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Attachment to letter from the ÚSŽNO and the SRP to Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia Klement Gottwald, 15 May 1947, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

business. At some point in 1946, a cooperative (*verejna obchodna spoločnosť*), two-thirds made up of Brüll's heirs, applied for restitution of the enterprise. On November 29, 1946, a district court in Bratislava approved of *Weltson's* restitution.²³⁵ On December 7, 1946, the cooperative sent the restitution agreement to the commissioner of trade and commerce in Bratislava requesting annulment of the national management of *Weltson*. Along with the agreement, the cooperative sent a resolution of *Weltson's* works council, signed by sixty workers, which demanded annulment of the national management. The resolution stated that only restitution could secure the uninterrupted production and the execution of production plans and thus put an end to the current problems suffered under national management. The national manager of *Weltson* also joined the signatories of the resolution, declaring readiness to yield his position.²³⁶

At this point, it seemed that *Weltson's* restitution was merely a matter of time. However, the commissioner of trade and commerce complicated the process by refusing to nullify national management of *Weltson*, despite the decision of the court and the request of the works council. In April 1947, *Weltson's* staff reapplied for the annulment of national management, claiming that the current situation was harmful to its morale.²³⁷ Soon after, Secretary Jašik of *Weltson's* trade union suddenly called for a meeting of all employees. At the meeting, Jašik posed a rhetorical question: what if *Weltson* should fall into the hands of capitalists or "people and the nation."²³⁸ Jašik's answer was that national management should be maintained until the state nationalized the works, "Will you decide or will Klingers, Wolfs, Schwarzs, Baruchs... tell you what to do?" (Klinger

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

and Wolf were former owners while Schwarz and Baruch were imaginary Jews). Jašik dismissed comments that, in accordance with the law, *Weltson* would not be nationalized and he proceeded by reading a resolution against restitution of the company. The works council rejected Jašik's resolution and decided to vote. When the first vote approved of restitution (twenty-six to twenty-five votes), Jašik called the vote invalid. The second vote ended in favor of Jašik's resolution (twenty-nine to twenty-seven votes).²³⁹ Both votes were non-confidential (hand-raising). In any case, voting should not have had any effect on the status of the company. The court and the commissioner of trade and commerce were the only competent bodies in the matter.

What *Weltson's* case showed was that, first, state officials could disregard court decisions depending on their current interests disguised as "public interest" and, second, that nationalization loomed large over the restitution of Jewish property in Slovakia. Four nationalization decrees from October 1945 subjected all mining, power, iron, chemical, and steel plants to nationalization. Also nationalized were all other large plants with more than 150 or 800 employees (depending on the particular branch of industry), basic branches of the food industry with 150 to 500 employees including breweries and mills generating a specific amount of produce. All banks and all private insurance companies were to be nationalized regardless of their number of employees.²⁴⁰ Except for politically unreliable Germans and Magyars, all other owners would receive compensation which was established at the current value of the property.²⁴¹ For Jewish owners of medium enterprises Czechoslovak nationalization seemed more lenient than its Polish counterpart,

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Nationalization decrees no. 100-104/1945, 24 October 1945, digital data of the ministry of interior of the Czech Republic, http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1945/zakon_4q.html#castka_47 (accessed June 26, 2008).

²⁴¹ Samuel Herman, "War Damage and Nationalization in Eastern Europe," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 16, no. 3 (1951).

which left in private hands only enterprises hiring less than fifty workers. Nationalization in Czechoslovakia, however, was to extend after the 1948 coup d'état, doing great damage to owners of newly restituted property.

Overall, up to May 1946, only a small number of businesses had been restored to previous Jewish owners.²⁴² In July 1947, JOINT Director for Czechoslovakia Israel Jacobson reported,

Many of the small businesses have been returned, but very few outright. In most cases, the owner has been appointed national administrator. In many instances, the former "aryanizator" is still a partner in the business.... In many cases, where individual houses have been returned to the former owners, or to their heirs, it has been almost impossible for these people to obtain possession of these houses for their own use. While they do receive rents from the houses, they cannot live in them themselves....²⁴³

According to the estimates of the chairman of the WJC compensation department, Robinson, about 2,000 claimants had applied for restitution by the early months of 1947.²⁴⁴ Jacobson cited 1,500 cases which required financial aid in initiating the restitution proceedings in the Czech lands and Slovakia.²⁴⁵ By December 1947, homes and small farms were being returned while the large farms "and some other properties were still subject to conflicting and complicated procedures."²⁴⁶ By and large, a significant portion of Jewish belongings remained the property of the state. For example,

²⁴² JOINT Weekly Review, 4 October 1946, Collection of the JOINT, File 644 J6 A1, JOINT Archives.

²⁴³ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson's report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁴⁴ Report on stolen Jewish property by Chairman of the WJC Department of Compensations Nehemiah Robinson (in Polish), Collection of the CKŽP, 303/XIII/190, pages 65-9, AŽIH.

²⁴⁵ The average cost was estimated at 5,000 crowns. Letter from the JOINT office in Prague to the JOINT office in Paris, 18 April 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

²⁴⁶ JOINT Weekly Review, 26 December 1947, Collection of the JOINT, File 644 J6 A1, JOINT Archives.

in 1947, ninety percent of houses still belonged to the state.²⁴⁷ Yet, restitution of Jewish property in the Slovak countryside must have surpassed that in Polish villages and small towns. When describing the attacks of Ukrainian troops on northeastern Slovak villages in 1947, Keleti wrote, “They began to murder the few Jews who returned after the terrible sufferings to villages in east Slovakia, where they owned small flour mills, village saws, small shops and inns, to continue their daily work, which was interrupted during the Slovak State.”²⁴⁸ Similar Jewish returns to mills, saws, and inns in provincial central and eastern Poland in 1945-47 were impossible, except for isolated and short-lived cases.

In the meantime, Slovak Jewish leaders pushed for effective restitution by illustrating the limited role of Jewish restitution in the overall economy.²⁴⁹ The number of Jewish enterprises before the war reached 10,000 of which 8,000 were liquidated and only 2,000 *aryanized*, making the number of *aryanizers* insignificant.²⁵⁰ Only relative progress had been made in the restitution of communal property. For observers abroad, it seemed that property would be gradually handed over to individuals, particularly to those who enjoyed “special priorities on the grounds of political reliability, military service abroad, their status as victims of political and racial persecution, etc.”²⁵¹

By 1947, a considerable portion of Jewish property in Slovakia and the Czech lands remained heirless, meaning it had never been claimed by former owners or their heirs. The deadline for filing property claims was later (June 17, 1949) than in Poland. While the deadline did not cause much anxiety or controversy, the fate of unclaimed

²⁴⁷ Report from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), undated 1946/47, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²⁴⁸ Testimony of Georg Keleti, Collection of testimonies, Acc.1995.A.564, USHMM.

²⁴⁹ Report from the circles of the SRP (Winterstein), undated 1946/47, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ JOINT Weekly Review, 26 December 1947, Collection of the JOINT, File 644 J6 A1, JOINT Archives.

property did. The Jewish community in Czechoslovakia (Czech and Slovak) wished to claim heirless property for public Jewish purposes.²⁵² They believed that heirless property should be used for the benefit of the Jewish community, especially since the government had already mentioned such a course of action. In 1946, for example, the ministry of social welfare intended to create a fund to manage heirless property (“the administration of which was to be represented equitably”) which would provide for “the rehabilitation of the victims of Nazism and social services for them generally, the victims of racial persecution to have first claims.”²⁵³ The Jewish organizations in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia put pressure on the government to prepare a separate law on heirless property “in the spirit of the original governmental decision” and in accord with the international treaties on reparations.²⁵⁴ However, the Jewish organizations were not invited to the governmental session at which a special amendment was drafted which allocated all heirless property to the Currency Liquidation Fund – established to complete currency reform (reimbursing people whose accounts were blocked immediately after liberation).²⁵⁵ Despite Jewish protests, parliament passed the establishment of the Fund with the amendment in July 1947. The president signed the law.²⁵⁶ The government declared that the funds would not be used “in a manner contrary to the Republic’s

²⁵² The Council of Jewish Communities of Bohemia and Moravia received sixty million crowns (\$1,200,000) from the government from the Theresienstadt Fund – the confiscated funds of Jews who died heirless in the Theresienstadt camp. See internal correspondence of the AJC concerning heirless property in Czechoslovakia between July and September 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO. Also see correspondence between the AJC and the JOINT concerning heirless property in Czechoslovakia between June 1948 and July 1949, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD 41-46, RG 347.7.41-46, box 5, YIVO.

²⁵³ Correspondence between Joel H. Fischer and Kurt Wehle concerning heirless property in Czechoslovakia, Paris, 5 June 1948, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD 41-46, RG 347.7.41-46, box 5, YIVO.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. Also see letter from JOINT director in Prague to the JOINT office in Paris, 3 July 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

obligations” laid out in international treaties.²⁵⁷ That, however, was a mere verbal declaration which did not guarantee the Jewish communities access to the funds. In a line of defense, the parliamentary committee for budgets allegedly stated that

The establishment of a separate fund for Jewish survivors *might create the impression that the Jewish part of the population received far reaching preferential treatment* which could give rise to antisemitic feeling, and that the Council of Jewish Communities was neither legally nor morally entitled to claim this property.²⁵⁸

Conclusion

Poland and Slovakia were not exceptional in a larger European perspective in terms of handling restitution. Despite differences between the East and the West (more profiteers of Jewish property and a tentative character of restitution due to projected nationalization in the East), both parts of the European continent failed to deliver “material justice” during the first two years after the war. In 1947, Milton Winn from the AJC prepared a report on the status of restitution of Jewish property in Europe. Having conducted surveys in Greece, Turkey, and Czechoslovakia, Winn concluded,

First, it became evident that as the war and the toll it took of Jewish lives and Jewish property recedes into the background of the thinking of those in power in the various countries, and as these political people and forces became more and more concerned with their present political situation, less and less energy and thought is being devoted to the narrower Jewish problems of civil rights and property rights. Particularly in the field of property rights, conflicting interests have arisen during the passage of time. Those who have become possessed of title to property, being in possession resist any attempt to restore such property to those who may be rightfully entitled to it. This resistance manifests itself in obstructions of remedial legislation, adverse pressures on those in charge of implementing the return of seized property and active opposition to efforts made to secure these rights. This opposition often finds its basis in religious and racial

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ As quoted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel G. Jacobson in a letter to the JOINT office in Paris, 3 July 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

discrimination. Second, it became evident that the initial impetus toward restitution was, on the whole, carried out in broad legislation, but that the force of this impetus has become nullified in the process of execution. The inevitable technical delays, lack of clarification, the raising of rather difficult legal points, and, again, the undoubted bias coloring judicial and administrative decisions, has brought about a situation where, in many instances, the broad purposes of the original legislation have been defeated. Third, and this affects all local efforts to bring about a proper solution is the fact that the indigenous Jewish groups in the countries involved find themselves in a weak political and economic situation so that their representations are disregarded. Being without power, they are denied access to the higher political levels which might cure some of the unfavorable conditions, or, if they are granted such access, are put off with vague promises which are never really implemented or followed through.²⁵⁹

Similar to Slovakia, the French legislature did not recognize Jews as a distinct subject minority and thus was hesitant to recognize Jewish distinct losses. The government was fixed on reintegrating Jews into society and hence treated them as "one among many of Vichy's numerous victims."²⁶⁰ As a result, the legislation was incomplete. Bureaucratic slowdowns added to the misery. However, in contrast to Slovakia, these obstacles only delayed but not ultimately prevented the French Jews from effective restitution.²⁶¹

In Poland and Slovakia, as in France, the central authorities were apprehensive of restituting Jewish property as it led to "grave societal problems."²⁶² Fear of a rise in antisemitism and violence led to the government's cautious approach to property restoration. In Slovakia, commentators on the pogrom in Topolčany (September 1945) and in Bratislava (August 1946) directly linked both events to restitution of Jewish property. After the Topolčany pogrom, the Bulletin of the Czechoslovak ministry of information published the following statement of the ministry for the interior,

²⁵⁹ Report on the status of restitution of Jewish property in Europe by Milton Winn, Collection of the AJC, AJC-GEN 10, RG 347.17.10, box 294, YIVO.

²⁶⁰ Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France*, 83.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64-85.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

Investigations by security organs brought to light that the population of the Topoľčany district had been disturbed, long before the demonstrations, by untrue rumors disseminated by former members of the Hlinka Guards, of Hlinka's Clerical Party, and by "Aryanizers" of Jewish property. The obvious reason for the deliberate policy of these reactionary elements was their fear for the property which they had gained by so-called aryanization during the clerical regime. They continued their efforts to force returned owners to leave the town, by instigating anti-Jewish demonstrations. By these means, the Hlinka "Aryanizers" wanted to save for themselves all which they had so easily gained during the past six years.²⁶³

A year later, after the Bratislava riots in August 1946, an internal memorandum of the commissioner of internal affairs listed restitution as the number one cause of antisemitism in Slovakia.²⁶⁴ Not coincidentally, riots broke out during the Assembly of Partisans who constituted a large section of the national managers of property in Slovakia.

As for Poland, the US Army Sergeant Joseph Naton, stationed in Germany, reported in July 1945,

The attitude of the newly liberated Polish people is not surprising... Although perhaps only one out of every hundred Jews in Poland remains alive today, there are good economic reasons for not welcoming them back. Many Jews have claims to property now held by Poles, who either bought or took it from the Germans, who had confiscated it from the Jews. The Poles do not want to relinquish it. Effort to rehabilitate Polish Jews economically only increases existing sentiments of hatred for this minority.²⁶⁵

Even if Naton's report is considered unreliable (his comments were based on second-hand knowledge acquired from Polish-Jewish survivors), there is plenty of evidence proving that his was a widespread conviction at the time. Minister of Labor and Social

²⁶³ Bulletin of the Czechoslovak ministry of information, News, 12 October 1945, Collection of the US Embassy in Prague, General Records, RG 84 350/54/13/2, E 2377, box 3, NA.

²⁶⁴ A memorandum prepared for the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, 10 September 1946, PV – Národné vyborý, II/1/1946, box 491, SNA.

²⁶⁵ Report of the US Army Sergeant Joseph Naton, 15 July 1945, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD 1, box 92, YIVO.

Welfare Jan Stańczyk, for example, explained anti-Jewish violence as the activity of “bands” or “gangs” which killed Jews because they “expected them to have some movable possessions like money, gold and jewels” and, by “the fact that the Poles took over former Jewish shops and factories when they were abandoned by the German administrators and of course are very reluctant to give them back.”²⁶⁶ The JOINT’s correspondents in Poland also came to the conclusion that, in addition to the legacy of six years of Nazi propaganda, “the instinctive resentment against the mere idea of restitution enhanced the antisemitic feeling of the people.”²⁶⁷ At a meeting of the CKŻP, only six days after the pogrom in Kielce, when the participants were still grappling with what had happened and why, property restitution came up at least three times in the conversation.²⁶⁸ The CKŻP saw property claims and the pogrom in Kielce as interrelated.

Jan T. Gross, in his book *Fear*, showed that the conflict surrounding property was a central incentive for anti-Jewish violence in the immediate years after the war. Gross argued that fear of losing profits obtained during the war and calming one’s own conscience by eliminating victims and witnesses stood at the root of most violent attacks against Jews after the war. Cited evidence from Poland and Slovakia seems to confirm his hypothesis. Yet, greed, and fear of unmasking past crimes can not fully explain this tenacious clinging to newly acquired goods even at the expense of murder. Without grasping the degree of poverty endured by the peasants after liberation, at least in the most devastated parts of the country, one can not understand the level of anxiety over a

²⁶⁶ Summary of the conversation between Jan Stańczyk and Max Gottschalk in a note (copy) from Max Gottschalk to John Slawson regarding Jewish situation in Poland, 16 January 1946, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD 1, box 92, YIVO.

²⁶⁷ Report on “The Basic Facts behind Polish Antisemitism” prepared for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, 3 February 1947, Collection of the AJC, AJC-FAD 1, box 92, YIVO.

²⁶⁸ Protocol from the session of the CKŻP, 10 July 1946, Collection of the CKŻP Presidium, 303/II/1, pages 13-20, AŻIH.

piece of belonging. The following description comes from the first-hand experience of a group of Quakers – the Religious Society of Friends – who came to Poland in the end of September 1945 for a ten-day inspection trip across the country.

Stopnice is a town on a provincial road running from Tarnów north to Opatów (east from Kraków)... Stopnice was lost and retaken alternately by the Germans and the Russians several times in the course of the fighting. It is ninety-five percent destroyed by the artillery fire and aerial bombing to which it was subjected. It once had a population of about 8,000, 6,000 of whom were Jews. Not a Jew has returned, but there are now about a thousand Poles back, and to find shelter they must live in holes, in cellars with two and three inches of water, in box-like shelters with all cooking arrangements out of doors. Their bed clothing has gotten wet in the recent rains and is rotting and molding... The agricultural land around Stopnice is still heavily mined.... In addition this whole region has been overrun by a plague of mice. In the fall of 1944 the fighting made it impossible to harvest the crops and the mice got such bounteous food that they multiplied ...and this spring and summer they have eaten the seed, and what they did not get there they have eaten as it grew. ... The roads by which Stopnice is reached are terrible and trucks rarely get there. The only food these people are able to get is potatoes which they have gotten by taking a sack and walking ten or fifteen kilometers and begging. There is a little bread and other food in the open market in town, but the people have almost no money so they cannot buy at the high prices it costs. Their food is principally potatoes, salt, and water... A small shipment of marmalade and sugar was sent to these wretched people who had nothing to put it on. ... After a trip of inspection that took us into cellar after cellar until one could scarcely bear it to go further, these people had the audacity to tell us, "But we are not as bad off as the villages." By villages they meant the rural clumps of peasants houses that were completely annihilated in the fighting.²⁶⁹

If any "formerly Jewish" house had still been in this town, the residents would have taken it in a heartbeat. If the Jewish owner had come back to restore his or her property, lynching would not have been out of the imaginable, especially considering that violence in postwar Poland was a daily reality, a norm rather than aberration.

²⁶⁹ "Report on Quaker Visit to Poland, September 30 to October 10, 1945," Collection of the JOINT, File 736, JOINT Archives.

CHAPTER 5

VIOLENCE (1945-48)

It would, surely, be a truism, or even a sign of naturalism, were one to posit that these horrific acts merely attest to the fact that violence (or the use of force) is an anthropological constant, an eternal feature of human nature and the human condition, one to have puzzled generations of historians, ethnographers, philosophers, and politicians. Rather, however eternal or universal violence might be, it also seems curiously historical and specific, insofar as every generation, every historical period, produces its own sociopolitically determined forms of violence as well as its own codified discourse on the phenomenon.¹

Caught in a moment of radical transformation in politics, economy, culture, and social relations, Poland and Slovakia struggled to define new categories of inclusion and exclusion. The criteria of belonging to national communities and civil societies were fundamentally redefined and reframed during the first years after the war. The ethnic violence which left thousands of people dead in the name of ethnic purification appeared to have been an intrinsic part of the process. As I will argue in the latter part of this chapter, ethnic violence should not be reduced to a mere side effect or an “inevitable” consequence of the political and social change involved in the ethnic redefinition of a country. Instead, violence should be examined as a vehicle of ethnic reconfiguration. In fact, it was violence that reinforced and crystallized the rigid categorization of people along highly exclusionary ethnic lines.

¹ Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (Routledge: London, 2000).

This chapter has two main analytical foci. First, I intend to illustrate the startling distinction between the ubiquity of violence, in general, and ethnic violence, in particular, in everyday life in postwar Poland and the relative paucity thereof in Slovakia, with the notable exception of violence against Slovak Jews. Ethnic violence dominated the Polish, not the Slovak, landscape. I should clarify what I mean by ethnic violence. The mere fact that violence occurs between two peoples of two different ethnic affiliation does not “naturally” render this violence “ethnic.” Instead, I understand ethnic violence, following the definition given by Rogers Brubaker, as

Perpetrated across ethnic lines ... in which the putative ethnic difference is coded – by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts – as having been integral rather than incidental to the violence, that is in which the violence is coded as having been meaningfully oriented in some way to the different ethnicity of the target.²

Ethnic violence as defined above predominated in postwar Poland. Neighborly violence on ethnic grounds against Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews was common. In contrast, in Slovakia, the two main ethnic minorities (Hungarians and Germans) were spared physical attacks. Jews were the only minority targeted due to their different ethnicity.

Second, I propose to describe how centers of power – the official media and other sources of authority – interpreted and represented ethnic violence for their own ends.³ In order to do so, I will examine “the discourses of violence” in Poland and Slovakia. In other words, I will illustrate what Paul Brass defines as “the ways in which participants and observers – local and external, media, politicians and authorities, journalists and

² Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 423-53.

³ Argument based on Paul R. Brass, "Introduction: Discourses of Ethnicity, Communalism, and Violence," in *Riots and Pogroms*, ed. Paul R. Brass (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996); Brubaker and Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalist Violence."

academics – seek to explain incidents of violence.”⁴ The comparative aspect of this subject will be particularly interesting since, despite apparent similarities in social and political frameworks, the interpretative mechanisms of anti-Jewish violence were subtly different in the two countries due to differences in the motives of the controlling political interests. For example, specific cases of violence, like the Topolčany pogrom, were defined as ethnic, whereas others, like the Kraków pogrom, were represented as a non-ethnic occurrence in order to meet the particular interests of the interpreters. Classifying violence as ethnic or non-ethnic was inevitably a political act.

The violence discussed below, almost without exception, occurred on the boundary between public and private spaces. Much of the redefinition of ethnic boundaries in postwar Poland and Slovakia was the state’s doing – a part of grand political projects controlled by the state (like *repolonization* and *reslovakization* discussed elsewhere). Indeed, state agencies often inspired and approved ethnic violence.⁵ At the same time, however, the focal spaces for ethnic violence are rarely military fields and state institutions but rather streets and corners of towns and villages, country roads, forest paths, and trains. Hence, this middle ground between the public and the private will remain the central backdrop of this chapter.

Also, all the acts of violence presented in this chapter can be classified as physical “exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse; ...intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action or force.”⁶ In the majority of cases, however, the ramifications of

⁴ Brass, "Introduction: Discourses of Ethnicity, Communalism, and Violence," 2.

⁵ Difficulty in separating material which discussed cases involving the state from the ones that were free of such intervention illuminated the very obscurity of boundaries between the agency of the state and of the society at the time; between the state-instigated acts of brutality and the “ground-up” social practices. In the years 1945-48, the government launched the process of expanding power over society whereas the population strove to maintain sovereignty in everyday social practices.

⁶ Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1994).

violence extended beyond physical brutality. After all, even the fear of possible victimization is a subtle yet invasive form of abuse. Verbal violence also obviously occurred but there are no sources left to measure it.

Ethnic Violence

Violence against Jews, in Poland and Slovakia between 1945 and 1948, stands at the center of this chapter. However, the analysis of postwar antisemitism would be incomplete without presenting the context, namely the problem of ethnic violence in general at the time. This contextualization provides a fresh analytical perspective on anti-Jewish violence by placing antisemitic outbreaks in the larger picture of contemporary social dynamics. Discussing brutality against other ethnic minorities conveys how ubiquitous violence was in postwar Poland.

The most striking example of an ethnic group victimized solely due to its ethnicity in postwar Poland and Czechoslovakia was the German group. The following emotional confession of Alice Braun, a Jewish woman from Slovakia, reflected the general sentiment toward Germans, not only among Jews, but also many Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks after liberation,

I was just terribly upset and I wanted revenge for my parents. I just wanted to have revenge, and, coming back to that, when I was in Nachod I still reproached myself. I couldn't do it I guess, when we were in Nachod the Czech people told us: now, you girls have the [revolver? revenge?] The Russians came already and they had about thirty or forty SS-men in the brewery, and they said to us: we give you guns and you can go and shoot anyone you want. And none of us went. And I reproach myself because that much I owe to my mother and my father that I should have killed at least one German. And I didn't do it. I hated them because they did that to my parents. I hated them for myself too but that was nothing

comparing to what they did to the ones whom they killed, and it bothers me like anything to this day that I didn't do anything about it.⁷

To people like Braun, the term “German” came to symbolize absolute evil during the six years of the war. Fresh memories of the German occupation and the crimes committed by the Nazi regime left the oppressed with an acute sense of humiliation and helplessness, which exploded into calls for justice and harsh punishment. In extreme cases, individuals viewed personal revenge as the only way to overcome their fury and grief.

Either way, as a call for justice or a call for revenge, anti-German rhetoric dominated private and public discourse. As Edmund Dmitrów established in his path-breaking study of Polish attitudes to Germans in 1945-48, there was

an exceptional convergence and uniformity of views on the German question in Polish political thought of various shades as well as in official propaganda; this uniformity was even more exceptional under circumstances of fierce political struggle and conflict between views of the ruling and the ruled on other national problems.⁸

Dmitrów's analysis of contemporary memoirs, literature, songwriting, radio shows, and press material showed that the majority of Poland's residents were of the same mind. Anti-German resentment served as a unifying factor among Poles after the war. In the intimacy of a household, on the street, and in government chambers, antigermanism bridged ethnic and social divisions.⁹ Indeed, the one common viewpoint shared by state policy-makers and the public was the one concerning the so-called German problem. The

⁷ Alice Braun, interview by Jaschael Pery, January 23, 1992, interview T-1909, VHS, Fortunoff Archive.

⁸ Edmund Dmitrów, *Niemcy i Okupacja Hitlerowska w Oczach Polaków: Poglądy i Opinie z Lat 1945-1948* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1987), 17.

⁹ Ibid; Jerzy Holzer, "Uraz, Nacjonalizm, Manipulacja: Kwestia Niemiecka w Komunistycznej Polsce," *Rocznik Polsko-Niemiecki* 1 (1992); Tomasz Szarota, *Niemcy i Polacy: Wzajemne Postrzeganie i Stereotypy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996).

harassment of Germans had the social and political stamp of approval to the extent that when a Jewish woman, Hanna Zajtman, was beaten during the Kraków pogrom she wondered, “Why were they beating me? I’m not a German.”¹⁰ Apparently, beating Germans had acquired the status of something almost “natural,” allowed to happen.

Deputy Prime Minister Władysław Gomułka was clear, “Germans will be severely punished. Responsibility must be borne by the whole German nation, which in its mass bowed down to Hitlerism and tolerated the Hitlerite reign.”¹¹ The notion of collective German responsibility, regardless of individual responsibility, reflected the most dominant theme in postwar anti-German rhetoric. The Germans were assumed to be guilty by virtue of being Germans. State-promoted punishment included expropriation, expulsion, and imprisonment. Each of these methods used violence as a means to an end and each involved ordinary people in its execution. Among these practices, imprisonment best illustrated the degree of social sanction for the use of violence against Germans in the aftermath of the war in Poland. The creation of prisons and labor camps for German civil prisoners and prisoners of war and subsequent formation of cadres opened jobs for those willing to take advantage of the new anti-German regulations.¹²

Jerzy Kochanowski, in his study *W Polskiej Niewoli* (In Polish Captivity), established that more than 180 camps for German prisoners of war operated in postwar Poland.¹³ The main labor camps were scattered across central and western Poland in Jaworzno, Potulice, Warszawa, Sikawa, Gronów, and Mielęcín. The Polish authorities

¹⁰ Testimony of Hanna Zajtman, 20 August 1945, 301/1582, AŻIH.

¹¹ Leszek Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003), 28.

¹² Helga Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer: Deutsche in Polnischen Lagern 1944-1950* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1998).

¹³ Jerzy Kochanowski, *W Polskiej Niewoli: Niemieccy Jeńcy Wojenni w Polsce, 1945-1950* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2001).

often adopted former Nazi labor camps located in western Poland like Gleiwitz (Polish: Gliwice), Potulice, Lamsdorf, (Łambinowice), Schwientochlowitz (Świętochłowice), among others. Bernadetta Nitschke found that there was the total of 235 penal institutions which housed more than 100,000 Germans in postwar Poland.¹⁴

The mortality rate was high in those institutions. In Lamsdorf alone, between August 1945 and the fall of 1946, 6,480 Germans perished there, including 623 children.¹⁵ A list of the causes of death included “starvation, disease, hard labor, physical injury, infection, and execution.”¹⁶ The majority of the interrogated and tortured people were not guilty of involvement in the Nazi party or Nazi military apparatus. However, individual innocence had no bearing on the proceedings. Putting Germans in prisons facilitated bloody personal revenge. Helga Hirsch argued that often young Jewish survivors made up managerial cadres in the camps for Germans.¹⁷ Salomon Morel, the commander of the Świątochłowice camp, was the most notorious example.¹⁸

The former victims of the Nazi regime perceived the use of violence as one way to return to “normal” life. Whether revenge helped or further scarred the individuals and communities involved is impossible to assess. It is certain, however, that it intensified negative stereotypes featuring Polishness and Jewishness as the antonym of Germaneness.

The constant memorializing and remembering of German oppression during the first

¹⁴ Bernadetta Nitschke, *Wysiedlenie czy Wypędzenie? Ludność Niemiecka w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2001), 307. Bogusław Kopka listed the total of 206 camps, operating in Poland between 1945 and 1950, for the Germans, Ukrainians, other prisoners of war, and Polish political prisoners. See Bogusław Kopka, *Obozy Pracy w Polsce 1944-1950: Przewodnik Encyklopedyczny* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza Nowa: Ośrodek Karta, 2002).

¹⁵ Alfred M. De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 93.

¹⁶ Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 130.

¹⁷ Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer: Deutsche in Polnischen Lagern 1944-1950*.

¹⁸ The Polish government sought to indict him, without success, for crimes against humanity, including the murder of a minimum of 2,000 German prisoners between June and November 1945. Morel died in 2007 in Israel.

years after the war fostered dislike and fear of Germany; it showcased antigermanism as essential for “true Polishness” and Germans as the archetypal “other.” Hence, the violence in the immediate years after the war fixed the impregnability of the boundaries between Germans, and Poles and Jews, between being a German and being a Pole or a Jew.

Similar dynamics developed in Polish-Ukrainian relations. The Polish historian Grzegorz Motyka argued that in the beginning of the conflict (1943), the Ukrainian population helped their Polish neighbors as much as they could.¹⁹ The high number of mixed marriages also encouraged a neighborly climate. Unfortunately, with the intensification of propaganda as well as the aggravation of bloodshed, Catholic Polish speakers (taken for Poles) and Orthodox and Greek Catholic Ukrainian speakers (taken for Ukrainians) became more and more suspicious of each other. Deep-seated resentment against the Polish colonization of the region (dating back to the sixteenth century) and hunger for land were the major roots of the conflict. The abyss inevitably widened, not surprisingly, since the Polish-Ukrainian violence surpassed in cruelty anything that happened to the Germans in Poland after the war. The Polish-Ukrainian conflict was also more visible than the anti-German violence. While the beating and torture of Germans took place mostly in prisons in western Poland, Polish-Ukrainian hostility spread in the open, in the squares and streets of villages and towns in southeastern Poland.

In the years 1943-47, the countryside and the major cities of Lublin, Rzeszów, and Przemyśl were scenes of murderous ethnic conflicts between Poles and Ukrainians (see chapter 2). A survivor of the Volhynia massacres, Zygmunt Stański, recalled events

¹⁹ Grzegorz Motyka, *Tak Było w Bieszczadach: Walki Polsko-Ukraińskie 1943-1948* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 1999).

in the village of Poryck-Pawłówka in the summer of 1943. On July 11, 1943, Ukrainian military units attacked a crowd gathered at a local Roman Catholic church, slaughtering the majority of them. On the next day, the attackers came back to finish the “cleansing” of the village. About 500 people were murdered.²⁰ Stański also gave shocking testimony about the fate of mixed families. He described an incident involving a young Ukrainian man whose mother was Polish. The man allegedly received an order to kill his mother. Before executing the order, the son communicated the plan to his father, a Ukrainian. After failed attempts to dissuade him, the father killed his son and took his wife and remaining four children out of the city.²¹

The village of Pawłokoma (near Rzeszów) became synonymous with the most notorious murders of Ukrainians. In January 1945, Poles in Pawłokoma blamed the local Ukrainians for the kidnap and murder of nine Polish residents. In revenge, on March 1-3, 1945, the AK gathered Pawłokoma’s Ukrainian population in the Orthodox church to interrogate them about who had killed the nine Poles. When nobody confessed, the Ukrainian men were executed at the local cemetery while the women and children were forced to leave the village.²² Overall, the Home Army (AK) unit killed close to 360 Pawłokoma’s Ukrainians.²³ More than a month later, after a series of murders of Ukrainians in Dynów, Łubno, and other places, the UPA chose the village of Borownica (near Przemyśl) for reprisals. On April 21, 1945, around 4:00 A.M., the Ukrainian

²⁰ Testimony of Zygmunt Stański in Serhii Bohunov, ed., *Polacy i Ukraińcy Pomiedzy Dwoma Systemami Totalitarnymi 1942-1945* (Warszawa, Kijów: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005), 559.

²¹ Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 188. The Soviet deportations of Poles from Volhynia concluded the process of redefining “western Volhynia as a place without Poles” in the fall of 1944. For more information, see Motyka, *Tak Było w Bieszczadach: Walki Polsko-Ukraińskie 1943-1948*.

²² Motyka, *Tak Było w Bieszczadach: Walki Polsko-Ukraińskie 1943-1948*.

²³ For a monograph on the event, see Eugeniusz Misilo, *Pawłokoma 3 III 1945 r* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKAR, 2006).

partisans surrounded the village and killed dozens of Poles.²⁴ They burnt the place and expelled the remaining Polish population. These incidents were by no means isolated. The cycle of violence persisted, leaving thousands dead, Poles and Ukrainians, as well as forcing the remaining Ukrainian population out of the country.²⁵

The conflict intensified at the turn of 1944/45 when a wave of persecutions and murders of local Ukrainians rolled through the Przemyśl and Rzeszów regions in southern Poland. When the Polish state started deportations of Ukrainians from eastern Poland, the UPA changed its tactics from murdering civilians to burning villages. This shift stemmed from a change in the group's priorities; the major goal now was to hinder state-organized deportations. Transfers of population from Poland to the Soviet Ukraine and vice versa in early 1945, in particular, became scenes of enforcement and brutality. Special police units kept threatening local Ukrainian inhabitants, destroying their property, and often killing the obstinate. Meanwhile, the UPA civilian and military units fought back by attacking Polish police, destroying railroads and bridges, and assassinating members of the resettlement commissions.²⁶ In the process, thousands of civilians were killed.

In Slovakia, in contrast to Poland and the rest of the postwar Czechoslovak Republic, the Germans were relatively safe.²⁷ Soňa Gabzdilová and Milan Olejník

²⁴ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, 194.

²⁵ Various sources cite more than 100,000 Polish and approximately 20,000 Ukrainian casualties – victims of the 1943-47 Polish-Ukrainian conflict.

²⁶ Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, 194.

²⁷ In the Czech lands, approximately 24,000 to 40,000 German civilians were killed during the entire immediate postwar period (1945-48). These deaths included cases of lynching, street violence, suicides, deaths in camps, and others. The total German deaths – military and civilian – in Czechoslovakia after April 1945 reached 215,000 to 230,000 (including 15,000 of Carpathian Germans from Slovakia). Tomáš Staněk, *Perzekuce 1945: Perzekuce tzv. Štátne Nespolehlivého Obyvatelstva v Českých Zemích (mimo tábory a veznice) v Kvetnu-Srpnu 1945* (Praha: ISE, 1996), 7. Also see Piotr Pykel, "The Expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia," in *The Expulsion of the 'German' Communities from Eastern Europe at*

established that violence against Germans was absent from the postwar social landscape.²⁸ Instead, it was common to find cases of ordinary Slovaks challenging the state controlled persecution of German civilians by actively supporting and helping them.²⁹ Sympathy for the German minority stemmed mainly from the character of the German presence in Slovakia during the war. Lenient Nazi policies toward their Slovak ally, as well as a relatively short period of direct military occupation, contributed to the virtual calm over the German question in postwar Slovakia. Also, numerically the Slovak Germans were hardly significant. Fifty-seven thousand Germans in Slovakia constituted merely 0.17 percent of the total population of 3,459,000 in 1945.³⁰ However, when considering these statistics, it should be noted, that numbers do not necessarily generate particular social responses. Slovak Jews, for example, who were also outnumbered by the rest of the population, still became a target of violence.

Rather than Germans, it was Hungarians who were resented in postwar Slovakia.³¹ Political announcements and decrees targeting the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia were of necessity contained to the Slovak lands since 600,000 to 650,000

the End of the Second World War, ed. Steffen Prauser and Arfon Rees (Florence: European University Institute, 2004).

²⁸ Soňa Gabzdilová and Milan Olejník, "Proces Internácie Nemeckého Obyvateľstva na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1946," *Historický Časopis* 50, no. 3 (2002).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. The majority of Germans were transferred from Slovakia to the Czech lands in April 1945. For more information on the Slovak historical demography, see the population statistics in "Historical Demographical Data of the Whole Country," <http://www.populstat.info/> (accessed June 27, 2008).

³¹ On the position of Hungarians in postwar Czechoslovakia, see Juraj Zvara, *Maďarská Menšina na Slovensku po Roku 1945* (Bratislava: Epoque, 1969); Ludvík Němec, "Solution of the Minorities Problem," in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948*, ed. Victor S Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 416; Kálmán Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948* (New York: Social Science Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1982); Štefan Šutaj, *Maďarská Menšina na Slovensku v Rokoch 1945-1948: Východiská a Prax Politiky k Maďarskej Menšine na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Veda, 1993).

of 700,000 Czechoslovakia's Magyars lived in southeastern Slovakia in 1946.³² Not surprisingly, political and social conflict with Hungary and the Hungarian minority was focused in this area. The governments in Prague and Bratislava found the Magyars – like the Germans in the Czech lands – collectively guilty of the betrayal of the Czechoslovak Republic (for instance, responsibility for the pre-Munich crisis, the Munich Agreement, and the Vienna Arbitration) and support of fascism (for instance, the collaboration with Nazi Germans and violence against Czechs and Slovaks during the war).³³

The disfranchisement, expropriation, and expulsion of Hungarians had wide popular support in Slovakia. Public opinion surveys revealed broad dislike of Magyars among the Slovak population in 1948 when the Czechoslovak government was working on radical transformation of its policies concerning the Magyar population, including reinstatement of their civil and political rights. Almost half the respondents (forty-seven percent) did not agree that “the Magyars should obtain civil and political rights in Slovakia” whereas thirty-five percent did agree.³⁴ Similarly, fifty-five percent of the Slovak respondents approved of the expulsion of Magyars from the country.³⁵ Barnovský observed that, overall, anti-Magyar policies had the greatest support among youth

³² Joseph B. Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 129.

³³ Kalman Janics argued that, in fact, most Magyars in Slovakia were leftist and opposed the Nazi regime during the war. Thus, they perceived postwar persecutions as a gross injustice. See Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948*, 43.

³⁴ “Súhlasíte s tým, že Maďari dostávajú u nás občianske a politické práva alebo nie?” Research no 5, survey no 10, the Institute for Public Opinion Research in Bratislava (Ústav pre výskum verejnej mienky v Bratislave), 21 October 1948, Poverenictvo školstva a osvety v Bratislave (PŠk), PŠk S/1948, box 89, SNA.

³⁵ “Ste za vysťahovanie Maďarov zo Slovenska?” Michal Barnovský, “Slovenská Spoločnosť v Zrkadle Výskumov Verejnej Mienky v Rokoch 1948-1949,” *Historický Časopis* 52, no. 3 (2004).

(eighteen to twenty-nine years of age) and the least among farmers, thirty percent of whom gave neutral (“do not know”) answers.³⁶

At the same time, as the Hungarian historian Kalman Janics observed, anti-Hungarian sentiments did not translate into violence, “Certain calmness reigned for awhile in Slovakia. There was no lynching of Hungarians. It took the harsh measures decreed from above to arouse mass nationalist hatred.”³⁷ As the years went by, the anti-Hungarian campaign intensified but, even with the harsh laws issued by the president and the SNR, Hungarians did not suffer cruelty similar to that experienced by Ukrainians in Poland or by Germans in the Czech lands. I have not found any evidence of neighbor-inflicted persecutions of the Hungarian population in Slovakia after the war. Only *en passant* did Janics mention “the nationalist excesses, not uncommon in the Danube region...intended to intimidate the Hungarians – or manifestations of pent-up revolutionary passions, heightened by the presence of the Red Army as liberators” in the beginning of 1945.³⁸ But he did not expand on it, nor did he offer any references for these “chaotic events, considered to be as nothing unusual under postwar conditions.”³⁹

Nonetheless, the Hungarian minority in Slovakia was not entirely shielded from physical violence. Expulsions and confiscation of property organized and executed by the state in its attempts at redrawing ethnic lines in Czechoslovakia involved psychological and physical abuse. Indeed, to force someone from his or her property was not a peaceful practice. Uncertainty, made worse by psychological intimidation, must have been widespread among the Magyar minority. Slovak Hungarians, who waited day and night

³⁶ Ibid.: 478-79.

³⁷ Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948*.

³⁸ Ibid., 101.

³⁹ Ibid.

in anticipation of the notice to leave the country and then actually were forced to pack and move, were also victims of violence.

To summarize, the most striking difference was the omnipresence of ethnic violence in postwar Poland as opposed to its absence in Slovakia. This observation, however, is only relevant to ethnic violence which occurred on the street, “among neighbors,” without direct or indirect instigation by state agencies. In terms of state policies on ethnic issues, Poland and Czechoslovakia were similar. Brutal expulsions, expropriations, and detentions of Germans and Magyars in Slovakia, Germans in the Czech lands, and Germans and Ukrainians in Poland were equally violent state interventions into people’s lives. It was the treatment of ethnic minorities by their neighbors that greatly outdid, in quantity and quality, the brutality of anything that happened to individual Germans and Magyars in Slovakia. The only people who were attacked with equal ferocity on both Slovak and Polish streets were Jews.

Anti-Jewish Violence

In 1945-48, acts of violence against Jews – attacks on streets and roads, in apartments, and on trains – occurred in both countries, although on a different scale. Large violent outbreaks, like the pogroms in Kraków, Kielce, and Topolčany, were sporadic, only dotting the history of the first three years after the war in Poland and Slovakia. Kersten pointed to the wavelike character of violence targeting Polish Jews after the war.⁴⁰ March, April, and August 1945 were the periods of the highest intensity

⁴⁰ Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992). Literature on postwar anti-Jewish violence in Poland include Yisrael Gutman, “Żydzi w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej: Akcja Kalumni i Zabójstw,” *Przegląd Prasy Zagranicznej* 2, no. 3-4 (1986); Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona, ed., *Antyżydowskie Wydarzenia Kieleckie 4 Lipca 1946*

of “anti-Jewish excesses” in Poland.⁴¹ Indeed, in March 1945 alone, according to data from the ministry of public security, more than a hundred Jewish survivors were killed and nine seriously wounded.⁴² The safety of Jewish returnees further deteriorated in June and August 1945, when violent outbreaks occurred in Lublin, Rzeszów, Działoszyce (Kielce province), and Przemyśl.

In Lublin, on June 9, 1945, a few men broke into a hospital run by nuns where Jewish patients were admitted. They killed one person and wounded another one.⁴³ In Rzeszów, three days later, on the morning of June 12, 1945, a police detachment, having been informed of an alleged ritual murder, searched Jewish apartments for a child’s corpse. Rumors of ritual murder (“confirmed” by the police search) and the subsequent detention of the tenants attracted a crowd on the streets. People cursed the Jews as the police escorted them to the police station; passers-by threw stones, plundered the apartments, and beat up a few Jewish residents.⁴⁴ Eventually, the provincial police commander (Wojewódzka Komenda Milicji) ordered the immediate release of the detained Jews without interrogation. I have no information concerning further proceedings in the case. In Działoszyce, on the night of June 16, 1945, a group of people threw grenades into buildings occupied by Jewish returnees. Of approximately 150 Jews

Roku: Dokumenty i Materiały (Kielce: Urząd Miasta Kielce, 1992); Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 Lipca 1946* (Warszawa: Bellona, 1992); Alina Cała and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, ed., *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce, 1944-1968: Teksty Źródłowe* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997); David Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998); Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie: 11 Sierpnia 1945* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000); Joshua D. Zimmerman, ed., *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006).

⁴¹ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*.

⁴² Police reports from the collection of the ministry of public administration (Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej, hereafter cited as MAP), 1945, MAP/786, AAN.

⁴³ Police reports from the collection of the MAP, 1945, MAP/786, AAN.

⁴⁴ Report on the events in Rzeszów on June 12, 1945, 16 June 1945, 301/1320, AŻIH.

residing in the town at the time, five were killed and fifty wounded.⁴⁵ In Przemyśl, as in Rzeszów, rumors of a child allegedly saved from being kidnapped by a Jewish woman, circulated around the city. Fortunately, no major public disturbances occurred.⁴⁶

August 1945 marked another period of ethnic tensions in the geographical quadrangle of the southeastern and central provinces between Kielce, Kraków, Lublin, and Rzeszów. The Kraków pogrom was the most intense and most widely publicized but by no means an isolated event at the time. As early as the beginning of the month, in Radom (near Kielce) and Przemyśl, underground organizations distributed leaflets demanding that the Jews leave both towns before August 15, 1945. In the meantime, four Jewish survivors were killed in Radom.⁴⁷ Jews were victimized in Opatów (Kielce province), Sanok (near Rzeszów and Przemyśl), Lublin, Grójec, Gniewoszków (near Lublin), Raciąż (north of Warszawa), just to mention a few.⁴⁸ The most astonishing, however, was an assault in Rabka. On the night of August 12, 1945, someone hurled a hand grenade into a home for sick Jewish orphans (*sierociniec*). The house was under gunfire for about two hours. Nobody was injured but the orphanage was soon closed down.⁴⁹ On August 13, in Chełm (near Lublin) anti-Jewish riots lasted eight hours. A few people were beaten and their property plundered.⁵⁰ In central (Łódź, Radomsko), northern (Bydgoszcz), and southcentral Poland (Tokarnia near Kielce, Skaryszew, and Zwoleń

⁴⁵ Police reports from the collection of the MAP, 1945, MAP/786, AAN.

⁴⁶ Reports from the collection of the Presidium CKŻP, 1945, CKŻP/303/24, AŻIH.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ For details, see Cała and Datner-Śpiewak, ed., *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce, 1944-1968: Teksty Źródłowe*, 39-40. Also see Engel, "Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946."; Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*.

⁴⁹ Reports from the collection of the Presidium CKŻP, 1945, CKŻP/303/24, p. 179-180, AŻIH.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Also see Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, 112.

near Radom), as well as in Silesia (Czeladź near Katowice) rumors of ritual murder circulated, aggravating the climate of tension and insecurity.⁵¹

After a few relatively calm months, another wave of violence occurred in February and April 1946.⁵² According to data collected by Kersten, in April 1946 alone, approximately 300 Jewish survivors were killed in Poland.⁵³ But it was the pogrom in Kielce on July 4, 1946 that became a household name in the master narrative of antisemitism in postwar Poland.⁵⁴ This came to symbolize the peak of anti-Jewish violence, for it took the lives of forty-two people and pushed tens of thousands of others to leave the country. On July 1, 1946, an eight-year old boy disappeared. Two days later, he turned up alive, telling a story of Jews holding him in a basement. On July 4, police searched the Jewish repatriates' shelter at 7 Planty Street where the boy had been allegedly detained. A crowd gathered as the policemen had spread rumors about kidnapped Polish children on their way to the house. Since "men in uniform" spread the news about Jews imprisoning Polish children, the public considered it "the truth." Initially, the crowd merely observed the police searching the house. But when the third

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² For example, on February 5, 1946, in the early evening, a group of approximately hundred people in uniforms attacked Parczew singling out its Jewish residents. Three of the targeted Jews were killed and one was injured. The attackers robbed almost all apartments occupied by the Jews and destroyed property which they considered valuable. Parczew (near Lublin), a town of approximately 10,000, was liberated in July 1944 by the Home Army (as a part of the Operation Storm – *Akcja Burza*) followed by the Red Army and the Polish People's Army. Of 5,000 Parczew Jews (half of the prewar population), only approximately 200 resided in the town after the war. Large and dense forests in the Parczew area were a stronghold of the Polish military underground. The Jewish partisan movement also had its groups in the area, most notably units led by Ephraim (Frank) Bleichman and Shmuel (Mieczysław) Gruber.

⁵³ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, 10.

⁵⁴ On the pogrom, see Krystyna Kersten, "Kielce: 4 Lipca 1946," *Tygodnik Solidarność* 36 (1981); Michael Chęciński, *Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-semitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishers, 1982); Krystyna Kersten, "Pogrom Kielecki: Znaki Zapytania," in *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, ed. Krystyna Kersten (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Meducki and Wrona, ed., *Antyżydowskie Wydarzenia Kieleckie 4 Lipca 1946 Roku: Dokumenty i Materiały*; Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 Lipca 1946*; Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*.

police patrol, accompanied by the army, entered the house and brought the Jewish tenants out to the street, the crowd became increasingly aggressive. The action of the police triggered violence. The rioters beat the Jews, threw them out of the windows, and plundered the buildings. By the end of the day, forty-two people were killed, many more injured. Sixty-two attackers were arrested.

While hundreds of Jews were killed across Poland, in Slovakia, the numbers were much lower. No local pogroms reached the intensity of Kielce.⁵⁵ I have no definitive estimate of how many Jews were injured in violence in Slovakia after the war. Based on available data, I speculate that at least twenty people were killed and at least one hundred injured in 1945-48 across Slovakia. Nonetheless, given the relative absence of violent outbreaks against Magyars and Germans and the generally low level of brutality in daily life in comparison to Poland, instances of violence against Slovak Jews were conspicuous. In 1945 alone, anti-Jewish riots took place in Košice on May 2, in Prešov in the summer, and, most notoriously, in Topoľčany on September 24. Simultaneously with the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in Topoľčany, individual incidents occurred in Žabokreky and Chynorany.⁵⁶ On September 23, 1945, people threw stones at a young Jewish man in the train station as well as into a house of a Jewish family in Žabokreky (a village north of Topoľčany). On the next day, Sunday, September 24, a crowd of people gathered on the streets shouting antisemitic slogans. According to the testimonies collected by the SRP in Bratislava, national security officers in Žabokreky denied Jews protection based on “information” that they had allegedly killed four children in

⁵⁵ Numbers for Poland quoted after Israel Gutman and David Engel.

⁵⁶ Letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

Topoľčany.⁵⁷ Early Sunday evening, people gathered on street corners to talk about the Topoľčany blood libel accusations and other news of the day. The atmosphere grew hostile and, later that night, a few local Jews were beaten and their apartments robbed.⁵⁸ In Chynorany (near Žabokreky), on September 24, a man was harassed and beaten near the train station and his nearby apartment ransacked.⁵⁹ Considering that the rumor was that Jews had killed thirty children in Topoľčany, it seems to have been fortunate that no larger disturbances occurred in the town.

Another wave of violent attacks targeting Slovak Jews occurred in the summer of 1946. The commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava issued, in August 1946, a memorandum on public order and safety, addressed to all district national committees, officers responsible for safety, as well as to the central headquarters of national security, in which he called their attention to possible unrest in the future.⁶⁰ The commissioner recommended detention or suspension of any member of the national security force who participated in any antisemitic and anti-state activity. He also called for wide-ranging restrictions on public gatherings.⁶¹ The document came in response to events in Bratislava on August 1-6, 1946. During the Assembly of Partisans, participants robbed at least ten apartments, wounded nineteen people (four seriously), and demolished the kitchen for Jewish returnees.⁶² The SRP reported a four-day-long series of robberies and

⁵⁷ Letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

⁵⁸ For details, see *ibid.* For details on the robbery of Maximilian Feldmar's apartment, see statement of the National Security Bureau in Žabokreky, 13 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

⁵⁹ Letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

⁶⁰ Memorandum on the public order and safety issued by the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, 19 August 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, Presidium ONV 475/46, box 7, SAN.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Report of the SRP on the riots during the Assembly of Partisans in Bratislava on August 1-5, 1946, 27 August 1946, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 491, SNA.

beatings of Jewish residents across Bratislava that spread far outside the city limits. As early as a week before the Assembly, posters appeared on city walls warning, “Attention Jew, a partisan is coming to beat Jews,” “Czechoslovakia is for Slovaks and Czechs, Palestine is for Jews,” “Jews to Palestine!” “Jews out!” “Hang the Jews!”⁶³ On Thursday night (31 July-1 August), a group of people broke into an apartment occupied by Jewish residents and robbed it. On Saturday (3 August) evening at around 8:30 P.M., a group of partisans and civilians randomly checked the identification of passers-by and beat those whom they identified as Jews. The same evening, a larger group of partisans, some in uniform, and civilians gathered on a street with the intention of attacking Jews. Non-Jews who sided with the Jewish residents were not spared either.⁶⁴ When the crowd attacked the repatriates’ kitchen a couple of hours later, the army intervened and restored quiet in the city, by 11:30 P.M.⁶⁵ However, unrest continued until Tuesday, August 6, 1946. At the time of the Bratislava riots, attacks on Jewish returnees occurred in Nové Zámky (2 August), Žilina (4-6 August), Komárne (4 August), Čadca (5 August), Dunajská Streda, Ipoľske Šahy (8-9 August), Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš, Beluša, Tornaľa (11 August), Šurany (17-18 August), and Veľká Bytča.⁶⁶

While 1947 was a relatively quiet year (with the exception of the anti-Jewish riots in Bardejov in June 1947), violent attacks against Jews again occurred in 1948. In Bratislava, on August 20, 1948, in the morning, two women beat each other up at the

⁶³ “Pozor žide, partisan ide židov biť,” “ČSR pre Slovákov a Čechov, Palestína pre židákov,” “Židia do Palestíny!” “Židia von!” “Židov obesit!” Ibid.

⁶⁴ The riots occurred on Kapucínska Street, the Hurbanovo Square, near the Michalska Gate (the Old City), and spread toward the Manderlák building near the Kamenné and SNP Square (Stalin Square at the time).

⁶⁵ Report of the SRP on the riots during the Assembly of Partisans in Bratislava on August 1-5, 1946, 27 August 1946, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 491, SNA.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

farmers' market at the SNP Square.⁶⁷ One of the women was Emilia Prášilová, the other was Alica Franková. Prášilová started the brawl by yelling at a seller for privileging Jews like Franková.⁶⁸ In response, Franková called Prášilová “a fascist, an SS-woman” who forgot that it was no longer 1942, “These times are gone when one could handle Jews in *this* way!”⁶⁹ Pulling each other's hair was just a beginning. The police finally took the two women to the police station, releasing them soon after. In the meantime, a small crowd gathered in front of the police station and, when Franková left the building, people started to beat and kick her. In the end, the police took her back inside and, then, to the national security station where Franková spent two days. In the meantime, on August 20, before noon, people who had gathered in front of the police station beat two other Jewish women, one of whom had to be taken to hospital. The same people, mainly young, in their twenties, yelled slogans like “Hang the Jews!” and “Jews out!”⁷⁰ In the evening, around 8:00 P.M. a larger crowd gathered at the SNP Square and moved toward Jewish Street where most of the public institutions for Jewish survivors were located. The home for the elderly, the youth hostel, the hospital, and the girls' dormitory were closed but the repatriates' kitchen failed to shut down before the crowd appeared. As a result, the kitchen was ransacked for a second time. The crowd also threw stones into the hospital's windows. The disturbances lasted until 10:00 P.M. On the next day, August 21, a crowd

⁶⁷ Stalin Square at the time. The description of the events based on reports of the SRP and the ÚSŽNO, as well of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, August-September 1948, PV – Secretariat 1948, box 97, SNA.

⁶⁸ “*Smradľave židovky.*” Report of the SRP and the ÚSŽNO on the riots in Bratislava on August 20-21, 1948, 24 August 1948, PV – Secretariat 1948, box 97, SNA.

⁶⁹ “... *tie časy už pominuly, keď sa so židmi mohlo takto zaobchádzať!*” Ibid.

⁷⁰ “*Obesit' židov! Von so židmi!*” Ibid.

gathered again on the same square but, this time, the national security forces quickly dispersed it.⁷¹ Forty people were sentenced to three weeks to two years in prison.

Soon after the riots (September 23, 1948), public opinion interviewers asked the following, “Recently there were anti-Jewish riots in Bratislava. Do you approve of them, or not?”⁷² Thirty-seven percent answered positively, thirty-five percent disapproved, and twenty-eight percent did not know.⁷³ The answers were distributed more or less equally across age, gender, religion, and occupation, with the exception of Greek Catholics, who approved the riots in the largest percent (forty-seven percent, while thirty-two percent of Protestants and thirty-nine percent of Roman Catholics also answered positively). When asked if there were more “honest or dishonest” (*statočných alebo nestatočných*) Jews in Slovakia at the time, sixty-three percent of the respondents said there were more dishonest (*nestatočných*) Jews, whereas only five percent declared otherwise.⁷⁴

Answering another question, “Frankly speaking, were you against the Jews during the Slovak State and are you against the Jews now?” fifty-six percent of the respondents claimed that they were now, that is in September 1948, against the Jews, whereas only

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “V Bratislave boli nedavno proti židovské výtržnosti, schvaľujete ich alebo nie?” Research no 4, survey no 7, Ústav pre výskum verejnej mienky v Bratislave, 23 September 1948, Poverenictvo školstva a osvety v Bratislave, PŠk S/1948, box 89, SNA.

⁷³ The intentions of the regime, that generated the surveys, were questionable. Although in 1946, when the idea of such surveys was born, Czechoslovakia was by no means a totalitarian regime eager to falsify the results (the government was split half/half – thirteen to thirteen seats – with Communists occupying the most strategic posts of the ministry of the interior and the ministry of defense), the initial survey was conducted two years later (two months after the February takeover in 1948) when Communists were willing to legitimize their power at any cost. The assessment of the level of “honesty” on the public’s part poses the other methodological challenge. The questionnaires under investigation were distributed seven months after the communist takeover (September 1948) and the degree of intimidation of the public at that time is not clear.

⁷⁴ “Podľa vašej skúsenosti, akých židov je u nás teraz viacej statočných alebo nestatočných?” Research no 4, survey no 10, Ústav pre výskum verejnej mienky v Bratislave, 23 September 1948, Poverenictvo školstva a osvety v Bratislave (PŠk), PŠk S/1948, box 89, SNA.

thirty-four percent declared that they had been against the Jews during the war.⁷⁵ Overall, twenty-two percent (or a fifth) more of the respondents claimed to dislike Jews in the period after the war than during its course. Such an open expression of resentment and its alleged increase within a period of a few years was due to either increased social acceptability of dislike of Jews after the war, blurred memory of what had been the case during the war, or an actual increase in anti-Jewish sentiments.

Case Studies of Kraków and Topolčany

In 2006, Kraków, located in south-central Poland on the banks of the Vistula River, was one of the major cities of Poland, ranking third (after Warszawa and Łódź), with a population of 757,000. In 1945, Kraków had about 298,500 residents.⁷⁶ Immediately after liberation, in January 1945, there were approximately 500 Jews registered in the city.⁷⁷ This number grew rapidly from the constant immigration of Jews from the East, from camps, from hiding, as well as from villages and small towns. By the end of 1946, the number of Jews in the city had reached 6,600, of whom only one-third were returnees to the city of their birth or youth.⁷⁸ The majority of the Jewish survivors in postwar Kraków was new to the city and often treated their stay as a short break before continuing their journey to another destination.

As elsewhere in Poland, 6,000 was only a fraction of the prewar presence. In 1938, of 251,500 residents of Kraków approximately 60,000, or twenty-five percent,

⁷⁵ "Povedzte úprimne, boli ste proti židom za Slovenského štatu, áno alebo nie, – a ste proti židom teraz, áno alebo nie?" Research no 4, survey no 5, Ústav pre výskum verejnej mienky v Bratislave, 23 September 1948, Poverenictvo školstva a osvety v Bratislave (PŠk), PŠk S/1948, box 89, SNA.

⁷⁶ Anna Cichopek, "The Kraków Pogrom of August 1945: A Narrative Reconstruction," in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

were Jews. The Kraków prewar Jewish population was highly diverse with a large religious and mainly impoverished community residing in the Kazimierz quarter; with pockets of acculturated Jewish families who lived on the boundary between gentile and Jewish society; and, finally, with radically assimilated individuals who had cut their links with the Jewish religion, language, and tradition.⁷⁹ Kraków Jews were mainly lower middle class employed in the commercial sector and light industry but with a strong presence in the city's liberal professions and arts.

During the Second World War, the entire Jewish population of the city became the subject of discrimination, persecution, and, finally, extermination. The Kraków ghetto was formally established in March 1941 to become one of the largest ghettos in wartime Poland. Although the area adopted for the ghetto was originally inhabited by approximately 3,000 people, it eventually held a population of 15,000. In 1943, the ghetto was liquidated and the majority of its prisoners was sent to concentration and death camps across southern Poland. The local non-Jewish population and the German administration took over the apartments, houses, movable property, and commercial enterprises left by the community of 60,000 between 1941 and 1943. In January 1945, the residents of Kraków also appropriated Jewish property that the fleeing Nazis left behind.⁸⁰ As a result, postwar Kraków was a city radically changed.

⁷⁹ For the history of Kraków Jews before the war, see Majer Bałaban, *Historja Żydów w Krakowie i na Kazimierzu, 1304-1868* (Kraków: Nadzieja, 1928); Andrzej Żbikowski, *Żydzi krakowscy i ich gmina w latach 1869-1919* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1994); Eugeniusz Duda, *The Jews of Kraków* (Kraków: Hagada, 1999); Eugeniusz Duda and Jacek Balcewicz, *Jewish Kraków: a Guide to the Historical Buildings and Places of Remembrance* (Kraków: Vis-a-Vis/Etiuda, 2003); Sean Martin, *Jewish Life in Kraków 1918-1939* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004).

⁸⁰ For literature on the persecution of Kraków Jews during the war, see Julian Aleksandrowicz, *Kartki z Dziennika Doktora Twardego* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1983); Tadeusz Pankiewicz, *The Kraków Ghetto Pharmacy* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987); Aleksander Bieberstein, *Zagłada Żydów w Krakowie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001); Katarzyna Zimmerer, *Zamordowany Świat: Losy Żydów w Krakowie, 1939-1945* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2004).

In Kraków, rumors of ritual murder circulated days before the pogrom occurred on August 11, 1945. On June 27, a crowd, agitated by the news of a Jewish woman allegedly arrested for the abduction of a child, gathered in one of Kraków's market places (Kleparski Square). They almost demolished a shop belonging to a man named Halbreich but a police detachment dispersed the crowd in time.⁸¹ Police intervention, however, did not succeed in ending the stream of accusations. In the same market, women repeated rumors of thirteen Christian children's corpses allegedly discovered in Kraków. During the trial following the pogrom on August 11, 1945, one of the witnesses testified that he heard women yelling "loudly, threats and insults directed at Polish Jews: 'They should all be killed; if [the Jews] had such power as the Germans they would have murdered us all.'"⁸² Markets are, by nature, places with a concentration of people and, hence, particularly conducive to collective agitation. Like Kleparski Square, Szeroka Square in the Kazimierz district functioned as a flea market after the war.⁸³ Youngsters gathering in the square, very close to the Kupa Synagogue at 27 Miodowa Street, had, for a few weeks in the summer of 1945, regularly thrown stones at the synagogue to disturb services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings.⁸⁴

As on previous Saturdays, on August 11, 1945, during the morning Shabbat service in the Kupa Synagogue, a group of youngsters threw stones at the main entrance

⁸¹ Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie: 11 Sierpnia 1945*.

⁸² Testimony of Eljasz Grünfeld, 1945, 859/322, Central Military Archives, Warszawa (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe, hereafter cited as CAW).

⁸³ Regrettably, due to an error in translation, both markets were conflated into one in the essay Cichopek, "The Kraków Pogrom of August 1945: A Narrative Reconstruction," 227. Events in June 1945 occurred in Kleparski Square but the pogrom on August 11, 1945, happened in Kazimierz, near a flea market, in Szeroka Square.

⁸⁴ On July 24, 1945, the Jewish Religious Association in Kraków (*Żydowskie Zrzeszenie Religijne w Krakowie*) issued a letter to the voivode of Kraków requesting immediate protection against the attacks. On August 6, five days before the pogrom, the police assigned a two-person patrol to protect the Kupa Synagogue on Miodowa Street. Letter from the Jewish Religious Association in Kraków to the voivode of Kraków, 24 July 1945, *Urząd Wojewódzki II 1073, APKr*.

on Miodowa Street. The worshippers attempted to chase the attackers away. Jewish soldiers, present in the synagogue at the time, ran outside and “one of them caught a boy throwing stones at the synagogue’s window and beat him. The boy freed himself and ran away screaming...”⁸⁵ However, it was the behavior of another boy, Antoni Nijaki, which was crucial to the development of events. Nijaki entered the synagogue and, then, ran out screaming “People, help! They want to murder me!”⁸⁶ The rumor of ritual murder, a rumor repeated for several days, found its “confirmation” in a scared boy escaping from the synagogue. His screams became the trigger for the anti-Jewish riots in Kraków.

Shortly after 11:00 A.M., the crowd from the nearby flea market at Szeroka Square attacked the synagogue. The gate was forced open in search of the supposedly murdered Catholic children. Attackers demolished the synagogue’s interior, trampled on the holy objects, and dragged the Jews from the synagogue to the street amidst yells, curses, and beatings. One of the attackers, Franciszek Bandys, a janitor in the Jewish shelter, with a group of the police went to the annex by the synagogue. Sara Stern, a resident of the Jewish shelter at 26 Miodowa Street, testified on Bandys’ attack,

[Bandys, a janitor] pulled from the crowd, or led out from the synagogue, a girl, almost undressed, in a torn skirt and shirt, scuffling. He kicked her and jabbed her, and a crowd of people behind them assailed her. The janitor then escorted the girl I don’t know where. After about fifteen minutes I noticed the girl in a car which came and stopped in front of the synagogue. The girl was beaten with sticks and hands, and then the car took off again with the girl.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Bill of indictment, 5 September 1945, 1265/336, CAW.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Notes from Sara Stern’s testimony, 13 August 1945, 767/322, CAW.

This was not an isolated incident. Hateful screams accompanied the scenes of violence. Bandys yelled, “You whore, if Hitler didn’t finish you, we will,” “You are on Polish soil and dare to murder Polish children!”⁸⁸

Soon, plundering and demolishing spread further in the city. Attackers searched the buildings, stole anything they found, and beat up the Jewish residents. Non-Jewish passers-by and residents of the district who showed sympathy to the attacked and stood up in their defense exposed themselves to verbal abuse and assault.⁸⁹ When Józef Drzewiecki tried to stop a man chasing a small Jewish girl, the assailant “punched him in the face with his fist. He said, ‘what do you son of a b— care, it’s a Jewish child.’”⁹⁰ The fear of robbery and beating stopped many witnesses from helping the attacked. Based on available data, it is impossible to assess whether and to what extent help was granted. Likely, most of the observers remained passive.

Among the assailants, the most visible were those in uniform – policemen and soldiers. The fact that among the twenty-five accused, twelve were in uniform is illuminating. Instead of defending the victims, policemen led and encouraged the violence. The active participation of representatives of law and order sanctioned, de facto, violence against Jews. When one of the accused was asked why he had acted with such cruelty, he said, “Everybody around said the Jews were murdering children. I saw the soldiers caught mainly Jews, and the old hatred of Jews started boiling in me so I

⁸⁸ Resolution to call Franciszek Bandys to account, 22 August 1945, 1265/336, CAW.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Protocols from the interrogation of the witness Michał Drzewiecki, 21 August 1945, 853/322, CAW.

simply let it out.”⁹¹ The underlying logic was that if the authorities (*władza*) beat and plundered, then all felt free to do the same without the fear of reprisal and responsibility.

Civilians who participated in the riots were mainly local residents, by and large poorly educated, unskilled, and unemployed. However, hostility toward Jews was not limited to the poorest and the least privileged. One victim’s testimony suggested that health-care professionals in the hospital, a Catholic nun, and skilled railway workers, among others, did not significantly differ from the poor in their hostility toward the Jews.⁹²

The actual number of victims of the violence, which erupted in Kraków on August 11, 1945, is unknown. The report of the CKŻP stated that five people were “seriously wounded [of whom] four were in the hospital at the surgical ward, and one was in the hospital in the building of the Jewish Committee at 38 Długa Street.”⁹³ Possibly many more were injured but not seriously enough to need hospitalization and thus remained undocumented. On August 14, the Polish Press Agency reported two people killed: Róża Berger and another unidentified woman. The *American Jewish Year-Book* from 1946 added a third casualty, sixty-two-year-old Anszel Zucker.⁹⁴ Overall, the only death that was confirmed in all the sources was that of Berger, who was buried in the Jewish cemetery at Miodowa Street.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Protocols from the interrogation of Franciszek Bandys, 11 August 1945, 767/322, CAW. Translation from Cichopek, "The Kraków Pogrom of August 1945: A Narrative Reconstruction," 228-29.

⁹² See the testimony of Hanna Zajtman in Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie: 11 Sierpnia 1945*.

⁹³ Julian Kwiek, "Wydarzenia Antyżydowskie 11 Sierpnia 1945 w Krakowie: Dokumenty," *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego*, no. 1 (2000): 26.

⁹⁴ *American Jewish Year-Book*, no. 1/5707 (1946): 336-7.

⁹⁵ In my book, I suggested that at least five people were killed in the pogrom, based on the photographs from the Kraków Photographic Society. However, Julian Kwiek convincingly argued that these photographs showed another event: the Kraków funeral of five Jews murdered outside the city in April 1946. Persuaded by his argument, I recognize and regret my mistake. See Julian Kwiek, *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* (2001).

The riots were most intense between 11:00 A.M. and 1:00 P.M., calming down around 2:00 P.M., only to gain strength again in the early evening. The provincial police and the office of state security in Kraków attempted to disperse the crowd and detain the perpetrators for several hours. By late evening, the streets of the prewar Jewish quarter of Kazimierz, to which the riots were limited, were quiet. The police arrested twenty-five people during the next few days. Following the interrogations of the accused and the witnesses, the police completed the investigation on September 1 and passed the case to the prosecutor's office of the Kraków district. Between October 1945 and February 1946, the military district court in Kraków sentenced ten people to prison terms of six months to seven years.⁹⁶ Although tensions persisted throughout the city for another few days, they did not turn into full blown riots and no one else was hurt.

Forty-four days later similar events occurred in Topolčany, in western Slovakia. Located on the western bank of the Nitra River, Topolčany is now a medium-sized town with the population of about 29,000. Although much smaller and culturally and politically much less affluent than the neighboring cities of Bratislava and Nitra, Topolčany was an important commercial center of the region before World War II. The local Jewish community was amongst the richest in Slovakia with a relatively small population (only the eleventh biggest Jewish community in Slovakia). In 1930, the total population of the town reached 8,731 of whom approximately 2,200, or twenty-five percent, were Jews.⁹⁷ In 1938, this number increased to 3,000.⁹⁸ According to the census of 1930, a third of the local Jews considered themselves Jewish by nationality while the

⁹⁶ For more details, see Cichopek, *Pogrom Žydów w Krakowie: 11 Sierpnia 1945*.

⁹⁷ Robert Y. Büchler, *Židovská Náboženská Obec v Topolčanoch: Počiatky, Rozvoj, Zánik* (Bratislava: Slovenské Národné Múzeum. Múzeum Židovskej Kultúry, 1996), 59.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 59-62.

remaining two-thirds registered as Slovaks, Magyars, and Germans.⁹⁹ By and large, the Jews of Topolčany constituted a considerable portion of the local middle class: doctors (sixty-seven percent), lawyers (fifty-nine percent), and political activists, among others.¹⁰⁰ Besides the liberal professions, commerce was another major area of Jewish economic activity. In 1930, of 615 businesses in town, including stores and workshops, 320 (fifty-two percent) had Jewish owners.¹⁰¹ Politically, Topolčanians oriented themselves toward the right with the radical HSĽS having a majority in the town's council. However, it should be noted that the third political force in the town before the war (after the HSĽS and the Communists) was the Jewish Party (Židovská strana) with a large constituency among non-Jews.¹⁰² In short, on the one hand, there was an affluent, sizeable (one-fourth of the total population), and relatively well-integrated Jewish population in Topolčany, and, on the other hand, the town's authorities and a significant portion of the population accepted the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the political right.

During the war, when the Slovak State introduced anti-Jewish measures like *aryanization* of property, the estates, businesses, and movables of the prosperous Topolčany's Jewish community became an easy and very attractive target. Members of the local HSĽS, in particular, profited from *aryanization* since they were the ones who took over the most prosperous of the eighty-nine *aryanized* businesses in the city. Robert Y. Büchler, a historian of Topolčany's Jewish community, also claimed that the majority of profiteers were not Topolčanians but outsiders with no prewar connections to the

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 88.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

city.¹⁰³ Regardless of their origins, the *aryanizers* stayed in the town after the war and became the fiercest defenders of the economic status quo. Therefore, when former Jewish owners gradually returned to Topoľčany (of approximately 2,800 prewar Jewish residents about 750 returned) and claimed their property, the new owners and their families turned against them.¹⁰⁴

Anti-Jewish slogans appeared on city walls and individual Jews were harassed for at least four weeks before the events.¹⁰⁵ The most immediate trigger to violence were rumors of the nationalization (*poštátnenie*) of the Catholic schools in Topoľčany. As early as September 10, 1945, nuns running the Catholic school for girls heard rumors that the school would soon be nationalized and they would be replaced.¹⁰⁶ As the rumor circulated, it gradually acquired new features including the supposed Jewish origin of the new state-designated teachers. The mothers of students loudly accused Jews of trying to take over the school in order to protect their own children attending the institution. In his analysis of the pogrom, Ivan Kamenec pointed to a lack of evidence regarding whether the school authorities actually believed these rumors.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the case, the headmaster, E. Kokodičová, asked the local mothers for help in preventing the school's

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Copy of the report on the causes of the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 5 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA. Kamenec pointed to the social profile of returning Jews as yet another factor contributing to the general apprehension for the recently acquired material gains. He suggested that since the majority of Topoľčany Jewish returnees were mainly well-to-do former owners who survived thanks to bribery and pay for hiding, their return turned into a particularly harsh “open or silent reproach” against expropriators. See Ivan Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945," *Studia Historica Nitriensia* 8 (2000).

¹⁰⁵ The SRP's letter mentioned slogans against Jews, Czechs, and Communists posted on a Nitra-Prievidza train in western Slovakia as early as the mid of September 1945. See letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁰⁶ Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁰⁷ Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945."

nationalization and secularization.¹⁰⁸ In response, representatives of the parents petitioned the commissioner of education in Bratislava requesting a cancellation of nationalization projects.¹⁰⁹ On Sunday, September 23, 1945, after worship, a group of women (mainly mothers of the students) decided to call a demonstration against nationalization of the school for the next day.¹¹⁰

On Monday, September 24, at 8:00 A.M., about sixty women came to the offices of the district national committee (Okresný národný výbor, ONV) to demand a halt to the school's nationalization as well as the removal of the Jewish children from the school.¹¹¹ At this point it was not clear who said what to the protesters. According to the report of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, the ONV deputy chair allegedly told the women "to take guns and go for the Jews."¹¹² Another clerk supposedly sent the women to speak to the city's school inspector. According to the SRP in Bratislava, the women were told that it was none of their business, which supposedly further infuriated them.¹¹³ Upon the women's arrival, the inspector attempted to convince the protesters that the rumor of the school's nationalization was untrue. At that point, as Kamenec found, there were already about 160 people gathered in front of the inspector's building, ready to move toward the school.¹¹⁴ Anger levels increased when more and more stories

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ According to the reports, there were only about twenty women gathered in front of the district national committee.

¹¹² "...aby si vzaly automaty a išly na Židov." Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹¹³ Letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹¹⁴ Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945." The report mentioned 5,000 people gathering in the nearby streets but since the entire town had not more than 9,000 residents the above number is highly unlikely. Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

of Jews throwing out nuns and tearing down crosses and other religious symbols circulated in the crowd.

Women coming from the inspector's office started yelling anti-Jewish slogans like, "Away with Jews, Jews are guilty of everything, expel Jewish children from our schools, and prohibit Jewish doctors, the Bergers, to vaccinate our children!"¹¹⁵ Violence became imminent when the protesters accused a Jewish physician, Karol Berger ("Jewish doctors, the Bergers"), who that day had vaccinated children (seven to eight-years-old) in the school, of poisoning them. Historically, the "endangerment" of a Christian child proved the deadliest for the Jews (blood libel). The infuriated mothers broke into the school demanding access to the classroom where the doctor was vaccinating the children. Having heard and misinterpreted the cry of the children (obviously scared by the uproar outside the school), the mothers broke into the room, dragged the doctor out, screaming, "You Jew, you poison our children!" and handed him to the crowd outside the school.¹¹⁶ Berger, along with another victim, a Jewish soldier, managed to escape to the local national security offices (Národná bezpečnosť, NB) and eventually ended up in a nearby hospital with others injured in the riots.¹¹⁷ Throughout the town, 200 to 300 people attacked and beat Jewish residents on the streets and looted their apartments.¹¹⁸ A group of people even tried, without success, to drag the Jewish children out of the school. Others, equally unsuccessfully, went to the local branch of the NB and demanded that the Jews who had found refuge in the building be handed over to them.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Copy of the report on the causes of the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 5 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹¹⁸ Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945," 92.

¹¹⁹ Copy of the report on the causes of the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 5 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

The municipal authorities reacted to the unfolding events with considerable delay. The rumors were denounced as false on the city radio only once, at 6:45 P.M. in the evening, when the worst was already over.¹²⁰ Having failed to disperse the crowd before the attack on the school, the local police found themselves incapable of containing its growth. When it became evident that the resources of the local branch of the NB (seven men) were insufficient, the city council turned to the local army garrison for help. Twenty soldiers were deployed to pacify the city streets. As in other pogroms at the time, the soldiers joined the rioters instead of subduing them.¹²¹ One of many reports about the demonstration that circulated in the commissioner's offices in Bratislava blamed the inexperienced and indecisive commander of the unit, who was unable to stop his men from being lured by the crowd, who were screaming, "Soldiers come with us to beat the Jews!"¹²² Soldiers pulled Jews out of their apartments under the pretence of walking them to the safety in the buildings of the NB and then handed the unsuspecting victims to the infuriated people on the street.¹²³

Finally, around noon, a special auxiliary (*asistenčný*) unit dispersed the crowds.¹²⁴ An hour or so later, the Topoľčany streets were quiet. At 6:00 P.M., when an NB unit of forty policemen arrived from Bratislava (faced with intensifying total chaos, the city's national committee turned to the Central Bureau of National Security for assistance), the riots were over. Overall, in the Topoľčany pogrom, forty-seven people were injured,

¹²⁰ Letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹²¹ Estimates of soldiers participating in the riots vary. For example, see official letter from the command-in-chief of national security (Hlavné veliteľstvo národnej bezpečnosti, HVNB) in Bratislava to the SNR, 25 September 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹²² "Vojaci pod'te s nami spolu biť Židov!" Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹²³ Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945."

¹²⁴ It is not clear if it was a military or police unit.

among whom fifteen needed hospitalization.¹²⁵ The following day, on Tuesday September 25, the NB units from Bratislava arrested nine to eleven of the most active, and mostly very young (seventeen to twenty-four-years-old), participants in the pogrom.¹²⁶ In total, about fifty people were arrested, of whom many ended up in the labor camp in Ilava or a prison in Topoľčany.¹²⁷ The military conducted a separate investigation and arrested twenty soldiers in connection with the riots. There is, however, no evidence of any trial proceedings after the pogrom.

Interpretations of the Kraków Pogrom

The two pogroms, in Kraków and Topoľčany, generated considerable response in the respective countries. Local and central authorities, public associations and societies, and above all the press, vied with each other in reporting and commenting on the events. An examination of the Polish and Slovak press, official reports, statements, memoranda, and leaflets published after the two events reveal two recurrent models of coverage – the master narratives of the Kraków and Topoľčany pogroms.

Analysis of dozens of articles, published in the aftermath of the Kraków events, cast some light on the dominant narrative of the Kraków riots.¹²⁸ First, reporters expressed shock and disgust over the events, emphasizing the only recently ended horror

¹²⁵ Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹²⁶ Kamenec claimed that there were nine people arrested while the report claimed eleven arrested. Ibid. Also see Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945."

¹²⁷ Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹²⁸ Articles were published in *Dziennik Polski*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Rzeczpospolita* (daily published by the Publishing Cooperative Reader since 1945), *Robotnik* (daily of the Polish Socialist Party, first published in 1931), *Polska Zbrojna*, *Gość Niedzielny* (Roman Catholic weekly, published in Katowice since 1923), *Dziennik Łódzki* (Łódź daily since 1884), and *Ziemia Pomorska* (Bydgoszcz daily between 1945 and 1950), among others.

of the war, as well as the incongruity between the tragedy and its scenery. That Kraków, a city of a hundred churches and the oldest Polish university, widely considered the spiritual capital of the country, became a scene of antisemitic riots appeared to be a contradiction in terms.¹²⁹ Second, the journalists almost never called the events “a pogrom.” Rather, they used euphemisms, like “Kraków occurrences” (*zajścia krakowskie, wypadki*), labeled the riots “antisemitic excesses” (*ekscesy antysemickie*) and “disturbances” (*zamieszki*), or gave them a criminal cast, using the terms like “crime” (*zbrodnia*), “criminal operation” (*przestępcza akcja, zbrodnicza akcja*), and “criminal provocation” (*zbrodnicza prowokacja*).

Why not “pogrom” then? In my opinion, the press, particularly the newspapers strongly tied to the government, avoided the term since, by definition, it suggested intense mob violence of a rebellious character. At the same time, the official organs tried to downplay the size of the riots while portraying the governmental forces as highly capable. Also, I speculate that the press avoided the word “pogrom” due to its connotation of state provocation. Since the anti-Jewish riots in Russia in the 1880s, “pogrom” was associated with the idea of “official planning or collusion.”¹³⁰ As Brass stated,

pogroms might indeed best be defined as attacks upon the persons and property of a particular ethnic, racial, or communal group in which the state and/or its agents are implicated to a significant degree, but which are given the appearance, by design of the authorities or otherwise, of a riot [a riot understood as “outbreak among the people in violation of the laws and order of the state.”]¹³¹

¹²⁹ See “Zbrodnia i Głupota” (Crime and Stupidity), *Dziennik Polski* 187 (1945): 1, and *Robotnik* 214 (1945): 6.

¹³⁰ Brass, “Introduction: Discourses of Ethnicity, Communalism, and Violence,” 33; John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, ed., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹³¹ Brass, “Introduction: Discourses of Ethnicity, Communalism, and Violence.”

Finally, the strong ethnic component of the word “pogrom” – violence against Jews – was also thought as unnecessary. The authorities and the press preferred to interpret the riots as a politically motivated crime rather than ethnic violence since the former had more potential in the fight against the political opposition.

A third recurring element of the official press coverage was the blaming and naming of the villains with a vocabulary which, in the late 1940s, was central to official “newspeak.” The press presented the riots as the “work” (*robota*), “operation,” or “provocation” (*provokacja*) of “reactionary forces” (*reakcja*), “paid confidants of the London reactionary government-in-exile” (*płatni zauszniczy londyńskiej reakcji*), and “certain political circles” (*pewne koła polityczne*). The reactionaries supposedly provoked and organized “certain social elements” (*elementy społeczne*), “lumpenproletariat,” or “dark people” (*ciemnota*), and “social scum” (*szumowiny społeczne*) like “pimps and prostitutes” (*sutenerzy, prostytutki i alfonsy*) – social and political “trash.”¹³² The term “reactionary” (*reakcja*) referred to the entire political and military underground (above all the radically nationalist NSZ) at home and abroad, led by the London based government-in-exile.¹³³ The press tended to emphasize the alleged ideological kinship between the “reaction” and the prewar Polish regime, the *Sanacja* (regime of moral reformation). The terms “squirearchy-capitalist clique” (*klika obszarniczo-kapitalistyczna*) and “sanacja’s mafia” (*mafia sanacyjna*) were used to discredit the rioters as cruel capitalists who

¹³² Lumpenproletariat (German *Rabble-proletariat*) is a term originally coined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845). In Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), the term denoted “refuse of all classes,” including “swindlers, confidence tricksters, brothel-keepers, rag-and-bone merchants, organ-grinders, beggars, and other flotsam of society.”

¹³³ Similarly, in Slovakia, the Communist Party (KSS) used pogroms to discredit the Democrats (DS) in the government.

wished to resurrect the old system of social injustice. Finally, the journalists brought up the alleged Nazi legacy of the opposition, calling the latter “homegrown fascists” (*rodzimi faszyści*), “volksdeutsche” and “reichsdeutsche,” and “epigones of Hitlerism” (*epigoni hitleryzmu*). No other tactic was more likely to discredit a political opponent: any linkage to Nazism was utterly shameful immediately after the war.¹³⁴

The reactionaries allegedly had several main motives in organizing the riots. The antisemitic outbreak was supposed to discredit the Polish government in the international arena by portraying it as incapable of controlling the situation in the country. Also, the disturbances were supposed to stir up anarchy and chaos and thus further weaken the government’s position. Finally, the outbreak was supposed to disturb reconstruction and halt the rebuilding of the country. In short, antisemitism was one of the many means to discredit, weaken, and ultimately bring down the government. In its place, the underground supposedly wanted to reestablish the prewar regime, which would take land away from the peasants and factories away from the workers. The authors then concluded that the enemy underestimated the government, which, despite difficulties, could and would establish and execute “law and order.” The articles usually ended with a call for the severe punishment of the participants in and organizers of the riots as well as for the continuation of the fight against ignorance and “reactionary forces.” There was also a dose of optimism about the successful outcome of the struggle.¹³⁵

Needless to say, not every article matched the above narrative. There were numerous variations on the theme. For example, Marian Piechal from *Dziennik Łódzki*

¹³⁴ The reconstruction of the narrative based on articles from *Dziennik Polski* 187, 190 (1945), *Głos Ludu* (1945), *Polska Zbrojna* 169, 172, 174 (1945), *Robotnik* 214, 218 (1945), and *Rzeczpospolita* 220, 223 (1945).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

drew attention to how superficial the influence of literary and journalistic circles was if their message did not affect the crowds. He called upon artists and journalists to take partial responsibility for the crime.¹³⁶ Another example came from *Tygodnik Powszechny* (Universal Weekly), a Roman-Catholic weekly published in Kraków from March 1945, which ignored the version blaming the military underground's provocation and, instead, blamed the Germans. According to the journalist, Jerzy Zagórski, postwar Germany had the greatest interest in provoking anti-Jewish outbreak in order to shift the blame for the extermination of Jews to other nations. Zagórski also blamed the deep-seated prejudices and ignorance of the masses for generating the violence.¹³⁷

It is hard to establish to what extent the press was a mere vehicle for government propaganda or whether it was the actual reflection of popular beliefs. The fact that most articles covering the Kraków pogrom mirrored the government's officially promoted version is not sufficient to prove total governmental control over the press. Judging from the general chaos, the weakness of an administration, the lack of tools for effective enforcement (including censorship), as well as ad hoc formed journalistic cadres in the first months after the war, the Kraków press in the summer of 1945 can not be dismissed as a mere agent of the government's will. Krzysztof Dowgird called the years 1945-47 in press history, "a period of relative pluralism," when the number of press titles skyrocketed, every city had at least two dailies of different political options, the opposition had the limited right to publish, the number and circulation of literary

¹³⁶ "Nauka ze Zbrodni" (Lesson from the Crime), *Dziennik Łódzki* (1945). Also see *Robotnik* 215 (1945).

¹³⁷ "Żydzi, Polacy i Zaminowane Dusze" (The Jews, Poles, and Mined Souls), *Tygodnik Powszechny* 26 (1945).

weeklies grew, and high quality magazines were still available.¹³⁸ *Tygodnik Powszechny* was the best illustration of the continual presence of intellectual integrity in the period.¹³⁹

The most common type of journalism was represented by the daily newspapers *Dziennik Polski* (Polish Daily) in Kraków and *Rzeczpospolita* (The Republic). Both were published by the publishing cooperative *Reader* (Czytelnik) created in 1944 by Jerzy Borejsza, an active member of the PPR and the man in charge of publishing in postwar Poland. Both dailies, although required to stay in line with official policy, hired and published journalists known for their competence and professionalism, by no means mere puppets of the system. Newspapers such as *Dziennik Polski* and *Rzeczpospolita* thus functioned on the boundary between government policy and independent journalism, the latter reflecting opinions of a significant segment of the Polish intelligentsia. It should be noted that the convictions of the intelligentsia immediately after the war were not necessarily in radical opposition to the government. In fact, many journalists genuinely believed in the “socialist progress” and social and political change promoted by the authorities and the party at the time. Enthusiasm for change and support for reforms and for the general rebuilding of the country were common, particularly among the educated strata in urban areas. Many believed that antisemitism was indeed alien to socialist and communist ideals and, inevitably, it was the doing of anticommunists, fascists, and so-called reactionaries (as opposed to those who promoted “progress”).¹⁴⁰ The fact that so

¹³⁸ “Okres względnego pluralizmu prasy: 1945-47” in *Historia prasy polskiej: 1945-57*, http://www.reporterzy.info/article.php?section=historia&title=historia_prasy_polskiej_lata_1945_1957 (accessed June 28, 2008).

¹³⁹ On the other extreme was *Głos Robotniczy* (Workers’ Voice) in Łódź which functioned as a medium of the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR).

¹⁴⁰ For the description of journalists circles, see Leopold Marschak, *Zaraz po Wojnie* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978). For the description of the literary and artistic circles see Henryk Vogler, *Autoportret z Pamięci: Dojrzałość*, vol. 3 (Kraków, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981).

many articles were in tune with one another stemmed from this peculiar mix of governmental imposition and grassroots convictions.

In short, the rhetoric of the press represented the official interpretation of the events in Kraków, in line not only with the government but also with a significant segment of the literati, intelligentsia, and, in general, enthusiasts for reconstruction. Not surprisingly, all these sectors were extremely vocal after the pogrom, considering the availability of vehicles of expression and access to media. The government, both central and local, army, police, political and social organizations, trade unions, and others issued statements, announcements, and memoranda condemning the events. The first to issue a statement was the district board of the socialist, peasant, and communist parties. Subsequently, similar announcements were published by the mayor of Kraków, presidents of institutions of higher education in Kraków, the trade union of journalists, the headquarters of trade unions in Poland, the district voivode's council and voivode's office, the Polish scouts and youth organizations, Kraków students, the assembly of Polish artists, the writers of the city of Łódź, and others.¹⁴¹ Political organizations and associations organized rallies and demonstrations in Kraków and across the country. For example, the local branches of the Polish Socialist Party and Polish Workers' Party organized a rally against antisemitism in Kraków while the trade unions staged demonstrations in factories in Łódź and Warszawa.¹⁴² Needless to say, the rhetoric of all these events recycled the narrative presented above.

¹⁴¹ *Dziennik Polski* 187, 188, 190, 191, 194, 195, 206 (1945), *Robotnik* 218, 219, 234 (1945), *Polska Zbrojna* 177 (1945).

¹⁴² *Rzeczpospolita* 221, 225 (1945), *Robotnik* 214 (1945), *Dziennik Polski* 197 (1945), *Polska Zbrojna* 172 (1945).

The responses of the central government were similar. Five days after the events, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PPR debated the issue, concluding that the struggle against antisemitism was a part of the final encounter with “fascist elements” in Poland.¹⁴³ Participants in the meeting decided on concrete measures to combat antisemitism. Those included rapid reaction to antisemitic outbreaks, cooperation with broader strata of society, expulsion of the unemployed from Kraków (sic!) and other cities, expulsion of “reactionary” students and lecturers from universities, productivization of Jews, and material compensation for the victims of the pogrom.¹⁴⁴ The resolution that followed only partly included the above proposals. At its core, it was a perfect representation of the narrative of violence in Kraków analyzed before.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, by no means did it serve as a blueprint (the resolution, after all, was issued days after the main body of articles had been already published). Statements and interviews by other centers of authority like the prime minister, the president of Kraków, and the regional national council, which were simultaneous or shortly followed the PPR resolution, did not stray from the dominant rhetoric of dozens of other announcements and articles published at the time.¹⁴⁶

The only source of a counter narrative was the political underground, which had limited access to national and local media and thus a limited readership. Inevitably, then, the counter interpretation and representation of the events in Kraków had very few outlets and means to be heard. The clandestine press emphasized the possible provocation of the

¹⁴³ “Dokumenty: Protokoły KC (1945),” *Zeszyty Historyczne* 24 (1973): 141-3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* I have not found any evidence documenting the expulsion of the unemployed from the city of Kraków in the months following the pogrom.

¹⁴⁵ Resolution of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers’ Party concerning the Kraków events, August 1945, 205/VII/5, AAN.

¹⁴⁶ *Dziennik Polski* 187, 188, 195 (1945). Also see minutes of the seating of the regional national council in Kraków, 13-14 August 1945, UW, APKr.

NKVD in cooperation with the national security forces, police, and the army. Authors of the text distributed by the underground, entitled *Enough of Soviet Shuffling* claimed that Soviet manipulation was evident in the Kraków “occurrences.”¹⁴⁷ As proof that the Soviets and Polish communists organized and staged the whole event, the authors referred to the fact the NKVD arrested the Jews before they arrested the rioters. The authors were not clear, however, about the motives of the provocateurs. Another document, produced by an unknown clandestine political organization, stated that the main aims of the provocation were the intimidation of the opposition and thus pressure to stop the critique of the “Jewish question” in Poland; accusation and discreditation of the underground at home and abroad; and preparation of public opinion in the West for an influx of Jews from the East.¹⁴⁸ Even a superficial reading of the two texts suggests that their rhetoric was a carbon copy of the official narrative except that blame was placed in the opposite direction.

Interpretations of the Topolčany Pogrom

The Slovak press, in comparison to its Polish counterpart, devoted much less attention to the Topolčany riots.¹⁴⁹ Only two major titles in circulation at the time, *Čas* and *Pravda*, published an immediate commentary on “Topolčany violence” (*topolčianske násilnosti*) and returned as well to the subject occasionally during the three

¹⁴⁷ Papers of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party, *Enough of Soviet Shuffling*, August 1945, 295/VII/203, AAN.

¹⁴⁸ Papers of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party, *Informator* (Directory) no 2-3, 1945, 295/VII/200, AAN.

¹⁴⁹ For example, *Bojovník* (a daily designed for the military readership, first published in June, 1945, in Bratislava) did not publish a single entry on the subject. Unfortunately, I had no access to the 1945 issues of *Hlas Ludu*, another major newspaper, which remained in line with official policy in Bratislava (daily, published in Prešov since 1945).

weeks following the event.¹⁵⁰ The first to react was *Čas*, which published the initial reports on the events on September 30, followed by *Pravda*'s article on October 2, 1945.¹⁵¹ As Kamenec rightly observed, their coverage reflected their politics. *Čas*, an official organ of the Democrats (DS), published articles that emphasized the unethical aspect of antisemitism, persistence of the postwar moral crisis, and the continued influence of *ľudák* (Slovak fascist) prejudices against Jews. The journalists of *Čas* pointed to efficient policies on property restitution as a means to resolve the problem of antisemitism in Slovakia and called for patience among Slovak Jews as restitution could not be handled overnight.¹⁵² Overall, *Čas* tended to de-politicize the problem by stressing the moral and economic aspects of antisemitism.¹⁵³

Pravda, on the other hand, an official organ of the Slovak Communist Party (KSS), used the Topoľčany pogrom as a tool in the emerging political struggle against the Democrats. Kamenec wrote that *Pravda*, by and large, devoted more space to every manifestation of antisemitism in Slovakia in order to discredit the DS.¹⁵⁴ Every outbreak of anti-Jewish violence was supposedly proof of the DS's inconsistency in dismantling the legacy of the Nazi regime, including the consequences of the *aryanization* of property. Similar to the DS, the KSS pointed to the influence of Nazi ideology and property issues as the main sources of the riots. However, instead of drawing conclusions

¹⁵⁰ Daily *Čas* was an official organ of the Democrats (DS). Established by the underground during the Slovak national uprising in Banská Bystrica in September 1944, it moved to Bratislava in early 1945. Published until the communist takeover in February 1948. Daily *Pravda* was an official organ of the Slovak Communist Party (KSS) – the Slovak equivalent of the Russian *Pravda*, first published in 1945. See “Zvyšky fašistickej ideologie zdolať stoj čo stoj” (To overcome relics of the fascist ideology by hook or by crook), *Pravda* 185 (1945): 1, Newspaper collection, the Library of Congress, Washington DC.

¹⁵¹ See Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945." Both issues are missing from the newspaper collection of the Library of Congress.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*: 94-5.

¹⁵³ At the same time, the editorial board of *Čas* ensured the publication of every political resolution that was issued on the subject. For example, see “Podrobnosti o protižidovských demonštráciach v Topoľčanoch” (Details about the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany), *Čas* 143 (1945): 4

¹⁵⁴ Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945," 94-5.

of a moral and social nature, the KSS called for political measures against the agents of fascism. *Pravda* recognized antisemitism as not a temporary disturbance but as an attack against the newly reestablished republic.¹⁵⁵ For example, *Pravda*'s interview with Chairman of the Board of Commissioners Karol Šmidke on October 6, 1945, illustrated the point.¹⁵⁶ The introduction to the interview stated that fascism still had its adherents, who were ready to tear out the “young roots” (*mladé korene*) of the state and undermine its very foundation. Such a danger called for particular “vigilance and severity” (*ostrážitosť a prísnosť*) against fascist “elements.” The author painted an image of obscure fascists, at home and abroad, who were only waiting for the right moment to put “spokes in the new republic’s wheel.”¹⁵⁷ The Topolčany events allegedly proved how imminent this danger was. Šmidke emphasized the need to punish severely the rioters not only for the sake of maintaining law and order at home but also to uphold the image of Slovakia abroad. He believed that the relics of fascism in Slovakia might discredit the country abroad, which, considering the respect Slovakia earned through the uprising of 1944, would be a major loss. Šmidke also claimed that a thorough investigation and severe punishment of the Topolčany rioters would serve as a warning (*výstracha*) against all “reactionaries” and “fascist elements” in the future. Finally, he added that an organized ideological campaign would also help the fight against antisemitism and fascism.¹⁵⁸

Šmidke represented the voice of the government, which was much more involved in the interpretation of the pogrom than the official press coverage suggests. A significant

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ “Zvyšky fašistickej ideologie zdolať stoj čo stoj” (To overcome relics of the fascist ideology by hook or by crook), *Pravda* 185 (1945): 1, Newspaper collection, the Library of Congress.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

number of reports and statements circulating between Bratislava and Prague proved that the government did not view the events as entirely inconsequential. A week after the pogrom, on October 2, 1945, the government in Prague issued a statement in which it demanded that the SNR promptly undertake the investigation, prosecution, and punishment of the guilty parties.¹⁵⁹ The Prague government also stipulated a “thorough cleansing” (*dukladna očista*) of the Slovak administration. The government assumed, as in Šmidke’s words in *Pravda*, that it was the presence of fascist “elements” from the former Slovak State that contributed to contemporary tensions.¹⁶⁰ The commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava (the report of November 3), the NB office in Topoľčany (the report of October 5), the NB office in Bratislava (the letter of October 15) as well as the Prague government (the letter of October 5) agreed that the former members of fascist organizations such as the detachments of the Hlinka Guard were the major organizers and provocateurs of the anti-Jewish riots in Topoľčany and thus should be promptly arrested.¹⁶¹ The assumption was that the riots were not spontaneous manifestations of social unrest along ethnic lines but an organized crime of “fascist elements.” Government sources pointed to former members of the Hlinka Guard (*gardišti*) as the most active participants in the riots. For example, an anonymous resident of Topoľčany, in a letter sent to the government in Prague, denounced the two Boček brothers (a teacher and a

¹⁵⁹ Copy of the official letter from Prime Minister Zdenek Fierlinger to the SNR in Bratislava, 5 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁶⁰ The government recommended that the SNR would issue special decrees concerning the practical enforcement of equality for all citizens including Jewish citizens of Czechoslovakia. Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Pohotovostne oddiely Hlinkovej gardy. Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

civil servant) as enemies of Jews and Czechs, who had allegedly robbed Jews and raped young Jewish women.¹⁶²

The “fascists” were not the only ones blamed for the antisemitic outbreak in Topoľčany. In addition, the reports blamed nuns and the Catholic clergy for instigating the pogrom by telling children (who then told their mothers) that the nuns would be expelled and replaced by Jewish teachers. The NB office in Bratislava even recommended the removal of the leading Catholic figures (for example, the nun superior as well as the head of the Catholic school) from Topoľčany.¹⁶³ *Aryanizers* – residents who were the most interested in preventing the return of Jews for fear of losing their newly acquired property – were named the spiritual instigators (*duchovní pôvodcovia*) of the riots.¹⁶⁴ To complete the analysis of the Topoľčany pogrom, the commissioner of internal affairs also pointed to the Catholicism of the majority of the town’s residents and the anti-Jewish propaganda of the Slovak State during the war as factors contributing to antisemitism.¹⁶⁵ The latter was apparently widespread since the letter from the commander-in-chief of the NB in Bratislava from October 15, 1945 read that “there are very few people in Topoľčany who would not approve of the events of September 24,

¹⁶² Anonymous letter to the Czechoslovak government in Prague, date unknown, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁶³ Official letter from the commander-in-chief of the NB in Bratislava to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava concerning the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany, 15 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁶⁴ Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA. The report from October 5, 1945 also pointed to the “aryanizers’ circles” (*kruhy arizátorské*) as responsible for spreading antisemitism in the town.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

1945. Today in a conversation with a worker, farmer, or a member of intelligentsia you will find out that people hate Jews outright.”¹⁶⁶

The above letter from the NB office reads like malicious gossip or a denunciation report. It was full of personal attacks on employees of both the district national committee (ONV) and the NB office in Topoľčany. According to the author(s), weakness and indecisiveness, which were supposed to have enabled the riots, were the least of the administration’s flaws. For instance, the letter accused the head of the ONV in Topoľčany of embezzling the city’s resources, scolded the deputy head for incompetence, and called a clerk from the security department intellectually incapable.¹⁶⁷ Topoľčany’s office of NB did not escape criticism either. In a more constructive manner, the author(s) of the letter pointed to the absence of effective intelligence as the leading cause of the slow reaction to the riots. The work overload and lack of personnel could not, however, justify the failure to prevent or, at least, promptly suppress, the riots.¹⁶⁸

Interestingly, the reports also emphasized the alleged role of the Jews in inciting the pogrom by their “provocative behavior” and by isolating themselves from their non-Jewish neighbors. In the reports, there was an apparent trend in the interpretation of the Jewish role in the pogrom. The closer to the pogrom in terms of time and location, the

¹⁶⁶ Official letter from the commander-in-chief of the NB in Bratislava to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava concerning the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany, 15 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA. Similarly, the representatives of the SRP reported that, after the riots, one of Jewish residents heard people saying, “Look how straight he walks, didn’t he get beaten?” Letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁶⁷ The grandiosity of his daughter’s wedding and the use of an office car for private affairs was supposed to illustrate the point.

¹⁶⁸ The representatives of the Slovak Jewish community organized in the SRP agreed with the above statements and blamed the local powers-that-be – the district national committee, city national committee, the NB office, the police, and the army – for general incompetence in handling the situation. In the two-page letter to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, the Jewish representatives denounced numerous errors in judgment, delays, and intentional and unintentional mistakes committed by the authorities. See letter from the SRP to Commissioner of Internal Affairs Július Viktory in Bratislava, 8 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

more reporters paid attention to narrating the events rather than interpreting them. For instance, the authors of the report compiled in Topoľčany, just a few days after the pogrom (October 5, 1945), did not include a single mention of Jews provoking the riots. With the passage of time and in reports written far from the scene, they became more aggressive in pointing to the Jews as the main cause of the riots. As more time elapsed, authors tended to change their previous judgments. For example, the letter from the commander-in-chief of the NB in Bratislava to the commissioner of internal affairs of October 15, 1945, stated that “the main blame for the demonstrations rests on the provocative behavior of citizens of Israelite religion against Christian citizens.”¹⁶⁹ This statement was directly preceded by a story of a Jewish woman who supposedly claimed in public that it would be well in Topoľčany only if Marshall Stalin’s Street was paved with Christian skulls instead of rocks.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the report of the commissioner of internal affairs, written more than two weeks later and based almost entirely on the letter of the NB, fully omitted the above statements. At the same time, the commissioner’s report kept the paragraph emphasizing the Jews’ unwillingness to “make friends” with their Christian neighbors and, thus, Jewish responsibility for deepening the abyss. The letter also briefly mentioned the role of Jews as magyarizers and their allegedly privileged position in receiving food supplies.¹⁷¹

On October 7, 1945, at a public gathering organized by the SRP, the Jewish leaders addressed these issues as well as complaints that the Jews could not speak Slovak.

¹⁶⁹ “*Hlavnú vinu na demonštrácii má provokatívne chovanie sa obyvateľstva izraelitského vierovyznania voči obyvateľstvu kresťanskému.*” Letter from the commander-in-chief of the NB in Bratislava to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava concerning the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany, 15 October 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

¹⁷⁰ “...*bude dobre len vtedy, keď ulica Maršála Stalina bude vyložená miesto skál kresťanskými hlavami.*” Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Copy of the report from the anti-Jewish demonstrations in Topoľčany on September 24, 1945, 3 November 1945, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1947, box 582, SNA.

They stated that the Jewish leadership had obliged itself to make sure that in a year there would not be a single Jew without knowledge of the Slovak language in Slovakia.¹⁷²

Apart from the self-critique, the Jewish representatives talked about the suffering of the Slovak and Czechoslovak Jewish community during the war and the hope for a better tomorrow.¹⁷³ They emphasized that a good Catholic Slovak had nothing to do with the persecutions during the war. On the contrary, they said, the Catholic Church always took the side of the Jews. In unison with the Czechoslovak government, the speakers pointed to Hitler's legacy as the cause of contemporary antisemitism. The presenters also emphasized the loyalty of the Jews to the nation and the state as well as their eagerness to contribute to political, economic, and cultural progress of the "mother country" (*vlast*). Jewish participation in the uprising and their work in the underground and anti-Nazi espionage were highlighted to illustrate the point.

To summarize, close examination of the reports in the two countries reveal two discourses on ethnic violence, which differed considerably in spite of their similarity in condemning antisemitism and blaming the political opposition. In Poland, the intensity of the power struggle between Communists and the opposition demanded the use of radical means. The interpretation of ongoing social and political events in order to ascribe to them their "correct" meaning was an important aspect of the political fight since both sides were aware that control over the system of knowledge and establishment of a monopoly on "the truth" helped to give them control over society at large. As a result, in 1945-48, public life underwent a radical politicization. Almost every social act, every

¹⁷² "Slovenskí Židia manifestovali za ČSR" (Slovak Jews demonstrated for the Czechoslovak Republic), *Čas* 140 (1945): 3.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

social practice performed in the time of the power struggle, including acts of violence, became political acts.

The violence against Jews in Kraków was no exception. At the moment when they occurred, the Kraków riots were profoundly ethnic in the sense that the ethnic identity of the perpetrators and victims superseded any other systems of reference. The killed and injured in the pogrom were targeted solely *as* Jews (regardless of what Jewishness meant to the perpetrators). In the aftermath, however, the rhetoric surrounding the violence in Kraków, by and large, downplayed the ethnic factor in favor of politicizing the events.¹⁷⁴ The Kraków pogrom was turned into a political act, planned and organized by political interests on the “wrong” side in the power struggle. As I described above, one of the means to do this was to use highly politicized or ethnically neutral vocabulary and eliminate the word “pogrom.” Also, negligence in the examination of sources of antisemitism and problematic ethnic relations among non-Jewish and Jewish residents of the city was a way to strip the event of its ethnic connotations. Instead, casting blame on the political opposition (“reactionary forces”) and discussing methods for their effective dissolution took center stage.

In comparison to coverage of the Kraków pogrom, the extent of reaction to the riots in Topolčany was much more subdued and the final rhetoric much less politicized. It was hardly surprising, since the political struggle in Slovakia did not, during the years 1945-47, reach the intensity of the Polish struggle. The absence of civil war, participation of the opposition (Democrats) in the government, agreement between Communists and

¹⁷⁴ This Communist approach to understanding antisemitism was not unique to postwar Poland. Similarly, the Soviets blamed political enemies among Ukrainians Lithuanians, Latvians, and others for perpetrating any “immoral” and “anti-Soviet” acts, including anti-Jewish violence. For this remark, I am thankful to Zvi Y. Gitelman and Todd M. Endelman.

Democrats on a common enemy (the legacy of the Slovak State and the homegrown fascist regime), and, finally, the absence of anti-Soviet fears in opposition circles contributed to a lower degree of politicization of public life in Slovakia. Since power was still democratically distributed, there was no need for total control over interpretation and “the regime of the only truth.” Hence, ongoing social and political processes, ethnic violence included, had less value and less recognition as possible means in the political fight.

As a result, press coverage of the Topolčany pogrom was limited to a few articles and lacked the tone of a crusade, so striking in the Polish counterpart. True, the Slovak press also used the Topolčany events to call for a campaign against the remains of fascism in the country. But in the Slovak press the vocabulary of “people’s radicals and aryanizers” (*ludacke radikaly, a arizatory*), “reactionaries,” and “fascists” referred to the Slovak members of the fascist regime who had been defeated and presented no real challenge to the powers-that-be. In contrast, in Poland the terms “reactionary” and “fascist” stood for the broad spectrum of legal and illegal opposition that indeed “threatened” the political system in the country. Consequently, in comparison with their Polish counterparts, the Slovak press and government reports devoted more room to analyzing the possible causes than to an outright aggressive political campaign. Of course, by saying that Slovak journalists and officials focused more on causality of the events I do not suggest that they were bias-free and apolitical searchers of truth. In fact, facile scapegoating of the fascist legacy as the main source of violence was common. The official Slovak sources cast blame on the Jewish victims themselves in a manner unthought-of in the official postwar Polish press but symptomatic of the general approach

of the government and media to Jews in Slovakia – an approach which I discuss elsewhere.¹⁷⁵ But overall, ethnic violence was much less politicized in Slovak public life, thus leaving room to debate matters vaguely defined as ethnic.¹⁷⁶

Current Interpretations of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland and Slovakia

There are many interpretations of the origins of postwar anti-Jewish violence in Poland.¹⁷⁷ And although the debate is far from over, the most recent analytical interventions bring us closer to a better understanding of the roots of postwar antisemitism. In the introduction to *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68* (Poles, Jews, and Communism: Anatomy of Half-Truths, 1939-68), Kersten foregrounded negative stereotyping as a key to understanding Polish-Jewish relations after the war.¹⁷⁸ She and Jerzy Szapiro traced the universal beginnings of the stereotype in,

[U]nsatisfied needs, from disappointments, from dissatisfaction with oneself or one's life, or in the face of opinions – one's own, those of one's surroundings or of the world – about oneself, one's group, one's nation. [The stereotype] emerges from the desire to compensate for feelings of inferiority, from the unsatisfied need to affirm one's worth. It is born under the pressure of experience and emotions arising most often from fear, out of the feeling that the individual, a group, or a

¹⁷⁵ In Poland, the Catholic Church and the most radical anti-communist opposition alone blamed Jews for the pogroms.

¹⁷⁶ While the press in both countries condemned outright the street violence against Jews, it justified state-organized crimes against Germans and Ukrainians in Poland, and Germans and Magyars in Czechoslovakia, using the rhetoric of social inequality, political necessity, and ethnic purity.

¹⁷⁷ Arthur Bliss Lane, *I Saw Poland Betrayed: an American Ambassador Reports to the American People* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1948); Stefan Korboński, *W Imieniu Kremla* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1956); Chęciński, *Poland, Communism, Nationalism, Anti-semitism*; Tadeusz Żenczykowski, *Dramatyczny rok 1945* (London: Polonia, 1982); Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *Gwałt na Polsce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo CDN, 1983); Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*; *Kielce – July 4, 1946: Background, Context and Events*, ed., (Toronto and Chicago: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1996); Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*.

¹⁷⁸ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, 109.

national, religious, or ideological community is under threat, whether real or imagined.¹⁷⁹

However, close reading of Kersten's work on postwar Polish-Jewish relations suggests that for her the dynamics of the historically specific triangle of Jews – the Communist regime – Polish society were central to the anti-Jewish violence in the period. On one hand, the alleged link between the Communist regime and the Jews (the myth of the Jew-communist) and, on the other, the connection between the opposition and antisemitism and xenophobia, both formed symmetrical mirror “phantoms” that, according to Kersten, greatly affected the dynamic among Poles and Jews,

One needs, certainly, to ask a question, to what extent these phantoms reflected the mentality and viewpoints functioning in various circles of society. There is reason to claim that [the phantoms] constituted active, emotionally charged constructs with significant power of influence, which cannot be reduced to marginal views of any extreme Polish or Jewish circle.¹⁸⁰

Equally important were the surrounding circumstances: “unceasing acts of violence” (*nieustające gwałty*) “explosive” enough (*materiał zapalny*) to ignite and lead to murder.¹⁸¹ In Kersten's analysis of the Kielce pogrom in 1946, she underlined the general political circumstances as well as specific war and postwar histories as critical to understanding postwar antisemitism. But, above all, Kersten believed that the major source of antisemitic violence could be found in the mental framework of Polish society (what Kersten called “social atmosphere”), its postwar propensity for anti-Jewish

¹⁷⁹ Krystyna Kersten and Jerzy Szapiro, “The Contexts of So-Called Jewish Question in Poland after World War II,” *Polin* 4 (1990).

¹⁸⁰ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*, 117.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 131-34.

sentiments in moments of crisis.¹⁸² Kersten called it “the condition of society” (*kondycja społeczeństwa*), which encompassed not only anti-Jewish elements of Christian tradition and the antisemitism of the 1930s but also the events of the war, which resulted in the isolation of Jews from the rest of society, “Jews perished because they were Jews, because they returned from nonexistence – after all they were not supposed to be here any more.”¹⁸³ Finally, postwar “competition in suffering” and the general sense of frustration compensated by aggression contributed to persistent outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence.¹⁸⁴ Kersten also added stereotypes based on economic conditions. However, she tended to consider economic factors as secondary (in her work, Kersten seldom quoted primary or secondary sources that pointed to property return as one of the major causes of postwar anti-Jewish riots).

In my opinion, there are two weaknesses in Kersten’s intervention: the analysis of “society” as a whole with Jews a priori located outside of it and the treatment of the anti-communism of “Polish society” as a given. First, there is no way to prove that Poles and Jews constituted two separate quasi-camps after the war. Neither is there a basis to conceptually locate Jews outside society as if they were not a part of it. Indeed, Jews were perceived as outsiders and aliens but it is not a reason to employ the same categories in a historical analysis of the problem. Second, there are no surveys available to prove that the absolute majority of Poles had definitive attitudes toward Jews, the communist regime, and the relation between the two. The fact that rioters yelled anti-Jewish and anti-communist slogans did not reflect on all strata of society nor did it mirror the social

¹⁸² Ibid. Kersten referred to Alina Cała who studied the role of prejudices in a situation of crisis. See Alina Cała, *The Image of the Jew in Polish Folk Culture* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1995).

¹⁸³ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 130.

dynamics in all the regions. I consider statements defining Polish society immediately after the war as anti-communist en masse as highly problematic and impossible to prove.

In 2006, Gross' book *Fear* introduced a new and important reading of the causes of postwar antisemitism in Poland. Gross shifted emphasis from the role of the myth of the Jew-communist (Kersten) toward the role of economic factors, namely property return. He suggested, "We must seek the reasons for the novel, virulent quality of postwar antisemitism in Poland not in collective hallucinations nor in prewar attitudes, but in actual experiences acquired during the war years."¹⁸⁵ By "actual experiences," Gross meant the acquisition of Jewish property during the war and the threat of losing it after the war. He argued,

Living Jews embodied the massive failure of character and reason on the part of their Polish neighbors and constituted by mere presence both a reminder and a threat that they might need to account for themselves. A live Jew converted *mienie pożydowskie*, "formerly Jewish property," into property that belonged to somebody else, and various strata of Polish society could not bear any examination of the books documenting how it was acquired, in an infinite multitude of transactions, what went under the *pożydowskie* label.¹⁸⁶

Non-Jews across Poland, out of opportunism, were complicit in Nazi crimes of Jewish expropriation. Poles materially profited from the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and were unprepared to deal with the consequences after the war was over. As Gross eloquently put it,

In each case the experience was intimate, violent, and profitable. It took place at the interface of Polish Jewish relations, on the lower rungs of society, and it was insular. Each community followed its own dynamic and structure of opportunities, and the memory of those events remains sharp, distinct, and localized.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, 246.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

I pointed to this phenomenon in chapter 3 in the context of murders committed by villagers. Returning Jews were a reminder of often horrific crimes, thus constituting an unbearable burden of renewed presence. As Kersten put it in 1992, “Jews perished ... because they returned from nonexistence – after all they were not supposed to be here any more.”¹⁸⁸

The originality of Gross’ argument lies, in my opinion, in shifting attention from the power of myths, stereotypes, and prejudices – “hallucinations” as he called them – to the power of “everyday experience” as the main source of incentives for human behavior. An in-depth examination of primary sources from the period proves his hypothesis right. The application of this analytical framework also proves helpful in understanding violence against Ukrainians after the war in Poland (a question of land), violence against Germans (revenge), or violent outbreaks against Jews in Slovakia (property). At the same time, the total dismissal of the power of “hallucinations” in governing aggressive human behavior and the reduction of the role of stereotypes to a mere pretext impoverishes this otherwise persuasive hypothesis. Even though beliefs and myths may not be sufficient or even necessary factors leading to ethnic violence, they do signify an important layer in building motivation for violence. They help to translate individual grievances into homogenizing constructs (“this Jew did that and that and all Jews are like that”). For example, if mothers of vaccinated pupils in the school in Topolčany had not believed that their children had been poisoned, the pogrom would have never occurred or it would have had an entirely different character. Thus, completely ignoring the role of stereotypes in postwar acts of violence against Jews weakens if not distorts any historical analysis.

¹⁸⁸ Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, Komunizm: Anatomia Półprawd, 1939-68*.

Despite this weakness, Gross' analytical model applies to the two case studies in this work. Indeed, Kraków residents' fears that they would be forced to return Jewish property (combined with the actual poverty and the meager living conditions of the day) created a climate of insecurity, mistrust, and hatred. Kraków's Kazimierz quarter – Jewish until the war – was almost entirely settled by the Kraków poor and newcomers after liberation. Mostly unskilled and with no livelihood, living in poverty and constant frustration, the inhabitants of Kazimierz were part of an environment extremely conducive to antisemitic outbursts. That is not to say that the poor are more prone to antisemitism than the rich and the privileged. Rather, poverty is only one of the factors in an aggravating climate of hostility and mistrust. Moreover, it was not poverty per se but the promise of improvement in the living conditions through property appropriation that turned into a trigger for the riots. As someone said, the poor and the miserable without hope do not carry revolutions. But the poor who are given hope and achieve small gains are likely to rebel and ask for more (“revolution of rising expectations”). Anti-Jewish riots in Kraków were such a cry for more, namely for securing new acquisitions formerly belonging to Jewish neighbors. Fear of losing what had been expropriated and what had a potential to better one's life pulled people on the streets into violence against Jews.

Kamenec, one of a handful of scholars who analyzed the pogrom in Topolčany, singled out economic factors in explaining these events.¹⁸⁹ Kamenec argued that the consequences of the *aryanization* (*arizačný proces*) from the war period, the postwar appointment of national administrators (*národní správcovia*), and postwar restitution were at the core of anti-Jewish enmity in postwar Slovakia, which, in turn, led to outbreaks of violence. Thousands of Slovak *aryanizers* (*arizátori*) and national

¹⁸⁹ Kamenec, "Protizidovský Pogrom v Topolčanoch v Septembri 1945."

administrators benefited from the takeover of Jewish enterprises, houses, land, and movable property left by the deported.¹⁹⁰ Accompanied by efficient anti-Jewish propaganda, the threat of Jewish survivors returning became a source of *hystérie* among new owners.¹⁹¹ According to Kamenec, the fascist regime spread rumors of Jewish preparations for anti-Christian and anti-Slovak revenge after the end of the war. In western Slovakia, for example, stories circulated that in Sicily after liberation “Jews at once occupied their stores and estates and paid off old scores by shooting aryanizers.”¹⁹² Moreover, Kamenec argued, postwar tensions increased due to a lack of law (and competent administration, I would add), regulating the manner in which property restitution was to be handled. As I described in the previous chapter, restitution in Slovakia was not legally formalized until late 1946.

To conclude the analysis of the causes of postwar anti-Jewish violence, I argue that the power of anti-Jewish stereotypes, rising expectations of the poor, and fear of losing property still do not suffice to understand the intensity of pogroms after the war. In my opinion, devaluation of human life and ubiquitous lawlessness must be considered to fully grasp this phenomenon. Not only people got more used to killings, death, and violence, but also there was nobody to stop them. The disintegration and slow reconstruction of state structures, including the police, created a vacuum of execution of power in which criminals felt completely unrestrained. Weapons were too easily obtainable too.

¹⁹⁰ By the spring of 1942, of 12,000 enterprises almost 2,000 were aryanized i.e., taken over by non-Jews. The remaining 10,000 were closed down.

¹⁹¹ Kamenec, "Protižidovský Pogrom v Topoľčanoch v Septembri 1945." No Jews lived in Sicily before the war.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Finally, the general “demoralization” of society must also be counted as a root of postwar anti-Jewish violence. Gross wrote,

... We must guard against the easy insight that Nazi policies simply rubbed off onto the Poles, who grew to emulate the occupiers and became “demoralized.” Given the ruthlessly exploitive character of the Nazi occupation, the occupiers’ universally displayed contempt for the Poles, and the ferocious resistance their measures engendered in all milieu of Polish society, anything that Nazis did was only a recommendation for the Poles to do the opposite.¹⁹³

But that is precisely the point that Kazimierz Wyka fiercely argued in his *Excluded Economy*. Demoralization of the Polish population was not a product of “rubbing off” but rather of “survival” outside the law and against the law of the occupier. The population under occupation learnt how to “manage” through swindling, stealing, and any con possible. They learnt how to earn without work. About Poles, who profited from wartime robbery of Jewish property, Wyka wrote,

For the attitude of ordinary Poles to the tragedy of the Jews may be summarized as follows: in murdering the Jews, the Germans committed a crime. We would not have done this. The Germans will be punished for this crime. They have stained their conscience, but we – only benefit now and in the future only we will benefit, not sullyng our conscience, not staining our hands in blood.¹⁹⁴

And, here, lay the greatest damage that the German occupation did to Poles as a community of citizens: they completely undermined the notion of morality in daily life. Nothing like that happened in Slovakia and that, in addition to the absence of civil war, partially explains why violence against Slovak Jews never reached the Polish level.

¹⁹³ Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland after Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, 246-7.

¹⁹⁴ Kazimierz Wyka, “The Excluded Economy,” in *The Unplanned Society: Poland During and After Communism*, ed. Janine R. Wedel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 41.

Conclusion

One of the aims of this thesis is to explain how mutual perceptions among Jews and Poles and Jews and Slovaks were transformed after the war and how these transformations affected daily relations on the street. The narration of violence and violence's contemporary interpretation turned out to be useful in outlining these processes. One of the approaches is to analyze the impact of the media coverage of violence on the ordinary citizen. Highly fragmentary sources indicate that while in the fall of 1944 there were only thirty titles on the Polish press market, in 1948 there was a total of 880 titles, regional and national. The circulation of dailies was between 50,000 and 200,000, and weeklies 50,000 to 80,000 (this for a population of twenty-four million).¹⁹⁵ However, these numbers give a very limited insight into the readership and the media's political and social impact. After all, circulation tells us how many issues were published, not read.¹⁹⁶ The readership may have been much larger (when factoring the multiple readership in libraries and oral transmission of news among family and friends) or much smaller (periodicals subsidized without sales).

In Czechoslovakia, the ratio of press titles to the population of 3,300,000 was probably similar to Poland. There were twenty-eight major national newspapers alone on the Czechoslovak market in 1948.¹⁹⁷ Having included all types of regional periodicals, factory papers, and village papers, the total number of titles would reach three digits. Between 1945 and 1948, the Communists had at their disposal twelve major newspapers whereas the Democrats had eight (including *Čas* in Bratislava and *Svobodne slovo* in

¹⁹⁵ "System medialny w PRL," <http://portal.wsiz.rzeszow.pl/plik.aspx?id=7272> (accessed June 29, 2008).

¹⁹⁶ For this remark, I am thankful to Zvi Y. Gitelman.

¹⁹⁷ Vratislav Bušek and Nicolas Spulber, ed., *Czechoslovakia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), 111-13.

Prague). The Czech Socialist Party, the Catholic People's Party, the Social Democratic Party, and other non-Communist organizations also had press at their disposal.¹⁹⁸

Another way to assess the effects of the media representation of violence on the ordinary man or a woman is to point to specific choices people made after the event. The reaction of Kraków Jews, for example, who, in numbers higher than before the pogrom, left the city in the fall of 1945, suggests that the majority of Jewish readers dismissed the officially promoted optimism for the future and the promise of putting an end to anti-Jewish violence.¹⁹⁹ Also, the subsequent increase in the number of applications for change of names suggested that the Kraków Jews preferred to believe in "disappearance" of visible signs of Jewishness as the only way for staying in Poland rather than the state's promises of Polish-Jewish harmony.²⁰⁰ At face value, these reactions would suggest that it was violence as it happened and as it was experienced and internalized by the residents that affected people's choices and relations on the street rather than the controlled media representations. At the same time, however, it is impossible to establish to what extent the violence experienced or the violence represented in the papers pushed people to leave or change their names. I speculate that for Americans, for example, it was as much personal experience as the media coverage of the events of September 11, 2001, that shaped their knowledge and emotional reaction to the event; to the extent that the two sources of knowledge may have become indistinguishable.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ My research on the Kraków pogrom indicated that, although it was not a new phenomenon, Jewish emigration from Kraków did increase in the fall of 1945, a few weeks after the outbreak. Natalia Aleksiu estimated that, in July 1945, 4,600 Jews left Poland whereas in August 1945 their number doubled to 9,875. In September, the number of Jewish emigrants dropped to 6,475 to rise again to 9,760 in October 1945. See Natalia Aleksiu-Mądrzak, "Emigracja Żydów z Polski w Latach 1945-1949" (1995). As Zvi Y. Gitelman suggested, these fluctuations may have many other explanations, like political situation abroad, administrative procedures, economic situation, family matters, and so forth.

²⁰⁰ Małgorzata Kostecka, "Z Dziejów Ludności Żydowskiej Krakowa w Latach 1945-1947" (Master's Thesis, Jagiellonian University, 1997).

What, in my opinion, postwar violence did was to intensify neighborly perception of each other along ethnic lines; the perception which had been already in place before and during the war. As I mentioned before, ethnic identity superseded any other systems of reference in the pogroms in Kraków and Topolčany. When people were killed, they were killed *as* and *because of* being Jews; their ethnicity took precedence over all other political and economic affinities.²⁰¹ In the course of violence, a doctor of Jewish origin was above all a Jew and, only second, a doctor. More importantly, especially in Poland, postwar anti-Jewish violence further antagonized already (from before and during the war) hostile ethnic identities of Polishness and Jewishness, making “Polish Jewishness” more difficult to achieve.

Also, ethnic violence after the war brought to light revised ethnic images of victims and perpetrators. On the one hand, Jewishness after the war acquired an aura of resurrected ghosts, the unwanted who aspired to special treatment, who were stigmatized by their war experience and demanded answers about the committed crimes. On the other hand, Polishness gained an imagery of victims of Bolshevism and Nazism who harbored anti-Russian and anti-Jewish sentiment, who took Jewish property and betrayed their neighbors. As a result, being Jewish came to mean fear for life and necessity to chose between non-Jewishness and emigration. Thus, violence turned out to be an important means of delineating the limits of belonging to a national and ethnic community. It helped to solidify social boundaries along highly exclusionary ethnic lines. In short, bloodshed was not just a consequence of rigid ethnic categorization, already put in place

²⁰¹ Krystyna Kersten, "Polska: Państwo Narodowe, Dylematy i Rzeczywistość," in *Narody: Jak Powstawały i Jak Wybijały się na Niepodległość?* ed. Marcin Kula and Tadeusz Łepkowski (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1989).

in the two countries, but rather an agent actively reinforcing hostility along ethnic lines after the war.

Violence shaped individual lives, sometimes making people reassess life in the community, in society, or out of it. Overall, it was not abstract “minorities” or “groups” that suffered violence but individuals who sometimes lived their lives as a part of a community and sometimes did not, who registered in organizations built along ethnic lines and sometimes did not. These were individuals who had their own ideas of who they were, ideas that did not necessarily coincide with definitions formed by their neighbors. However, neighbors and neighborly violence were not alone in pushing Jews to reassess their perceptions of themselves and their place in society. In the next chapter, I will describe how the state classified Jews along ethnic lines, forcing them to take all the consequences of being a Jew, German, or Hungarian.

CHAPTER 6
CITIZENSHIP OF JEWS (1945-47)

In basic terms, citizenship is a personal status, held by all members of the nation-state, bestowed by the state, and consisting of universal rights as well as duties.

According to the classic definition given by T.H. Marshall, citizenship is “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community” that involves not only civil and political rights but also social entitlements like the right to welfare, education, and security among others.¹ Marshall not only stresses the social aspects of citizenship but also linked citizenship to membership in a community rather than in a state. This intervention, as Nira Yuval-Davis argued, “enabled us to analytically discuss citizenship as a multi-tier construct, which applies to people's membership in a variety of collectivities – local, ethnic, national and trans-national.”²

¹ T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1950); T. H. Marshall, *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development: Essays* (Garden City: N.Y., Doubleday, 1964). See the discussion of Marshall in Margaret R. Somers, "Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere, Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy," *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 5 (1993). Also see Nira Yuval-Davis, "Women, Citizenship, and Difference," *Feminist Review: Citizenship: Pushing the Boundaries*, no.57 (1997).

² Contemporary academic literature examines citizenship as much more than a political status bestowed by states on individuals or simple membership in a community. Rather, citizenship is understood as “a set of social practices that define the relationships between peoples and states and among people within communities. As sociologist Margaret Somers wrote, citizenship is an “instituted process” (which focuses on networks of membership and relationality) in which “the activities of people ... who interact with institutions, ideals, and rules of legal power and governmental participation” create citizenship rights. Kathleen Canning and Sonya O. Rose proposed thinking about citizenship as subjectivity, namely “the process by which historical actors assigned meanings to the prescriptions and delineations of citizenship and hence became subjects in their encounters with citizenship laws, rhetoric, and practices.” Canning and Rose argued that “subjectivity is central for citizenship because it fundamentally involves the positioning of a

The following analysis rests on the understanding of citizenship as “the relationship of belonging” to a dominant “strong” community as well as relationships among people within and between communities. Citizenship conceived as a process that defines these relationships serves as a lens to illuminate changing boundaries within and around a society. For this purpose, particularly useful is Rogers Brubaker’s notion of citizenship as “social closure,” where citizenship is an instrument to shield the state from unwanted outsiders.³ In Brubaker’s argument, an ideal liberal citizenship, in the democratic Enlightenment tradition embodies principles of equality, freedom, autonomy, and the right to be different. The practice of citizenship, however, often faces challenges in the form of the tangible forces of the state as well as the intangible legacy of “culture and tradition.” In practice, then, citizenship delineates social boundaries and serves as a tool of exclusion in the name of common good. Brubaker’s definition of social closure enables an analysis of the external as well as domestic forms of closure that shield citizens not only from foreigners from the outside but also from outsiders within the state borders.

The state excludes from “the bounded citizenry” those residents whom it labels outsiders, “not because of what they are but because of what they are not – because they

subject in relation to ‘something outside of it.’” Subjectivity also captures “the complexities of citizenship as both highly individualized and, at the same time, a collectively invoked social identity and subject position.” Kathleen Canning and Sonya O. Rose, “Introduction: Gender, Citizenships and Subjectivities: Some Historical and Theoretical Considerations,” in *Gender, Citizenships and Subjectivities*, ed. Kathleen Canning and Sonya O. Rose (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). Nira Yuval-Davis, “Women, Citizenship, and Difference,” *Feminist Review: Citizenship: Pushing the Boundaries*, no.57 (1997); Somers, “Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere, Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy,” 611.

³ Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

are not recognized or acknowledged as insiders.”⁴ The modern nation-state makes the distinction between insiders and outsiders predominantly along ethnic lines, thus making closure against outsiders an equivalent of closure against “ethnocultural non-nationals,”

Every state claims to be the state of, and for, a particular bounded citizenry usually conceived as a nation. The modern nation-state is in this sense inherently nationalistic. Its legitimacy depends on its furthering, or seeming to further, the interests of a particular, bounded citizenry.⁵

At the center of Brubaker’s analysis lies the notion that differing definitions of citizenship have been shaped by deeply rooted understandings of nationhood, namely that “conceptions of nationhood...have determined the tracks along which the politics of citizenship has been driven by the dynamic of interests.”⁶

Citizenship in a nation-state is inevitably bound up with nationhood and national identity, membership of the state with membership of the nation. Proposals to redefine the legal criteria of citizenship raise large and ideologically charged questions of nationhood and national belonging. [Contemporary] debates about citizenship in France and Germany are debates about what it means to belong to the nation-state. The politics of citizenship today is first and foremost a politics of nationhood. As such, it is a *politics of identity*, not a *politics of interest*.... It pivots more on self-understanding than on self-interest. The “interests” informing the politics of citizenship are “ideal” rather than material. The central question is not “who gets what?” but rather “who is what?”⁷

Thus, conceptions of nationhood and the interests of the state are bound, “Judgments of what is in the interests of the state are mediated by self-understanding, by cultural idioms

⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵ Ibid., X.

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Ibid., 182.

[which as much express as constitute those interests], by ways of thinking and talking about nationhood.”⁸

This theory is particularly useful in the discussion of the criteria of belonging in postwar Czechoslovakia and Poland. After the war, the two states were in the process of redefining the boundaries surrounding their dominant communities, defining anew who was and who was not a member of their citizenry. The idea of the nation-state and national homogeneity strongly informed this process and was fundamental to Czechoslovak and Polish policy-making at the time. This drive toward homogeneity, however, was not peculiar only to Czechoslovakia and Poland but reflected a general political trend in Europe after the Second World War.

... [T]here was great concern to stop the violence of spontaneous ethnic cleansing in ethnically mixed regions and a deep desire to prevent future conflicts through the separation of populations. Both Herbert Hoover and Winston Churchill believed that organized transfers of populations were the only means of ending the ethnic violence that plagued Eastern Europe, and *they regarded homogenous nation-states as the only path to a stable postwar peace*. Hoover declared in 1942, “The hardship of moving is great, but it is less than the constant suffering of minorities and the constant recurrence of war.” Churchill reiterated this sentiment in 1944: “There will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble... A clean sweep will be made.”⁹

The governments in Czechoslovakia and Poland did not simply ape the Allied powers. Rather politicians and political thinkers in the two countries independently formulated and executed their own policies of ethnic homogenization that were in unison with the general political trend.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, ed., *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 329.

¹⁰ Without the war and postwar political transformations in Eastern Europe, ethnic homogeneity would have remained an impossible vision. The ultimate homogenization of Poland was a consequence of human

This quasi-doctrine of ethnic homogeneity undoubtedly determined how the two states selected their insiders. Since membership in the state was to overlap with membership in the nation, the governments had to make sure that no “ethnocultural non-nationals” would remain in the country.¹¹ Citizenship thus came to serve as a shield against the unwanted “others.” In order to adjust citizenship to its postwar role, the redefinition of the criteria for acquiring citizenship was critical. The redefined criteria were embedded in the discourse of ethnicity and national belonging.¹² I argue that this redefinition was not a mere one-sided bestowal of new rules on society but rather a negotiation between the government, community leaders, and ordinary people. Submitting applications for citizenship, proving one’s eligibility, and appealing an unfavorable decision were methods of negotiation, which rendered residents active participants in the process. The Jewish returnees and their community leaders were among those who strove to secure their status as full-fledged members of the Czechoslovak and Polish states.

In this chapter, I will show how Jewish survivors in postwar Poland and Slovakia achieved (and not merely received) citizenship through dialogue and conflict between their representatives, the local administration, and the Polish and Slovak governments. I will compare the effects of these negotiations on the legal status of Jews and their daily experience. To illuminate these issues, I will analyze two parallel processes: the

losses during the war and the redrawing of national borders after the war. Kersten argued that the evolution of the communist ideology, which consistently prioritized the concept of nation over class, also contributed to the ideological predominance of the dogma of Polish national homogeneity (*państwo jednonarodowe*). Krystyna Kersten, "Polska: Państwo Narodowe, Dylematy i Rzeczywistość," in *Narody: Jak Powstawały i Jak Wybijały się na Niepodległość?* ed. Marcin Kula and Tadeusz Łepkowski (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1989). In Czechoslovakia, the significant national presence of Hungarians and Gypsies in Czechoslovakia to this day indicates that this ideal was never fully realized.

¹¹ Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*.

¹² *Ibid.*

verification of Polishness in western and northern Poland and the issuance of attestations of political reliability in southern Slovakia in the years 1945-47. These two processes were a part of projects administered by the Czechoslovak and Polish governments which aimed at ethnic homogenization and involved the enforcement of “Slavic” ethnic uniformity (reslovakization and repolonization) and the elimination of the “non-Slavic elements” (demagyarization and degermanization). Especially Slovak Jews found themselves trapped in the midst of these processes and faced the need to negotiate their legal standing if they wished to remain in the country.

I chose western and northern Poland and southern Slovakia as loci of my analysis for a few reasons. First, more than seventy percent of the Jewish population in Poland after the war concentrated in the west and north of the country, in the so-called Recovered Territories (*Ziemie Odzyskane*).¹³ Similarly, the majority of Slovak Jews lived in the big cities of western and southern Slovakia after the war. Second, the Jews who resided in both regions were most vulnerable to discrimination, i.e. German- (Poland) and Magyar- (Slovakia) speaking Jews.¹⁴ Thus, their status best illustrates issues examined in this chapter. Third, the examination of regional processes casts light on more general trends in state policies and the impact of these policies on the Jewish experience in the entire country. For example, the way in which the upper echelons of Warszawa handled

¹³ The term “Recovered Territories” was commonly used to denominate the western and northern provinces of Poland, annexed from Germany in 1945. The term underlined alleged historical legitimacy of Polish claims. For more interpretation of the term, see Claudia Kraft, “Who Is a Pole, and Who Is a German? The Province of Olsztyn in 1945,” in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Bernard Linek, “De-Germanization” and “Re-Polonization” in Upper Silesia, 1945-1950,” in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

¹⁴ Study of the determination of German nationality gives more insight into the status of Polish Jews than, for instance, a study of Ukrainian nationality. Few Jews, if any, considered themselves Ukrainian, making “Jews of Ukrainian nationality” a non-issue after the war. In contrast, the obscurity of the status of German Jews generated significant legislative and political responses, which shed light on the interpretations of Jewish nationality in Poland after the war.

local problems in western and northern Poland did not just reflect their understanding of the region but also manifested their general stance on citizenship and nationality. Regional narratives enable the examination of postwar experiences with all their peculiarities and inner tensions, an examination that the national narratives of “Jews in Poland” and “Jews in Slovakia” fail to deliver.

German-Speaking Jews in Poland

In contemporary Poland, citizenship and nationality are hardly distinguishable in public and private discourse. More than ninety percent of citizens of Poland claim Polish origin and speak Polish without questioning the terms of their belonging. This conflation of citizenship and nationality is not a mere reflection of ethnic homogeneity but rather a consequence of a long-lasting transformation of the ways in which people “imagined” their place in the dominant community in Poland. The following analysis does not aspire to examine this process; it only points to one of its aspects, namely the significance of the first two years after the war in obscuring the lines between citizenship and nationality in the public imagination. The regulation of Jewish status with the accompanying ambiguities and tensions was a part of this process.

Leszek Olejnik wrote that the Polish government did not formulate a policy on nationalities for at least the first few months after the liberation of 1945. The politicians seem to have believed that deportations and resettlements would solve the problem eventually.¹⁵ Thus, at the time they paid little or no attention to the criteria for Polish citizenship. The July Manifesto of the Soviet-sponsored Polish Committee of National

¹⁵ Leszek Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2003).

Liberation (PKWN), issued on July 22, 1944, dealt only superficially with the issue. The signatories of the Manifesto declared "...restitution of all democratic freedoms, equality of all citizens regardless of race, denomination, and nationality."¹⁶ This political commitment was to be reinforced in February 1947, when the appendix to the Small Constitution stated that the legislature would "continue to realize the basic civil rights and freedoms... legal equality regardless of *nationality, race, religion, sex, origin...* [my emphasis]."¹⁷

Similar to the later Czechoslovak Košice Program (April 1945), the Polish Manifesto of 1944 singled out the Germans for retribution.¹⁸ The Manifesto read,

The time has come for reprisal on Germans for agony and suffering, for burnt villages, demolished towns, destroyed churches and schools, for round-ups, camps, and executions, for Auschwitz, Majdanek, Treblinka [death camps], and for the murdered ghettos.¹⁹

¹⁶ "...przywrócenie wszystkich swobód demokratycznych, równości wszystkich obywateli bez różnicy rasy, wyznania i narodowości." An original Polish version of the July Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Manifest Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego*), 22 July 1944, in Ryszard Kozłowski and Jan Sziling, ed., *Historia PRL: Wybór Źródeł* (Toruń: Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, 1978).

¹⁷ Declaration of the Parliament concerning the execution of civil rights and freedoms (*Deklaracja Sejmu Ustawodawczego w Przedmiocie Realizacji Praw i Wolności Obywatelskich*), 22 February 1947, http://www.polskaludowa.com/dokumenty/prawne/mala_konstytucja.htm (accessed June 30, 2008).

¹⁸ There were interesting parallels between the Polish Manifesto and the Czechoslovak Košice Program, issued in April 1945. The two documents laid out the division and organization of power in the two countries. They envisaged the main and immediate goals of the new states including the completion of the fight for liberation, retribution against war criminals, restitution of property, reconstruction of the welfare and education system, land reform, and nationalization. Both praised the Soviet Army. There were also differences between the two acts stemming from the timing, domestic affairs, and geopolitics. The Czechoslovak government formulated the Košice Program in the final phase of liberation (April 1945) when it had a solid foundation for legitimacy and a negligible political opposition. In contrast, the Polish Committee of National Liberation issued the Manifesto in the midst of a political struggle for legitimacy when Russian troops barely entered the Polish territory and political opponents were closing their ranks (July 1944). Hence, the Polish Manifesto was more aggressive than the Czechoslovak Program; it opened with a direct attack against the political opposition at home and abroad, delegitimizing both.

¹⁹ Although not explicit, the association between the camps, ghettos, and Jews was clear. The signatories of the Manifesto ignored the presence of other national minorities in the country, only mentioning future state-relations with neighborly Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Russians. The July Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, 22 July 1944, in Kozłowski and Sziling, ed., *Historia PRL: Wybór Źródeł*.

This statement set the tone for any pronouncements on Germans for the coming years. In February 1945, Deputy Prime Minister Władysław Gomułka of the Communist Party (PPR) said, “Germans will be severely punished. Responsibility must be borne by the entire German nation, which in its mass went under Hitlerism’s command and tolerated Hitlerite reins.”²⁰ Obviously, the government channeled this virulent anti-germanism to further its own political agenda. For example, anti-germanism helped the government to unify and mobilize society around the national idea and hence paved the way for its legitimization on nationalistic ground.²¹ Above all, anti-germanism fit into the ideology of ethnic homogeneity. It neatly dovetailed with the then-fashionable vision of the New World and building a New Poland – nationally uniform, free of criminals, and with justice for all. Consequently, the government saw the projects of degermanization (*odniemczanie*) and repolonization (*repolonizacja*) of the western and northern territories as the most “natural” part of this process.

The degermanization – “elimination of Germaneness” (*akcja zwalczania niemczyzny*) – involved expulsion, detainment, and expropriation of Germans, as well as the elimination of the German language (culture) from public and private life.²² The expulsion of Germans from Poland to the Soviet and British zones in Germany between 1945 and 1947 was the central means of the process.²³ Along with expulsions, the

²⁰ Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 28.

²¹ Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, Legitymizacja, Nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna Legitymizacja Władzy Komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa: Trio, 2001).

²² Linek showed that the German intelligentsia, Catholic priests in particular, was an object of special attention. The degermanization lasted until 1950. Bernard Linek, *"Odniemczanie" Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Instytut Śląski, 1997), 38.

²³ There is a large body of literature on the postwar expulsions of Germans from Poland. See Joseph B. Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963); Bernadetta Nitschke, *Wysiedlenie czy Wypędzenie? Ludność Niemiecka w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2001); Ther and Siljak, ed., *Redrawing Nations:*

government worked out an effective system of punishment for German war criminals.²⁴ On November 4, 1944, a decree “concerning protective means against traitors of the nation” was issued. The decree targeted those Polish citizens from central and eastern Poland who, at any point of the Nazi occupation, declared “German nationality or German origin” and thus “took advantage of rights and privileges by virtue of (*z tytułu*) affiliation with German nationality or German origin.”²⁵ The punishment included “detention, placement in a location of seclusion (camp), and submission to forced labor for an indefinite time, regardless of criminal liability.”²⁶ The Treasury would confiscate the traitor’s (and immediate family’s) property. The traitors and their relatives from the same household would lose public rights and civil honorary rights (*obywatelskie prawa honorowe*) as well as parental and tutelary rights.²⁷ Also liable for the loss of civil and public rights, life imprisonment, and capital punishment were these people who escaped from detention, hid their property, or aided convicts.²⁸

Polish Germans were deprived of their citizenship a year after their Czechoslovak counterparts. While the Czechoslovak government stripped Germans of citizenship in August 1945 (presidential decree no. 33/1945), the Polish government issued a similar

Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948; Tomasz Kamusella, "The Expulsion of the Population Categorized as 'Germans' from the Post-1945 Poland," in *The Expulsion of the 'German' Communities from Eastern Europe at the End of the Second World War*, ed. Steffen Prauser and Arfon Rees (Florence: European University Institute, 2004); Leszek Olejnik, *Zdrajcy Narodu? Losy Volksdeutschów w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej* (Warszawa: Trio, 2006).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The law authorized prosecutors to table a motion to detain a suspect. Specially set-up criminal courts would then approve or deny the motion. Decree no. 54/1944 concerning the protective means against the traitors of the nation, 4 November 1944, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 11, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;04;listopada,dziennik,ustaw,1944,011,54.html (accessed November 2007).

²⁶ *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 11, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;04;listopada,dziennik,ustaw,1944,011,54.html (accessed November 2007).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

decree in September 1946. Decree no. 310/1946 deprived of Polish citizenship people (and their families) who showed a “distinct German national character” in their conduct (*swym zachowaniem wykazały niemiecką odrębność narodową*).²⁹ Expropriation and deportation (*wysiedlenie*) were to follow the loss of citizenship. The decree applied only to people who had Polish citizenship before September 1, 1939 (i.e., it was not valid for the Recovered Territories).³⁰ Interestingly, the declaration of German nationality did not suffice to prove German national distinctness, meaning that the administration did not automatically consider people who had signed the Volksliste as Germans.³¹ Instead, critical for the determination of German nationality were a “distinct German national character” (the use of the German language), participation in a German organization, and the display of a negative attitude toward Polish society.³²

Beginning in 1947, the use of German in any form, in public or private, was considered a “manifestation of ill-will toward the Polish state” (*okazywanie niechęci dla Państwa Polskiego*) and thus subject to punishment, ranging from a warning to a fine or imprisonment.³³ Silesian Voivode Aleksander Zawadzki spoke publicly of “cleansing the region from German accretions” and the need to deepen hatred of the German language as *sine qua non* of Polish existence in Silesia (“us or them”).³⁴ When speaking of mixed

²⁹ Decree no. 310/1945 concerning the exclusion of persons of German nationality from Polish society, 13 September 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 55, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;13;wrzesnia,dziennik,ustaw,1946,055,310.html (accessed November 2007).

³⁰ Olejnik, *Zdrajcy Narodu? Losy Volksdeutschów w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej*, 187.

³¹ Decree no. 310/1945 concerning the exclusion of persons of German nationality from Polish society, 13 September 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 55, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;13;wrzesnia,dziennik,ustaw,1946,055,310.html (accessed November 2007).

³² Olejnik, *Zdrajcy Narodu? Losy Volksdeutschów w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej*, 186.

³³ Linek, *"Odniemczanie" Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich*, 69.

³⁴ “Teaching of the German language will be completely eradicated (*wyrugowana*). Children should quickly forget this German language that we hate. We have to deepen this hatred since we face the

marriages, Zawadzki concluded that “Germaneness (*niemczyzna*) should not be allowed to fry in a Polish sauce.... Germans are our mortal enemies and we must fight against them with all means available.”³⁵ Any manifestation of compassion toward German POW’s or the broadcast of German songs in restaurants and cafes was also punishable. The administration urged people to remove German inscriptions from their family graves. Although contested and stopped shortly after its introduction (due to the obvious analogy), the local administration introduced the practice of marking Germans with the letter “N” (*Niemiec* – a German in Polish) and concentrating them in a ghetto-like manner.³⁶ Further serving the degermanization and repolonization, the signs and street names were changed from German to Polish, giving the province a “Polish look.”

The repolonization – restoration of Polishness (*polskość*) – entailed state-controlled settlement of the Polish population, verification of Polish nationality, education (courses in language and history), and culture-building initiatives like the collection of Polish books, among others. Similar to the reslovakization of southern Slovakia, repolonization translated into the forceful assimilation of the local population. Two main approaches to repolonization – pessimistic and optimistic – dominated the debate. Pessimists were cautious in estimating the possible success of repolonization. They stated that the majority of the local population would not repolonize that easily if at

dilemma, us or them. There is no time for weakness or compassion toward Germaneness (*niemczyzna*) right now.” *Ibid.*, 26. Also see Aleksander Zawadzki, *Notatki, Przemówienia, 1945-48 na Śląsku i w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim* (Katowice: Śląsk, 1964).

³⁵ Linek, “*Odniemczanie*” *Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich*, 23.

³⁶ Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 88-89. The Polish government put an end to these measures in November 1945. See Kraft, “Who Is a Pole, and Who Is a German? The Province of Olsztyn in 1945,” 112.

all hence, they should leave the country.³⁷ The argument was that “hostile elements” that repolonized only superficially might “stab Poland in the back” should an occasion arise and, therefore, aggressive expulsions were safer than leniency toward any “questionable element.”³⁸ Optimists believed that almost half of “the indigenous population” (*ludność rodzima*) of western and northern Poland was of Polish origin and could easily repolonize.³⁹ That stance implied an understanding of Polishness and Germaneness as flexible, and if necessary, moldable identities. Jan Misztal quoted one of the Polish Catholic activists who wrote that “nationalization” (*unarodowienie*) of as many as a million of the “germanized Slavic population” in western Poland was within reach.⁴⁰ Another journalist wrote, “A German passport and a level of germanization are not crucial. It is Polish origin and Polish blood that matters.”⁴¹

In the rhetoric of repolonizers, Polishness was the essence of the land “recovered” from Germany; Polishness was “its roots, and its soil.” Thus, they believed that not even “a drop of Polish blood” should be wasted without making all attempts at repolonization.⁴² The “restoration of *stifled* Polishness” of the residents of western and

³⁷ Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 202-3. Also see Marian Orzechowski, *Odra – Nysa Łużycka – Bałtyk w polskiej myśli politycznej okresu drugiej wojny światowej* (Wrocław, 1969).

³⁸ Jan Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej* (Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, 1991).

³⁹ Bernard Linek noted that the term *ludność rodzima* functioned as a propaganda tool in dividing the residents into two camps of newcomers and old residents. This ethnic myth served legitimization of the annexation of the western territories. Linek, “*Odniemczanie*” *Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich*; Linek, ““De-Germanization” and “Re-Polonization” in Upper Silesia, 1945-1950.”

⁴⁰ Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej*, 232. Article by L. Górski, “Geograficzne podstawy granic zachodnich,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* (1945).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Article by E. Osmańczyk, “Śląsk Opolski w Rzeczypospolitej. Kataster narodowościowy,” *Dziennik Polski* (1945).

⁴² Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*.

northern Poland became an imperative of the central authorities after liberation.⁴³ But who was Polish and who was not; and how could one be distinguished from the other?⁴⁴ The process seemed difficult since Poles and Germans had mingled together for so long. As the voivode of Silesia stated,

The fact that all our brothers Opolanie [people from the city and the countryside of Opole] were forcefully counted among the citizens of the Third Reich and the fact that they were densely mixed with a foreign German element on their ... land left deep imprint on them [Poles] ... – all of this caused the necessity to distinguish the Polish population from Germans through individual verification.⁴⁵

The verification (*weryfikacja*) seemed to have served a few purposes at once: increasing the numbers of Poles, selecting people of “doubtful” nationality for expulsion, and regulating the distribution of property.⁴⁶

In March 1945, the provincial administration of the Recovered Territories started the process. Prewar residents of western and northern Poland who declared “local” or “here” (*tutejsi*) nationality before the war and “neutral” after the war now became the

⁴³ Repolonization, similar to reslovakization, ended with only superficial success. Linek argued that the local population, *Ślązacy*, clung to their local traditions, customs, and dialects and reacted negatively to the administration’s attempts at forced assimilation or polonization. Although German signs disappeared from the streets, the German language (or rather local German dialects) survived in the privacy of homes. See Linek, “Odniemczanie” *Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich*, 12-13.

⁴⁴ The Bureau of the New Lands (Biuro Ziem Nowych) apparently worked on distinctions between “true, half, and quarter Poles.” Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 197.

⁴⁵ Remarks of Voivode Aleksander Zawadzki in Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej*, 29. Also see Zawadzki, *Notatki, Przemówienia, 1945-48 na Śląsku i w Zagłębiu Dąbrowskim*.

⁴⁶ Jan Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990), 92-4. Most recent books dealing with the process of redefining citizenship in western Poland after WWII are T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006) and James Bjork, *Neither German Nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

main target of the verification process.⁴⁷ Once they claimed Polish nationality and expressed their desire to stay in the country and maintain legal status (the enthusiasts of repolonization encouraged them to do so), they had to undergo an assessment of their Polishness. When approved, they obtained a certificate of Polish nationality (*zaświadczenie polskiej przynależności narodowej*).⁴⁸ Similar to the attestations of political reliability in Slovakia, the Polish certificates shielded them from discrimination and guaranteed their civil rights. The certificates also regulated individual material survival and personal freedom.

The determination of Polishness was thus critical. It also turned out to be more difficult than expected. Until the beginning of 1946, the criteria for the determination of Polish nationality in western and northern Poland depended on the politics of the specific regions. In January 1946 the minister of the Recovered Territories made the first attempt to standardize the process. In his study of the verification, Misztal found that the government based the standardization on the following premises:

A person of Polish origin or a person who showed unity (wykazująca łączność) with the Polish nation should be considered as belonging to the Polish nation. Due to many instances of dormant consciousness of Polish origin, the consideration of surnames, germanized en masse, and blood relations with Poles was necessary. Unity with the Polish nation could be proved by the inner attitude (postawa wewnętrzna) and language and by membership in Polish organizations or participation in the fight for Polishness. Also, the cultivation of Polish customs in the family, despite the dangers, demonstrated a connection and solidarity with the life of Poles, could prove it [the unity]. In the cases of discrimination of a member of a family for a political crime, the remaining members of the family should not be discriminated without a well founded reason [my emphases].⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Linek, "Odniesienie" *Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świecie Materiałów Wojewódzkich*, 26. Based on questionnaires prepared by the local administration in Katowice, Silesia, in the spring of 1945.

⁴⁸ Rehabilitation of the residents of western and northern Poland, who signed the Volksliste during the war, served the same purpose as the verification. Linek, "'De-Germanization" and "Re-Polonization" in Upper Silesia, 1945-1950."

⁴⁹ Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 212.

In other words, the government defined Polishness based on origin and/or unity with the nation. The most enigmatic was the concept of “inner attitude,” which could be interpreted in many ways. Most importantly, the central administration understood Polishness as an inherited legacy and/or behavior. In this sense, national identity was not merely fixed by birth but rather by individual choice.

In April 1946, the ministry of the Recovered Territories completed the standardization of criteria determining Polish nationality (see appendix 1).⁵⁰ In accordance with ministerial directive, the behavioral aspect carried more weight than origin or kinship. Even if an applicant was of “Polish origin” but had betrayed the nation, he or she would be denied the attestation. On April 28, 1946, the president of the State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa, KRN) and the minister of the Recovered Territories signed a decree concerning Polish citizenship for residents of Polish nationality in western and northern Poland.⁵¹ The right of citizenship was awarded to everyone who had permanently resided in the territories before January 1, 1945, who proved Polish nationality to the verification committees, received the attestation of Polishness, and declared loyalty to the Polish nation and the state.⁵²

Past behavior proved to be of paramount importance in rehabilitation of the Volksdeutsche – Polish citizens of German origin from the territories annexed to

⁵⁰ Directive of the minister of the Recovered Territories concerning the attestation of Polish nationality for the residents of the Recovered Territories, 6 April 1946, *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Decree no. 106/1946 concerning Polish citizenship for the residents of Polish nationality in the Recovered Territories, 28 April 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 15, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;28;kwietnia,dziennik,ustaw,1946,015,106.html (accessed November 2007).

⁵² *Ibid.* At the same time, the law regulating Polish citizenship from January 20, 1920 retained its legal force.

Germany who signed Volksliste, i.e., declarations of German nationality during the Nazi occupation.⁵³ In accordance with the law from May 1945, if Polish citizens signed the Volksliste “against their will or under duress and proved their *Polish national distinctness* with their behavior,” they maintained their rights.⁵⁴ In such cases, a declaration of loyalty to the Polish nation and state was required. A decree from June 1946 stated that “a Polish citizen who declared German or another nationality privileged by the invader between September 1, 1939 and May 9, 1945 was liable to imprisonment up to a maximum of ten years.”⁵⁵ Traitors would also pay a fine and lose public and civil rights as well as their property. Commutation of a sentence was possible if the perpetrator “...acted due to ignorance (*ciemnota*) or lack of civic manners (*wyrobienie obywatelskie*) justified by the living conditions.”⁵⁶ Other criteria for innocence and acquittal included suffering severe persecution for refusal to declare German nationality and participation “in the fight for liberation at home and abroad” despite declarations of German nationality before and during the war.⁵⁷

Obviously, a framework which allowed for Polishness to be *earned* through “good” behavior was of great significance for Jewish survivors. In October 1947, the

⁵³ Deutsche Volksliste (DVL) – the German National List. The Nazi administration introduced the DVL in occupied Poland in March 1941. Overall, approximately three million people signed the DVL on the Polish territories annexed to the Third Reich. Volksdeutsche were divided in four categories, ranging from “active” Germans to the “passive” ones with the potential to “regermanize.” For the most recent study on the Volksdeutsche in postwar Poland, see Olejnik, *Zdrajcy Narodu? Losy Volksdeutschów w Polsce po II Wojnie Światowej*. Also see decree no. 96/1945 concerning the elimination of hostile elements from Polish society (*O wyłączeniu ze społeczeństwa polskiego wrogich elementów*), 6 May 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 17, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;06;maja,dziennik,ustaw,1945,017,96.html (accessed November 2007).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Decree no. 237/1946 concerning criminal liability for renegation of nationality during the war, 28 June 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 41, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;28;czerwca,dziennik,ustaw,1946,041,237.html (accessed November 2007).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

voivode of Silesia decreed the establishment of civic control commissions (*obywatelskie komisje kontrolne*), one of whose tasks was to “identify firms and stores which had signboards bearing German first and last names and effect their replacement with Polish ones.”⁵⁸ However, he made an exception for the signboards with Jewish names. This “favoritism” was part of the government's recognition of the particularity of the Jewish experience. As early as in July 1944, the Polish Manifesto (unlike the Czechoslovak Košice Program) pointed to Jews as a group of particular interest, “The Jews, whom the occupant so brutally oppressed, will now be assured of the right to rebuild their existence and of the equality of rights de jure and de facto.”⁵⁹ References to death camps and ghettos also implied governmental recognition of the particularity of the Jewish victimhood. On numerous occasions, Jewish survivors received promises of civil rights from the Polish authorities. In January 1945, Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski said, “The Jewish population who remain alive will be able to take full advantage of not only de jure but also de facto legal equality...”⁶⁰

The Communists – the Secretariat of the PPR Central Committee – formulated their official policy toward Jews in October 1947. The decree *O pracy i zadaniach Polskiej Partii Robotniczej wśród ludności żydowskiej* (On work and tasks of the PPR among the Jewish population) stated that

The solution to the Jewish question in Poland must be based on the principle of joint (*wspólna*) work and the fight of *the Jewish population at home, together*

⁵⁸ These commissions kept visiting not only stores and companies but also private houses. The police (Milicja Obywatelska, MO), property managers, and janitors (*zarządcy domów i dozorczy*) were engaged in control and removal of German signs. For more examples, see Linek, *“Odniemczanie” Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich*, 81.

⁵⁹ “Żydom po bestialsku tępionym przez okupanta zapewniona zostanie odbudowa ich egzystencji oraz prawne i faktyczne równouprawnienie.” Ibid.

⁶⁰ Program declaration of Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski, 2 January 1945, cited after Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 353.

*with the whole Polish nation, for the solidification of the system and the power of people's democracy [my emphasis].*⁶¹

Further, the decree reinforced principles of “national equality” with a view toward enabling the development of Jewish life in Poland,

Denial of prospects and the need for a normal national development of Jews in Poland...is unfair since it leads to a setback in the creative forces of the Jewish population and furthers the activity of hostile reactionary elements... In the face of the establishment of normal conditions for life and development of the Jewish population in Poland, based on complete national equality of rights (*równouprawienie narodowe*), ... migration of Jews from town to town and their panicky escape abroad stopped.⁶²

The decree also mandated the preservation of the central and apolitical role of Jewish committees in organized communal life, equal opportunities and full employment, “productivization” of the Jewish population in industry and cooperatives, intensification of communist political influence within the Jewish community, restoration of Jewish cultural life in order to bring up the Jews “in the spirit of People’s Poland and Marxism,” and the introduction of policies enabling the assimilation of Jews into Polish culture and history.⁶³

Regardless of its ideological bias, this text illuminated how the PPR perceived the Jews as a community. For the leading Communists, “the Jewish population” and “the

⁶¹ Decree of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the PPR, 27 October 1947. Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na Tle Polityki Wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945-1968* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999), 67-8. Extensive fragments of the original text in Józef Orlicki, *Szkice z Dziejów Stosunków Polsko-Żydowskich, 1918-1949* (Szczecin: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1983), 226-7. Also see *PPR I 1947-XII 1948: Rezolucje, Odezwy, Instrukcje, Okólniki KC*, (Warszawa 1973), 150.

⁶² Orlicki, *Szkice z Dziejów Stosunków Polsko-Żydowskich, 1918-1949*, 226-7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 226-9. Also see Janusz Mieczkowski, *Żydzi, Niemcy i Ukraińcy na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Latach 1945-1956: Liczba, Położenie i Działalność Polityczna* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 1994), 44. Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Polityka Narodowościowa PRL* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Białoruskiego Towarzystwa Historycznego, 2000).

Polish nation” seemed to have been two separate categories of belonging, a cultural and a national one respectively, friendly and collaborative but non-inclusive unless assimilated. Eugeniusz Mironowicz argued that although the Polish government and the communists allowed Jews to organize *nationally* and *culturally* (the only national minority accorded that privilege), they expected that Jewish communal life would take on a more *cultural* than *national* character.⁶⁴ The ministry of public administration, for instance, instructed the provincial administration to treat the Jewish committees as social or political institutions of charitable, not national, profile.⁶⁵ Janusz Mieczkowski claimed that, indeed, the Polish state never “recognized the Jews as a *national minority* with full rights (my emphasis).”⁶⁶ He described how the voivode of Szczecin (northwestern Poland) claimed the absence of national minorities in June 1947 when more than 6,000 Jews still lived in the province.⁶⁷

Mironowicz explained this ambiguity by pointing out that the state’s efforts to build a nationally homogenous state (without minorities) coexisted with its policy of enabling Jewish survivors to reconstruct their communal life. Tomasz Szarota pointed out that, for example, the Jews in Lower Silesia were a “national minority enclave in-the-making” in a nationally homogenous state in-the-making and thus politically problematic.⁶⁸ It was one thing to let Jews reconstruct their communal life as a religious and cultural minority, and hope that individuals would assimilate into the dominant

⁶⁴ The second national minority which enjoyed equal protection and support in postwar Poland were Slovaks. That, however, was due to the Polish-Czechoslovak agreement on reciprocity in the treatment of their minorities. See Mironowicz, *Polityka Narodowościowa PRL*, 67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁶ Mieczkowski, *Żydzi, Niemcy i Ukraińcy na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Latach 1945-1956: Liczba, Położenie i Działalność Polityczna*.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁸ Tomasz Szarota, *Osadnictwo Miejskie na Dolnym Śląsku w Latach 1945-1948* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1969), 160-2.

national community, and quite another to support their national aspirations and sense of national separateness. The recognition of any national minority would have contradicted the doctrine of homogeneity. However, the special status of Jews as “natural allies in the fight against fascism” called for some acknowledgement.⁶⁹ The working compromise was to recognize Jews as full-fledged citizens while hoping for their total assimilation or emigration.⁷⁰

Alina Cała and Halina Datner-Śpiewak argued that the political considerations of the day were also crucial in shaping the pro-Jewish governmental policies,

The Polish Left, the Communist Polish Party [Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP] in particular, fought resolutely against antisemitism, associating it exclusively with rightist attitudes. Hence, the Polish Left considered the fight against antisemitism to be a significant tactic against opponents after the war and counted on widespread support from the Jewish population for political transformations. Communists supported Jewish initiatives of self-governance and used the reconstruction of Jewish life as fodder for propaganda, particularly outside of Poland.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Mironowicz, *Polityka Narodowościowa PRL*, 31.

⁷⁰ To illustrate the Polish government’s policies on Jews, Wojciech Jaworski, who studied Jewish communal life in Upper Silesia (a territory partly Polish since 1920) in the years 1945-70, presented the case of Abraham Frochcwajg. Frochcwajg was deprived of Polish citizenship in 1920 after he left Poland for Germany to escape a military draft. Then he emigrated to Brasil from where he applied for the restoration of his Polish citizenship in 1946. Three years later, his efforts ultimately ended in the denial of citizenship. Jaworski concluded that Frochcwajg’s case confirmed the thesis of the government’s aspiration to reduce the number of Jews in Poland despite their official pro-Jewish policy after the war. One documented case, however, is not sufficient to prove the thesis. Further, the processing of Frochcwajg’s application lasted three years (1946-49) during which the policies changed substantially. Finally, Frochcwajg’s personal record may have hampered his chances for citizenship as much as the state policies did. Wojciech Jaworski, *Żydzi na Górnym Śląsku w Latach 1945-1970* (Sosnowiec: 2001), 32.

⁷¹ Alina Cała and Helena Datner-Śpiewak, ed., *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce, 1944-1968: Teksty Źródłowe* (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1997), 11.

In a similar vein, Mieczkowski argued that the recognition of Jewish equality and subsequent use of the “Jewish motif” served to promote the illusion of equality and freedom for all citizens in official propaganda.⁷²

A good example of this was a proclamation from June 1945 by the minister of public administration, declaring that Jews in newly annexed Lower Silesia should be given far-reaching aid considering “that, after the martyrdom of German concentration camps, they will be *a loyal guard over Polishness* in the Recovered Territories.”⁷³ A couple of weeks later the local Jews proclaimed that

Lower Silesia became their [Jews’] motherland... With Germany’s downfall... Jews took guard (*objęli straż*) of factories and workshops, *declaring their Polishness* loudly and proudly. They paid dearly with their blood and sweat for the right of citizenship in Lower Silesia [my emphasis].⁷⁴

The overlap between the aspirations of Jewish survivors willing to stay in Poland and the proclamations of the Polish central government seemed evident. In administrative practice, however, this ideal was unfeasible. The difficulties that German Jews (German-speaking and former German citizens) faced in the local administration in western and northern Poland showed that Jewishness did not guarantee civil equality.

German Jews or German-speaking Jews were by no means a large community in postwar Poland. Szyja Bronsztejn spoke of a small group of 135 “indigenous Jews” (*autochtoni-Żydzi*) living in Lower Silesia immediately after the liberation of 1945.⁷⁵ In contrast, Bożena Szaynok spoke of “a large group” of German Jews living in Lower

⁷² Mieczkowski, *Żydzi, Niemcy i Ukraińcy na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Latach 1945-1956: Liczba, Położenie i Działalność Polityczna*.

⁷³ Circular of the ministry of public administration, 6 June 1945, in Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), 24.

⁷⁴ Memorial concerning the Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia, 23 June 1945. See *Ibid.*, 20.

⁷⁵ Szyja Bronsztejn, *Z Dziejów Ludności Żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II Wojnie Światowej* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993), 8.

Silesia until at least the beginning of 1946.⁷⁶ Ewa Waszkiewicz found records of twenty-seven German Jewish funerals taking place in the city of Wrocław in 1945 and 1946.⁷⁷ She also cited the correspondence of the Jewish Religious Congregation, written mostly in German and Hebrew, which indicated the presence of German-speaking Jews as well as their Zionist political inclinations.⁷⁸ Having added the small pockets of German-speaking Jews in other provinces of western and northern Poland, including Upper Silesia and Pomerania, I estimate that only a few hundred German Jews lived in Poland during the first two years after the war. Although seemingly negligible, considering their numbers, I argue that the tension surrounding the legal status of German Jews illuminates the general criteria for citizenship in postwar Poland.

The first signs of the administrative problems concerning the legal status of German Jews in Poland appeared in June 1945 when the representatives of the CKŻP, the local Jewish committees in Lower Silesia, and the central government met to discuss the issue. The central and local administration promised to pass decrees that would enforce "legal equality in every sphere and in every respect (*w każdej dziedzinie i pod każdym względem*) between German Jews and Polish Jews."⁷⁹ A month later, the Jewish committee in the Gdańsk province (northern Poland) sent a memorandum to the voivode of Gdańsk, reminding him that German Jews, despite their foreign citizenship, enjoyed the same rights as Polish citizens due to their suffering as Jews during the war,

⁷⁶ Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*, 42.

⁷⁷ Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na Tle Polityki Wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945-1968*, 81.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*; Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*.

⁷⁹ Letter from the Jewish committee in Wrocław to the plenipotentiary of the government in Lower Silesia concerning legal status of Jews – former German citizens, 30 July 1945, Collection of Urząd Wojewódzki Wrocławia (hereafter cited as UWW), UWW VI-269, p. 9, State Archives in Wrocław, Wrocław (Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, hereafter cited as APW).

People, who were submitted to painful or even horrific personal persecutions and property reprisals from Germans, who have not gotten civil rights since 1933 ...are now, after the expulsion of Germans and downfall of the murderous Nazi regime, in an unchanged situation. ...In the face of the absence of relevant laws, the *Polish authorities treat them as German citizens* with all consequences, i.e., loss of property, forced labor, and, recently, even resettlement from the territory of the Gdańsk province...Then it seems supremely right and fair that the new democratic Polish State does not identify [these Jews] with Germans but rather treats them equally with *its own citizens* considering the oceans of wrongs, tears, and blood that these people suffered from Germans [my emphases].⁸⁰

Author(s) of the memorandum requested that “the legal and financial status of Jews and persons of Jewish origin,” holding German citizenship or citizenship of the Free City of Gdańsk, should be equalized with the legal and financial status of Polish citizens who had possessed German citizenship or citizenship of the Free City of Gdańsk.⁸¹ They also demanded that the resettlement of German Jews be suspended and instructed the responsible institutions to separate Jews from the groups assigned for deportation.

In the summer of 1945, the government issued two decrees that played a fundamental role in regulating the legal status of German Jews in Poland. On June 20, 1945, the minister of public administration issued a directive to all provinces across the Recovered Territories specifying the requirements for temporary attestation of Polish nationality. In accordance with the directive, the people eligible for attestation were former citizens of Germany and the Third Reich who

On August 31, 1939, resided in the territories recovered by Poland in 1945 and maintained Polish nationality, who were not members of the NSDAP [the Nazi Party] ..., and who would sign a statement of loyalty to the Polish nation [*złożyć pisemną deklarację wierności narodowi polskiemu*].⁸²

⁸⁰ Grzegorz Berendt, *Żydzi na Gdańskim Rozdrożu 1945-1950* (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 2000), 41.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Directive of the minister of public administration from June 20, 1945 (L.dz. II.C. 805/45) as quoted by Jan Misztal in Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 210.

On July 10, the minister of public administration issued yet another instruction, ordering the administration in western and northern Poland to issue attestations of Polish nationality to people subjected to Nazi persecution due to their nationality or marriage to a person discriminated against due to his or her nationality.⁸³ The instruction highlighted two groups: “the persecuted by virtue of (*z tytułu*) Jewish nationality” and the Germans who were discriminated because they refused to divorce their Jewish spouses.⁸⁴ In October 1945, the administration further modified the rules, emphasizing behavior as a primary criterion. Consequently (like in Czechoslovakia), the following could not undergo verification: members of the Nazi Party, the SS, the SA, and members of pro-German associations and organizations as well as German teachers and military officers, and people who voluntarily Germanized their names.

To sum up, by privileging behavior (suffering from persecution) in the determination of nationality and civil rights, the government opened the door to citizenship for Jews regardless of their former citizenship, origin, language, and religion. I speculate that, in accordance with the governmental prescriptions, suffering under Nazi persecution came to equate Polish and Jewish nationality, rendering them interchangeable. After all, Jews could theoretically obtain attestations of Polish nationality, guaranteeing exemption from forced labor, the right to food rations, and the temporary right of residence in Poland (until the final determination of legal status), upon showing certificates of Jewish nationality and/or proof of suffering persecution during the

⁸³ Letter of the minister of public administration of July 10, 1945 as quoted by Jan Misztal in *Ibid.* Also see a short discussion of the decree (L.dz. 9337/II/P.909/45) in Berendt, *Żydzi na Gdańskim Rozdrożu 1945-1950*, 42.

⁸⁴ Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*. Also see Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej*, 65.

war.⁸⁵ However, clerks who made those decisions on a daily basis had their own understanding of the relationship between Jewishness and access to civil rights, which did not concur with the government's.

In western and northern Poland, verification commissions (*komisje weryfikacyjne*) were responsible for the determination of nationality. The voivode of Silesia ordered that the commissions involve "...local (*miejscowi*), reliable citizens (*godni zaufania*) of unquestionable Polish nationality." These included representatives of the executive (like the town's mayor), teachers' trade unions, Polish political organizations and associations, the police, and the intelligence service.⁸⁶ In theory, the commissions were to be comprised of people who had resided in the province before and during the war and had thorough knowledge of local ethnic relations.⁸⁷ The commonly held belief was that these residents guaranteed fairness of the verification due to their familiarity with local relations as opposed to newcomers who, not knowing local histories, were bound to misjudge the nationality of applicants. I speculate that, in practice, all the members of the commissions – locals and outsiders – had similar motivations, ranging from personal interests to the so-called common good. Moreover, the outsiders had limited room to act against the well-established communal "who is who" since the prewar communities had ceased to exist, shattered by the war and postwar migrations and were mainly replaced by new social structures in-the-making.

⁸⁵ Berendt, *Żydzi na Gdańskim Rozdrożu 1945-1950*. The Jewish committees were supposed to routinely certify Jewish nationality with a document which included the following phrase: "Based on the submitted ID... and a birth certificate... we testify that ... the citizen ... is a Jew and *as such was persecuted by the national-socialist fascism* (my emphasis)." Attestation concerning Jewishness of Walther Kurnik, 16 November 1946, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-270, p. 32, APW. Also see Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*, 42-3.

⁸⁶ Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*; Misztal, *Polityka Władz Polskich wobec Stałych Mieszkańców Ziem Odzyskanych w Pierwszych Latach po Zakończeniu Drugiej Wojny Światowej*, 68-9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Misztal argued that the testimony of three signatories, “confirming” the Polish nationality of a petitioner, usually sufficed to obtain the final approval of Polishness from the verification commission.⁸⁸ In addition to the testimonials, the commissioners were also supposed to consider the applicant's attitude toward Poles, activities under German occupation, and the spirit (*duch*) in which the applicant brought up his or her children.⁸⁹ Mixed marriages did not guarantee successful verification, although they could serve as a basis for an application. The applications of women married to Germans were supposedly processed through the lens of the husband’s political past, his proficiency in Polish, his attitude to the state and Polish nation, and her national consciousness, and the spirit in which she raised the children (making female applicants partly dependent on their spouses).⁹⁰

These administrative practices and laws differed regionally. In Upper Silesia (southwestern Poland), membership in a local Polish organization, three testimonies from members of the Union of Poles in Germany, and three testimonies from locals whose Polish nationality was “beyond doubt” were necessary to obtain a certificate of Polish nationality.⁹¹ Subsequent instructions lowered the requirements to one of the above documents accompanied by evidence of the use of the Polish language at home and the ability to read and write Polish. In the north, the requirements were less restrictive. Claudia Kraft, in her study of the ethnic re-composition of northern Poland, argued that the local administration was primarily interested in “hoarding citizens for the Polish

⁸⁸ Signing the testimonials of Polishness became a “profession” for some. Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 214-16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* Gender as a criterion in the assessment of nationality in postwar Poland requires separate research.

⁹¹ Voivode Aleksander Zawadzki’s directive on the classification of the residents of the Silesia-Opole, 22 March 1945, *Ibid.*, 208-09. Also see Linek, “*Odniemczanie*” *Województwa Śląskiego w Latach 1945-1950: W Świetle Materiałów Wojewódzkich*; Bernard Linek, *Polityka Antyniemiecka na Górnym Śląsku w Latach 1945-1950* (Opole: Wydawnictwo Instytut Śląski, 2000).

state” and thus aimed at “categorizing as many as possible as Poles...”⁹² The majority of the residents considered their regional identity to be more important than their national allegiance. Being a “Warmian” or a “Masur” (*Warmianin*, *Mazur* – names deriving from the names of the regions) resonated more with a personal sense of identity than a Pole or a German. In May 1945, the administration issued a directive instructing that Warmians and Masurs should be registered as “indigenous,” thus Polish.⁹³ The ability to speak Polish was temporarily ignored, although the administration organized special repolonization courses for people who wanted to learn the language. Consequently, Polish citizenship became a commodity that was relatively easily accessible. Needless to say, similarly to reslovakization in southern Slovakia, none of these practices succeeded in the actual homogenization (repolonization) of northern Poland. Provincial registers of population were the sole success: in June 1945, they showed 45,964 fewer Germans and 40,000 more Poles in comparison to the data from the spring of 1945.⁹⁴

Zygmunt Izdebski argued that overall the verification commissions based their decisions primarily on behavior during the war, treating past conduct as the foremost marker of nationality in Poland after the liberation of 1945. He wrote in 1947,

The ground for the verdict of a verification commission... was the commission’s free conviction [?] based on the analysis of a person’s behavior toward next-door Polish masses, the display of Polish or German national separateness regardless of objective factors such as language and origin which played only a supplementary... role... From a sociological ... point of view, nationality...is... a certain state of man’s mind. A measure of this state... can not be anything else but what Americans call “behavior”...⁹⁵

⁹² Kraft, "Who Is a Pole, and Who Is a German? The Province of Olsztyn in 1945," 116-17.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 209. Also see Zygmunt Izdebski, *Rewizja pojęcia narodowości: doświadczenia opolskie* (Katowice, 1947).

Izdebski's conclusion seems somewhat idealistic. Of course, there must have been cases of decent commissioners who made decisions to the best of their abilities. But even with the best intentions, these decision-makers had to juggle with the obscure notions of "display of Polish or German national separateness," "unity with the Polish nation and attitude toward Polish matters," "spirit," or "inner attitude to Polishness" which could mean anything. Among these notions, behavior was yet another obscure construct, liable to numerous interpretations.⁹⁶

In actual bureaucratic practice, "objective" criteria seemed to have weighed less than mere indifference or the vital personal interests of the members of the verification commissions. Most commonly, the commissions processed the applications mechanically, without an in-depth reading of the documentation. But there were cases when applications were not even read. Tearing up the documentation of people who had conflicts with a verification commissioner was not uncommon.⁹⁷ The Polish Western Union (Polski Związek Zachodni, PZZ) in Katowice complained that "...applications for verification go to the trash without processing, thrown there by the hand of a village administrator who took with his other hand the appropriate pay for allotting a farm to someone else." Complaints and subsequent controls from district and municipal commissions helped to keep the lower rank officials in check but could not prevent the abuse of power.

That such abuses occurred was hardly surprising. After all, the commissioners held enormous power over people's economic existence. Recognition of one's Polishness

⁹⁶ For example, a family in Kluczbork (western Poland) was denied attestation of Polish nationality in April 1947 because "...the family had a good command of Polish, but did not show any unity with the Polish nation and had rather unfavorable attitude toward Polish matters." Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 295.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

granted one land (property) and a residence permit whereas Germaneness meant detention, expropriation, and expulsion. Considering the stakes, “the indigenous population” (the subjects of verification) and new settlers (mostly repatriates from eastern Poland) found verification to be one of the central, most contested issues at the time. Every unsuccessful verification (i.e., denial of Polish attestation) meant tangible gains for the repatriates. If the former property owner failed the verification, the repatriate kept the property while the owner was detained and forced to leave the country.⁹⁸ If, however, the former owner was successfully verified, the repatriate had to give up the newly acquired property. Thus, the repatriates preferred to perceive every “indigenous person” as a German, or rather a “german” (*niemiec*) in lower case. The repatriates called the verified “Poles for twenty-five zlotys” (the fee for verification) claiming that it was the newcomers, and not the verified locals, who were *true* Poles.⁹⁹ For example, one of the employees of a verification commission in Silesia had to swallow “acrimonious remarks, that he produced ‘*volk-Poles*,’ a hostile element that should be resettled without fail.”¹⁰⁰

Ultimately, the verification process did a great deal of damage to local communities in-the-making. It led to the sharpening of social and ethnic lines by separating allegedly “false” Poles (the unverified) from the “true” ones (the repolonized) and by distributing material and civil assets accordingly. Misztal quoted testimonies describing how, in the provinces where verification was not yet under way, the old residents and repatriates lived “peacefully” but “now, when Poles from camps [transitory camps for German prisoners] were verified, repatriates did not let these citizens into their

⁹⁸ Ibid., 106-7.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 113.

homes.”¹⁰¹ Intimidation and violence against the verified were not isolated incidents either.¹⁰² Due to false testimonies, denunciations, and obscure definitions of Polishness, even people who had received Polish attestation ended up in camps or were expelled as Germans.

Interestingly, Jews found themselves on both sides of the battle. They were both the agents of repolonization and the victims of degermanization. Unfortunately, I was unable to establish how many Jews had to undergo verification as Poles/Germans, but that they were entangled in both processes is beyond doubt.¹⁰³ I have already described the rhetoric surrounding Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia. How both the settlers and the government perceived the Jewish presence to be “a loyal guard of Polishness” in the region. In a report to the plenipotentiary of the central government in Lower Silesia (July 1945), the CKŻP complained about the constant disadvantages faced by Jews while settling, getting a job, and finding an apartment.¹⁰⁴ The CKŻP mainly blamed lower rank clerks (*niżsi urzędnicy*) for mistreating Jews, i.e., attempting to deport Jews and *privileging Germans* [sic!]. Interestingly, the CKŻP kept emphasizing the apparent privileging of *Germans* at the expense of Jews when it seemed obvious that the horrors of the war deemed Germans unworthy of good treatment. Obviously, the CKŻP used the term “Germans” in the same vein as non-Jewish repatriates did: to describe German-speaking residents of the region who received Polish attestation and thus threatened the material existence of the new settlers-repatriates.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Based on the reports of the district verification commission in Głubczyce from November 1945.

¹⁰² Ibid., 111.

¹⁰³ In Lower Silesia alone, there were approximately 80,000 to 85,000 Jewish repatriates from central and eastern Poland – almost half of all Jewish survivors residing in Poland in the first half of 1946. See Bronsztejn, *Z Dziejów Ludności Żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II Wojnie Światowej*.

¹⁰⁴ Report from the CKŻP to the plenipotentiary of the government in Lower Silesia, 25 July 1945, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-269, p.11-12, APW.

At the same time, some “Germans” turned out to be German-speaking Jews who had to undergo the verification process. That many failed to be verified is indicated in a letter from June 1947 written by the chairman of the provincial Jewish committee, Jakub Egit,

... [These German Jews] have not obtained Polish citizenship yet and their *applications for* [being declared] “*indigenous population*” have been denied. Local authorities want to start resettling these people to Germany where [Jews] dread to go to live among their enemies. By treating them like Germans, the local authorities contradict a political stance of the government, which granted protection to people of Jewish nationality, persecuted by the Nazi regime. ... We request an intervention with the central authorities, so they will instruct local officials on how to treat these people [German Jews] in order to enable them to stay and keep their apartments and property...[my emphasis].¹⁰⁵

These stories of German-speaking Jews, failing to get the attestation of Polish nationality, suggest that language did not necessarily lose its significance as an ethnic marker after the war. Like Izdebski, Misztal suggested that an individual’s behavior (*postępowanie i postawa*) during the occupation became the main criterion for nationality due to specific and confused ethnic relations in western Poland. He argued that language, in particular, lost its importance as an ethnic marker since many residents who had “a sense of developed separate national consciousness” (*poczucie rozwiniętej odmiennej świadomości narodowej*) could not speak the Polish language and vice versa. Perhaps language had a limited impact on individual self-identification in the region. But I suggest that it remained an important indicator of nationality as far as bureaucratic practice was concerned. If behavior during the war had indeed been the primary criterion for approval, German-speaking Jews would not have faced any problems. Suffering Nazi

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Jakub Egit to the CKŻP, 11 June 1947, in Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*.

persecution would have been an instant entry ticket to civil rights, as prescribed by the central government. That German-speaking Jews suffered disadvantages can only be explained by the persistence of traditional markers of nationality like language in the bureaucratic determination of citizenship.

Another way to explain this phenomenon and, at the same time, defend Izdebski and Misztal's argument, is to show that language itself became a mark of patriotic behavior. A good example is a complaint that representatives of Poles in Prudnik (Silesia) sent to the government officials,

Why should we declare to be Poles or non-Poles, if that piece of paper with a signature does not say anything about our nationality, *but actions do*, like participation in the uprisings, the *Polish language*, customs and habits, and our Polish hearts, and, after all, you can see all of this.¹⁰⁶

For these local residents, the choice of language was a patriotic act – a mark of “good” Polish behavior. As in Slovakia, regional authorities in Poland were not strangers to these local modes of thinking and cultural codes. The convictions, fears, expectations, and pressures of the local population were also those of local apparatchiks. If the German language was commonly associated as a marker of betrayal then a German-speaking Jew was to be considered a traitor. Whatever interpretation we chose, language undeniably remained a part of the equation.

As a result, “Jews of foreign nationality” (*Żydzi obcej narodowości*) – German-speaking Jews of German citizenship in particular – faced challenges concerning not only their legal status but also their daily security. They found themselves in double jeopardy: as Jews they were disliked by their neighbors and, as Germans, they were disliked by

¹⁰⁶ Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 226.

their neighbors and by the state administration. In fact, establishing whether discrimination against these people was a manifestation of anti-German or anti-Jewish popular sentiment is hardly possible. In August 1945, the plenipotentiary of the government in Jelenia Góra (Lower Silesia) requested information on how to deal with “Jews whose loyalty during the war was under suspicion,” suggesting that provincial authorities did not trust German Jewish survivors, suspecting them of collaborating with the Nazis.¹⁰⁷ Non-Jewish neighbors (repatriates) also treated German Jews with suspicion as they heard them speak German and thus considered them to be Germans.¹⁰⁸ That, however, was not unusual in the midst of the verification process which turned Germaneness into a subject of contest, an identity freely ascribed depending on social and political needs.

In September 1945, a local national security office demanded that a Jewish committee in Jelenia Góra remove all German Jews from their membership registry and take away their certificates of Jewishness. National security motivated the decision as follows, “We cannot allow that a member of your institution would be ‘a half-Jew’ or ‘a quarter-Jew,’ not mentioning Germans...”¹⁰⁹ In October 1945, the plenipotentiary of the central government in Jelenia Góra asked his superiors in Lignica if the local Jewish committee should accept membership and protect the interests of German Jews who had been persecuted by Nazism and whether the committee should issue certificates of

¹⁰⁷ Letter from the plenipotentiary of the central government in Jelenia Góra to the plenipotentiary of the central government in Lignica, 2 August 1945, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-269, p. 3, APW.

¹⁰⁸ It seems that in order to avoid the identification with Germans, German Jews emphasized their Jewishness which stood in contrast with behavior of the remaining Polish Jews who preferred to hide their Jewish origin.

¹⁰⁹ Note from the district national security office to the Jewish committee in Jelenia Góra, 15 September 1945, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-269, p. 30, APW.

Jewishness to these people.¹¹⁰ Szaynok found that, in several districts, the Jewish committees were banned from issuing certificates to German Jews.¹¹¹

Occasionally, lack of clarity in the law may have played a role. The same plenipotentiary in Jelenia Góra sent a note to Lignica in August 1945 requesting directives on how to treat “Jews of foreign nationality like Jews of French, Czech, German, Dutch, and other citizenship.”¹¹² Bureaucrats in Jelenia Góra had no idea how to act particularly in the case of German Jews who had no or “unclear” documents: “Jews with Polish citizenship are treated like Poles, but as far as foreign Jews are concerned there are no instructions on how to act.”¹¹³ Further, the note read, “There were cases of Jews of foreign nationality who demanded the allocation of a store or other establishment which seemed *unacceptable to us (niedopuszczalne)*.”¹¹⁴ Apparently, their superiors in Lignica had no idea what to do with “foreign Jews” either and asked the ministry of public administration in Warszawa for clarification.¹¹⁵

The following story of Augusta Sara Thiel is one of many illustrations of the daily problems that challenged German-speaking Jews. In a small town in Lower Silesia, in April 1946, a Russian commandant forcefully took over a pension (*pensjonat*) belonging to a German Jew, Augusta Sara Thiel, in the presence of the town mayor (*wójt*) and the

¹¹⁰ The plenipotentiary stressed that “in order to avoid abuses of power (*nadużycia*), the issuance of such certificates by his Office was necessary.” Letter from the plenipotentiary of the central government in Jelenia Góra to the plenipotentiary of the central government in Lignica, 2 October 1945, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-269, p. 27, APW.

¹¹¹ Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*, 43.

¹¹² Letter from the plenipotentiary of the central government in Jelenia Góra to the plenipotentiary of the central government in Lignica, 2 August 1945, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-269, p. 3, APW.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

chief police officer.¹¹⁶ She was slapped in the face, pushed to the ground, threatened with a pistol, and locked in a bathroom for twenty-four hours. Then, she and her German co-workers were allowed to take a few essentials before they were forced to leave.¹¹⁷

Apparently, the mayor of the district (*starosta*) offered to allow Thiel to return to the house, an offer which she refused to accept until the German tenants could come back as well.¹¹⁸ The mayor even suggested that Thiel left her house “voluntarily,” in solidarity with the German tenants.¹¹⁹ People who took over her house dismissed her Jewish papers including a temporary certificate of Polish nationality, issued by the plenipotentiary of the government in December 1945, stating that “...Thiel Sara-Auguste... should be treated as a person excluded from the German population and therefore should not come under the law concerning Germans.”¹²⁰ The certificate followed the decree of the ministry of public administration from June 20, 1945 discussed above. That the certificate was dismissed as non-valid perhaps was due to its expiration date (February 3, 1945). More likely, however, the assailants considered her German and found her Jewishness of no relevance to the case. In Thiel’s case, the disconnection between governmental decree and administrative practice on the ground was striking.

Very likely the majority of German Jews faced problems similar to Thiel’s and these hardships pushed many to leave Poland. The small number of remaining German Jews may also indicate that many had never planned to apply for the Polish citizenship

¹¹⁶ Letter from Augusta Sara Thiel to the ministry of public administration in Warszawa, 16 July 1946, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-270, p.39-40, APW.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Letter from Wrocław’ voivode to the ministry of the Recovered Territories, 31 October 1946, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-270, p.33, APW.

¹¹⁹ Letter from the mayor of Jelenia Góra district to the voivode’s office in Wrocław, 21 October 1946, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-270, p.34, APW.

¹²⁰ Temporary certificate issued by the plenipotentiary of the government in Jelenia Góra, 3 December 1945, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-270, p.38, APW.

anyway, intending to emigrate when the opportunity arose.¹²¹ For example, leaders and members of German Jewish communities in Pomerania maintained German citizenship and had no intention to apply for its Polish counterpart, choosing loyalty to the German state. Mieczkowski, in his study of national minorities in postwar northern Poland, quoted representatives of a German Jewish committee who allegedly justified their policies of exclusivity in March 1946 as follows: “When Szczecin [a major city in northwestern Poland] is a free city and the German authorities come back here, they will disband our union if we have *foreign citizens* in our ranks.”¹²² Thus, the departures of German-speaking Jews in the middle of 1946 seem to have resulted not only from antisemitism and bureaucratic discrimination but also from personal disappointment with the political status quo.

Those, like Walther Kurnik, who decided to stay, had to go through interminable bureaucratic procedures. Kurnik, “German citizen, a Jew of origin,” wanted to stay in Poland and keep his position as accountant in the furniture factory in Nowa Ruda.¹²³ In the summer of 1946, in the midst of mass expulsions of Germans, Kurnik requested a permit of residency (*zezwole nie na pobyt*) fearing imminent deportation.¹²⁴ He justified his request with his Jewish origin and suffering persecution under Nazism. He also asked for the possibility of receiving Polish citizenship, considering that his ancestors had been

¹²¹ Berendt, *Żydzi na Gdańskim Rozdrożu 1945-1950*.

¹²² Mieczkowski, *Żydzi, Niemcy i Ukraińcy na Pomorzu Zachodnim w Latach 1945-1956: Liczba, Położenie i Działalność Polityczna*. In March 1946, 700 German Jews resided in Pomorze Zachodnie (northwestern Poland).

¹²³ Documentation of Walther Kurnik, 29 July-16 November 1946, Collection of the UWW, UWW VI-270, p.28-32, APW.

¹²⁴ Kurnik’s story showed that German-speaking Jews lived under fear of resettlement as all Germans in the Recovered Territories. Fear of resettlement was not only a domain of German Jews. Szaynok mentioned constant terror of deportation among Silesian Jews of non-German origin. She suggested that Jewish unemployment and politics were major reasons for actual deportations. She also pointed to conflicts with antisemitic clerks in local offices as a source of anxiety among Jews. See Szaynok, *Ludność Żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945-1950*.

Polish citizens who emigrated to Germany in 1830. Documentation supporting his request included a certificate of competency and expediency from his workplace and a certificate of Jewishness from the Jewish committee in Kłodzko. In November 1946, provincial authorities submitted his request for a permit of residency to the ministry of the Recovered Territories, allowing Kurnik to reside in Poland until the final decision was made.

I have no documents concerning the ultimate resolution of Kurnik's case. However, Kurnik's temporary residency showed that despite bureaucratic loopholes German Jews could receive Polish residency. Szaynok claimed that in Lower Silesia all German Jews who applied for citizenship ultimately received it and could remain in the region.¹²⁵ By December 1948, of the million *indigenous* residents of western and northern Poland who underwent verification, the majority received attestations of Polish nationality.¹²⁶ Approximately 60,000 to 70,000 people, who did not apply for the attestation until the end of 1946, were forced to undergo the process in 1949. The remaining population left the country or received citizenship in accordance with the law from January 1951 which bestowed citizenship on all who had resided in Poland since May 9, 1945 (that included the verified and unverified residents of western and northern Poland).¹²⁷

Before the law of 1951, the citizenship of German-speaking Jews who wanted to remain in Poland was by no means predetermined. Representatives of German-speaking

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ The table of results of the verification in the Recovered Territories, 1 December 1948, Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 308. Compare to Olejnik, *Polityka Narodowościowa Polski w Latach 1944-1960*, 216.

¹²⁷ Decree no. 25/1951 concerning Polish citizenship, 8 January 1951, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 4, Archiwum aktów prawnych w Money.pl, http://www.money.pl/podatki/akty_prawne/ustawa;z;dnia;8;stycznia,dziennik,ustaw,1951,04,25.html (accessed December 2007).

Jews (the Jewish committees) were forced to defend their rights and negotiate their status with the local administration and the central government. These negotiations showed, among others, that the resentment of Germans made state officials more prone to disregard instructions from the upper echelons of Warszawa to exclude Jews from the anti-German measures. At least in western and northern Poland, Germaneness seemed to have taken precedence over Jewishness as a factor defining one's position in society, although anti-Jewish resentments should not be underestimated either.

Magyar-Speaking Jews in Slovakia

After the liberation of 1945, President Beneš and the Czechoslovak government, like their Polish counterparts, sought to exact retribution against members of the nations considered responsible for war crimes. The government applied the principle of collective responsibility, turning Germaneness and Magyariness into synonyms for fascism. Implicated were citizens of Czechoslovakia who, at any point since 1929, had declared German and Magyar nationality in a census or “had become members of national groups or organizations or political parties in which persons of German or Magyar nationality were united.”¹²⁸ In article VIII of the Košice Program, the authorities declared that “the terrible experience of the Czechs and the Slovaks with the German and Hungarian minorities, the overwhelming majority of whom became the tools of invaders from the

¹²⁸ The definition of Germans and Magyars from presidential decree no. 5/1945 (May 19, 1945; reiterated in the decree no. 12/1945 from June 21, 1945). Wilhelm Karl Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans* (Munich: University Press, 1953).

outside aiming to destroy the republic...compel new Czechoslovakia to intervene profoundly and for good.”¹²⁹

As early as the end of 1944, after the liberation of eastern Slovakia, the Slovak National Council (SNR) formulated discriminatory policies toward Magyars, which included stripping them of their right to vote, to work, to own property, and to receive an education.¹³⁰ In April 1945, the Košice Program outlined the policies on Germans and Magyars for the entire republic. Those Germans and Magyars who were to stand trial for crimes against the republic and the Czech and Slovak nations would be deprived of Czechoslovak citizenship immediately and banished from the country for good, unless sentenced to death.¹³¹ Germans and Magyars who moved to Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement in 1938 would also be banished immediately, unless under criminal investigation (with the exception of those who had worked for the benefit of Czechoslovakia).¹³² The confiscation of German and Hungarian property and the setting up of people’s courts to try German and Hungarian war criminals was also envisaged. In these matters, the Košice Program served as a blueprint for all subsequent ordinances of the SNR and the decrees of the president of the republic.¹³³

¹²⁹ The English translation of the fragment from Kálmán Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948* (New York: Social Science Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1982), 106. For the original text, see “*Programme československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích, tzv. Košický vládní programme,*” http://www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945_kosvlpr.htm (accessed September 2007).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid. As Janics showed, approximately three percent (20,000) of the Czechoslovak Magyars enjoyed mercy while hundreds of thousands were classified for deprivation of citizenship and expulsion.

¹³³ For details, see Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Post-War Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

In June 1945, the government officially declared Germans and Magyars to be traitors and enemies of the state.¹³⁴ Also, the newly coined term of “unreliable people as far as the interests of the state were concerned” (*osoby štátne nespoľahlivé*) unambiguously connected German and Magyar nationality to disloyalty to Czechoslovakia.

Unreliable persons were:

1. Persons of German or Magyar nationality....
2. Persons who developed activity directed against... independence, integrity, democratic-republican form of the state, safety, and defense of the Czechoslovak Republic; who incited toward such activity; or persons who... deliberately supported by any means German and Hungarian invaders....
3. In the judiciary, those whose administration deliberately served German and Hungarian leadership in the war or fascist and Nazi aims.¹³⁵

By branding Czechoslovak Germans and Hungarians as “politically unreliable,” the government asserted their incompatibility with the postwar republic. This move promoted the ethnic stereotyping of Germans and Magyars, equating both with unreliable political conduct. During the first three years after liberation, this equation came to play a crucial role in the process of social and national closure.

¹³⁴ Presidential decree no. 12/1945 (21 June 1945) defined traitors as “1. Persons whose activities were jointly or separately directed against the sovereignty, the independence, the integrity, the democratic-republican system, the security, and the defensive power of the Czech-Slovak Republic, who instigated such activities or seduced other persons thereto, and, in any manner, intentionally and actively supported the Germans and Magyar occupiers. 2. The judiciary whose activities intentionally and actively served the Germans carrying on the war or served fascist or Nazi purposes.” This definition struck resemblance to decree no. 5/1945 (May 19, 1945) defining people politically unreliable. Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans*. Decree of the SNR no. 33/1945 (May 15, 1945) first formulated the definition of a traitor of Czechoslovakia. For this definition, see Štefan Šutaj, Peter Mosný, and Milan Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku* (Bratislava: Veda, 2002), 99.

¹³⁵ Definition of political unreliability as far as the interests of the state were concerned, 1945, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 63/45, SAN. The Nitra officials followed the definition of unreliability in presidential decree no. 5/1945 (May 19, 1945) concerning “the invalidity of some transactions involving property rights from the time of lack of freedom and concerning the national administration of property assets of Germans, Hungarians, traitors, and collaborators and of certain organizations and associations,” 19 May 1945, digital collection of the historical legislation of the ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic, http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1945/zakon_2q.html#castka_4 (accessed September 2007).

What followed was the mass expulsion and expropriation of the German and Hungarian minorities in the Czechoslovak Republic. The Slovak administration, less concerned with the Germans, focused its attention on the more than 600,000 Hungarians, most of whom were concentrated in the south of the country. In February 1945, the SNR ordered the expulsion of Magyars who settled in southern Slovakia during the occupation. Schechtman found that by the end of 1945, about 25,000 Hungarians were removed from southern Slovakia.¹³⁶ The transfer of Hungarians from the region, however, was never completed because the western governments demanded that the process be stopped. Facing international condemnation, Slovakia attempted to solve the problem by different means such as: a population exchange with Hungary (approximately 30,000 Slovaks left Hungary and about the same number of Hungarians left Slovakia) and the enforced removal of Hungarians to the Czech borderlands (about 44,000 people). The ultimate failure of the two programs led the government to formulate a new policy of reslovakization of Magyars, described in chapter 2.

In order for the policies of expulsion to work, the government had first to deprive Germans and Magyars of state protection. The way to accomplish this was to deny them Czechoslovak citizenship. The first time after liberation that the Prague government attempted to regulate issues of citizenship for Germans and Magyars was in the Košice Program (see appendix 2). But it was presidential decree no. 33/1945 that became the fundamental legal document regulating Czechoslovak citizenship for Germans and Hungarians.¹³⁷ Every subsequent ordinance and legal instruction on matters of citizenship

¹³⁶ Schechtman, *Postwar Population Transfers in Europe, 1945-1955*, 135.

¹³⁷ During and immediately after the war, Beneš issued 143 emergency decrees, of which fifteen concerned German and Hungarian issues. The decrees regulated such political and social practices like the confiscation of German and Magyar property without compensation, loss of citizenship, and punishment of

issued in Slovakia in the years 1945-48 was based on this decree (see appendix 3).¹³⁸ In short, the decree deprived of citizenship all Germans and Magyars in the Czechoslovak Republic, except those who registered as Czechs or Slovaks in any official census between 1938 and 1945 as well as those who during that time “professed themselves Germans or Magyars under duress or under extenuating circumstances.”¹³⁹ As a result of the decree, people with German or Magyar ties who wished to maintain their citizenship had to report to the district national committees (okresne národné výbory, ONVs) to get the proper papers.

Considering the central role of these agencies, a short description is warranted. In December 1944, President Beneš decreed the creation of national committees in liberated territories which would “act as fully sovereign bodies until such time as the central government could assume its superior role.”¹⁴⁰ Article V of the Košice Program declared,

In contrast to the previous bureaucracy, [which was] an administrative apparatus alienated from the people, popularly elected national committees will be formed in communities, districts, and provinces (*v obcích, okresech a zemích*) as new organs of state and public administration.... In their jurisdiction the national committees will administer all public affairs, control the subordinate democratic bureaucracy, and take care of public security in concert with both central and local police forces. The government will carry out its policies via the national committees and rely fully upon them.¹⁴¹

war criminals, among others. Timothy William Waters, "Remembering Sudetenland: On the Legal Construction of Ethnic Cleansing," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 47, no. 1 (2006). Also see Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovém Slovensku*.

¹³⁸ For the original (Czech) text of decree no. 33/1945, see Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovém Slovensku*, 118-20. For the English translation, see Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans*.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Post-War Czechoslovakia*, 45-51.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 46. For the original text of the article V, see “*Programme československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích, tzv. Košický vládní programme*,” http://www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945_kosvlpr.htm (accessed September 2007).

Decree no. 26/1945 of the SNR, also issued in April 1945, defined national committees as organs of state administration that would take over from former communal councils, mayors, town halls, and communal notaries. The liberated people (*osvobozený lid*) would elect the personnel of the committees in popular elections (*lidem volené*).¹⁴² The elected were supposed to be “the people’s best representatives” (*nejlepší představitelé*). The committees, however, were comprised mainly of people of Slavic origin (Czechs and Slovaks), politically reliable, whose competence and intellect rarely matched what their office required. These clerks held an unprecedented concentration of power in critical matters such as property and citizenship.

Beginning in April 1945, national committees mushroomed around the country. The government created three levels of committees in the Czech lands: local, district, and provincial.¹⁴³ In Slovakia, local (*miestny národný výbor*, MNV) and district national committees were set up. Instead of provincial level committees, the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava oversaw the work of national committees across Slovakia. In the regions where Czechs and Slovaks constituted the minority, for example southern Slovakia, the government appointed the administrative commissions (*správne komisie*) and commissars until the Slavic representatives could assume power and set up the national committees.¹⁴⁴ On the following pages, I will focus on the work of the district national committees in western Slovakia and the work of the administrative commissions in southern Slovakia as the main administrative organs responsible for the determination of citizenship (*štátne občianstvo*) and nationality (*veci národnostné*) as well as the issuance of certificates of political reliability (*ľudovodemokraticka spoľahlivosť*).

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Post-War Czechoslovakia*.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

The national committees treated these matters as interrelated. They based decisions concerning invalidation or maintenance of citizenship on the determination of nationality and attestation of political reliability. Thus the latter – also called civil reliability (*štátoobčianska spoľahlivosť*) or people’s-democratic reliability (*ľudovodemokraticka spoľahlivosť*) – became the most desired document in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1945. Without it, maintaining citizenship, getting a job in the public sector, keeping property, buying land, leasing an apartment, or voting was impossible. Even retaining employment depended on this one piece of paper.

Until the fall of 1945, the criteria for a successful application were not clear due to the absence of federal law regulating reliability issues in the entire country.¹⁴⁵ The lack of standardization made the processing particularly chaotic.¹⁴⁶ The national committees made their decisions based on oral instructions from the ministry in Prague.¹⁴⁷ Finally, on November 12, 1945, the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava issued an ordinance regulating the procedure in Slovakia.¹⁴⁸ The major criteria for a positive decision were: Slavic (*slovanska*) nationality, the absence of treacherous, fascist, and collaborative activity followed by investigation and court sentence, or reasonable suspicion thereof.¹⁴⁹ People of German and Magyar nationality were not eligible to receive reliability certificates since, de facto, they had already been deprived of

¹⁴⁵ In accordance with the general rule in postwar Czechoslovakia, a law passed in Prague had precedence over laws from individual lands, including Slovakia. If the federal law was inconclusive, then local administration referred to the law of the land.

¹⁴⁶ See edict of the chairman of the local (communal) national committee in Prague on the regulation of issuance of certificates of state and national reliability from 17 January 1947, 11 February 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

¹⁴⁷ Circular of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava on citizenship of persons of German and Magyar nationality, 20 February 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, I have not found the original text of the ordinance. The only document I refer to later in the text is the instruction on the ordinance no. 2607/4-II/1-1945 from the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava to the district national committee in Vrábľe (*výnos Povereníctva vnútra no. 2607/4-II/1-1945*), 20 February 1946, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 490, SNA.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Czechoslovak citizenship in accordance with presidential decree no. 33/1945. The determination of German and Magyar nationality was based primarily on presidential decree no. 5/1945 from May 1945, which stated that as

People of German and Magyar nationality shall be considered those who on the occasion of any census since 1929 acknowledged their German or Magyar nationality or who became members of national groups or organizations or political parties in which persons of German or Magyar nationality were united.¹⁵⁰

In other words, people who were members of German or Magyar organizations during the war automatically *became* Germans or Magyars and were recognized as such by the postwar state administration. Hence being a German or Magyar became more a political than an ethnic category. Such “traditional” signifiers of ethnicity like religion and origin were mostly ignored (except for language) in favor of self-identification (declaration of German and Magyar nationality in a census) and political affiliation. Thus, a favorable ruling on political reliability boiled down to the determination of German and Magyar nationality.

Germans and Magyars were judged reliable only if they proved their loyalty to the republic, never betrayed the Czech and Slovak nations, and actively participated in the fight for liberation or suffered under the Nazi or fascist regime. These included soldiers serving in the Czechoslovak Army abroad, women whose husbands had not lost Czechoslovak citizenship, men whose wives were of Czech or Slovak nationality, were married before March 16, 1939 and remained loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic, and, finally, those who could prove that they had been coerced or forced by extenuating

¹⁵⁰ Presidential decree no. 5/1945 (May 19, 1945) concerning the invalidity of some transactions involving property rights from the time of lack of freedom and concerning the national management of property assets of Germans, Hungarians, traitors, and collaborators and of certain organizations and associations. Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans*.

circumstances to declare German or Magyar nationality in “the period of increased threat to the republic.”¹⁵¹ Under the aforementioned conditions, the district national committees could issue Germans and Magyars temporary certificates “until a definite decision on the Czechoslovak citizenship of the said person was made by the relevant competent central offices.”¹⁵² Germans and Magyars who declared Czech or Slovak nationality under occupation were eligible for the attestation of reliability as Czechs and Slovaks.¹⁵³

Standard questionnaires in the application process for attestation of political reliability reflected these criteria. The questionnaires asked about the political stance of the applicant and his or her activities during the war. Besides a standard inquiry on personal data (name, age, language, nationality, citizenship, etc), the remaining twenty-two questions revolved around the political conduct of the applicant between September 29, 1938 and the end of 1944. The questions concerned possible membership in German and Magyar fascist organizations or the Slovak Hlinka Guard (HG), attendance at Slovak schools run by the HSLŠ, participation in various social and political activities organized by the HG and HSLŠ, possible stays in Germany, persecution of Czechoslovak citizens, membership in the Slovak State administration, takeover of property during the war, possible participation in the partisan warfare and the uprising, among others.¹⁵⁴

Thus, in accordance with the law, the determination of German and Magyar nationality rested predominantly on political conduct during the occupation. However,

¹⁵¹ Circular of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava on citizenship of persons of German and Magyar nationality, 20 February 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA. “The time of increased threat to the republic” applied to the period from May 21, 1938 until the end of the war. See instructions on the matters concerning Czechoslovak citizenship, summarized by Counselor Mikuláš Huba – the head of the Central Commission for Reslovakization, Fall 1946, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 490, SNA.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Questionnaire from the district national committee in Nitra regarding an application for a certificate of political and civil reliability, 6 October 1945, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 96/46, SAN.

the national committees had their own understanding of who was and who was not a German and Hungarian and tended to prioritize language as well as the applicant's private affairs as decisive. That the clerks tended to cling to the more traditional markers of nationality, especially language, is illustrated in the story of Margita Czaková from Hrnčiarovce. Born in Slovakia of Magyar parents, twenty-four-year-old Czaková applied in January 1946 for Czechoslovak citizenship, which she had lost in August 1945 in accordance with presidential decree no. 33/1945.¹⁵⁵ As an applicant of Magyar nationality (*mad'arská národnosť*), Czaková warranted a particularly thorough investigation. The office of national security, the city and district national committees in Nitra, and the city office in Hrnčiarovce issued positive statements concerning her status. The main focus of the investigation was Czaková's past loyalty or disloyalty to Czechoslovakia and the Czech and Slovak nations, her possible participation in the defense of the country, and persecution from the Nazi and fascist regime immediately before and during the war.¹⁵⁶ The office in Hrnčiarovce issued the following statement:

During the occupation, she [Czaková] behaved loyally toward the Czechoslovak Republic, was not a member of the Magyar Party, did not stand up politically against the Czechoslovak Republic, attended a Slovak school although there was a Magyar school in Hrnčiarovce. According to the presented evidence, she assisted the Slovak revolt during the Slovak National Uprising by harboring a partisan

¹⁵⁵ Letter from the district national committee to the city national committee in Nitra concerning the Czechoslovak citizenship of Margita Czaková, 10 January 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 544/46, SAN. For her personal data, see statement concerning Margita Czaková's application for Czechoslovak citizenship issued by the office of the city national committee in Nitra, 31 May 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 544/46, SAN.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from the district national committee to the city national committee in Nitra concerning the Czechoslovak citizenship of Margita Czaková, 10 January 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 544/46, SAN.

Anton Magu. She helped him and other members of his group by bringing them food.¹⁵⁷

Thus it seemed that Czaková should have had her citizenship easily reinstated since she was “an active antifascist who would make a good and loyal citizen of the Czechoslovak Republic.”¹⁵⁸

However, Czaková’s behavior during the war was not the only factor under scrutiny. The local administration also investigated her linguistic skills. The national security in Nitra reported to the national committee that although Czaková spoke Hungarian in private, in public she attempted to speak only Slovak which she knew “fairly well.”¹⁵⁹ Czaková understood that the language she spoke at home and in public, as well as the schools she attended, had the power to ultimately prove her “true” Slovakness. She thus wrote the following,

I am of Slovak nationality (*národnosti slovenskej*), although my parents were of Magyar nationality, and am registered as a person of Magyar nationality in the last census of 1940. However, that happened without my knowledge or my agreement ... [Czaková was under age and thus registered under the nationality of her parents]. In fact, I am an alumnus of a Slovak school..., I attended a people’s Slovak school in Hrnčiarovce, all together eight grades, I moved and then I have always been among Slovaks, *I know Slovak perfectly and myself I feel to be hundred percent a Slovak woman*. I intend to marry a Slovak (lieutenant of the Czechoslovak Army). Similar my brother Peter Czakó feels ... and we declare that only our parents are people of Magyar nationality, but we are not – we are their children who attended the Slovak schools [my emphasis]!¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Letter from the city office in Hrnčiarovce to the district national committee in Nitra concerning the Czechoslovak citizenship of Margita Czaková, 5 September 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 544/46, SAN.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Letter from the national security in Nitra to the city national committee in Nitra concerning the Czechoslovak citizenship of Margita Czaková, 31 May 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 544/46, SAN.

¹⁶⁰ Statement of Margita Czaková regarding her nationality, 31 May 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 544/46, SAN.

Similarly, Barbara Czaková (maiden name Gero; Margita's relative) from Hrnčiarovce based her request for citizenship on the fact that she was born in Slovakia like her grandparents and that "she could not take responsibility for the fact that her mother tongue was Magyar (*zato ja nemôžem*).¹⁶¹

Ultimately, language proved to be the central criterion used by lower rank clerks to determine Slovakness and hence political reliability. The district national committees usually accompanied a positive decision on reliability with a statement confirming Slovak nationality by virtue of previous censuses, a Slovak spouse, and the use of Slovak language as the sole vehicle of expression (lack of knowledge of any other language was a bonus).¹⁶² In January 1946, the Slovak commissioner of internal affairs even reprimanded the national committees in Bratislava and Košice, finding fault with the fact that too many Germans and Magyars were being granted Slovak nationality based on shaky evidence – language used at home and marriage to a Slovak.¹⁶³ The committees, however, did not act against the law. In fact, they followed decree no. 104/1945 of the SNR (August 1945) which stated that

To determine allegiance to German and Magyar nationality, the language used in familial contacts [*v rodinnom styku*] is particularly decisive, so was membership in a German or Magyar political party after September 29, 1938, or the declaration of nationality in the censuses since 1929.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Statement of Barbara Czaková regarding Czechoslovak citizenship, 16 January 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 1654/46, SAN.

¹⁶² See, for example, confirmation from the city national committee in Ivánka near Nitra concerning nationality of Ján Kukla, 31 January 1946, Okresný národný výbor v Nitre, administration ONV 1664/46, SAN.

¹⁶³ Letter from the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava concerning matters of citizenship, people's-democratic reliability, and nationality to all the district national committees in Bratislava and Košice, 11 January 1946, PV – Presidium ONV, 130/46, box 5, SAN.

¹⁶⁴ See *Nariadenie Slovenskej národnej rady č. 104 zo dňa 23. augusta 1945 o konfiškovaní a urýchlenom rozdelení pôdohospodárskeho majetku Nemcov, Maďarov, ako aj zradcov a nepriateľov slovenského národa*, 23 August 1945, in Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku*.

President Beneš entirely ignored language as a criterion for the determination of German and Magyar nationality in decree no. 12/1945 (June 1945), but the subsequent legal acts had to acknowledge what had been common practice at lower levels of administration.¹⁶⁵ In February 1947, the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava echoed decree no. 104/1945, stating that along with political affiliation and declared nationality, the language used in the family must be recognized as a crucial factor in the determination of nationality.¹⁶⁶ In November 1947, the commissioner admitted that the criterion of language was “natural and just in Slovakia,” regardless of presidential decree no. 12/1945.¹⁶⁷

The issue of language was especially problematic for Jews who had in the past declared German and Magyar nationality and/or spoke German and Magyar. Since the central government did not recognize Jews as a separate legal or national category in Czechoslovakia, the local administration freely ascribed nationality (Jewish, Czech, Slovak, German, or Magyar) on an individual basis. Considering the legal treatment of Germans and Hungarians, ascription of either nationality had particularly harsh repercussions for almost half (forty-three percent) of all the Jews living in Slovakia after the war. Of 30,000 Jewish Slovak survivors, approximately 3,700 Jews had declared German nationality and 9,000 had declared Magyar nationality in the census of 1930. The

¹⁶⁵ See *Dekret presidenta o konfiskaci a urychleném rozdělení zemědělského majetku Němců, Maďarů, jakož i zrádců a nepřátel českého a slovenského národa*, 21 June 1945, in digital data of the historical legislation of the ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic, <http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1945/sb07-45.pdf> (accessed August 2007).

¹⁶⁶ Circular of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava on the citizenship of persons of German and Magyar nationality, 20 February 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

¹⁶⁷ Memorandum of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava on the solution of Jewish question in Slovakia, issued in response to the report of the SRP and the ÚSŽNO from September 11, 1946, 10 November 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 81, SNA.

remaining fifty-seven percent constituted the Jews of Subcarpathian origin and people who declared Jewish, Slovak, and Czech nationality in 1930.¹⁶⁸

Since lower rank clerks prioritized language, Jews who, at any point in the past, declared German and Magyar nationality and/or were German and Magyar speakers were often denied certificates of political reliability based on their alleged linguistic “inadequacies.” In September 1945, Winterstein commented on the common accusation that Jews lacked sufficient knowledge of the Slovak language,

Jews speak Magyar [*mad'arčia*!] It is true that on the land formerly ruled by the Arrow Cross [*Nyilasmí*] people speak Hungarian until now. It is forgotten, however, that the youth had to attend Magyar schools between 1938 and 1945. We have warned the returning youth who passed through Bratislava not to speak Magyar, to which they responded that they were coming from gas chambers where they could not learn the Slovak language!!! Since we do not like it we will try to assure that all Jews speak Slovak within a year from now. Let the newspapers write about it but not the contrary. Today on a street you will not hear a note that is not Slovak from a Jew!¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ According to the census of 1930, there were 136,737 Jews in Slovakia, of whom 9,700 or 7.1 percent declared German nationality. Ludvík Němec estimated that approximately 6,000 German Jews of Slovakia perished in the Holocaust. Thus, of 30,000 Jewish survivors in postwar Slovakia, approximately 3,700 Jews were of German nationality. As for the Slovak Jews of Magyar nationality, 9,728 or 7.1 percent – almost exactly as many as German nationals – declared Hungarian nationality in the census of 1930. The number of Jews declaring Hungarian nationality in Slovakia dramatically declined from 22,400 or 16.50 percent in 1921 to 9,728 or 7.1 percent of the total Jewish population in 1930 (drop of fifty-one percent). Bruno Blau ascribed the decline to the trend toward czechoslovakization among the Hungarian speaking Jews who shifted their allegiances toward Czechs and Slovaks. Robert Y. Búchler estimated that, in the years 1942-43, about 9,000 Jews – of whom the overwhelming majority were Magyar Jews – left Slovakia for Hungary, leaving behind maybe a few hundred. After the liberation of 1945, however, most of the refugees (approximately 9,000) returned to their country of origin, making up thirty percent of the 30,000 Jewish survivors in postwar Slovakia. Of course, these numbers fluctuated but even the considerable demographic shifts did not change the fact that a substantial part of the Jewish community suffered the consequences of German and Magyar policies implemented by the Czechoslovak state. See Bruno Blau, "Nationality among Czechoslovak Jews," *Historia Judaica* 10 (1948); Ludvík Němec, "Solution of the Minorities Problem," in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948*, ed. Victor S Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); Robert Y. Búchler, "Znovuoživenie Židovskej Komunity na Slovensku po Druhej Svetovej Vojne," *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, no. 4 (1998).

¹⁶⁹ The Arrow Cross Party (Nyilaskeresztes Párt) was a Hungarian national socialist party led by Ferenc Szálasi. It took over power in Hungary between October 1944 and January 1945. Address of Winterstein in Bratislava in response to the pogrom in Topoľčany, September 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

In a public address in November 1945, Winterstein said,

When Jews applied for the attestation of reliability, they did not get it. The criterion was the language that [applicants] spoke at home. There were instances when the refusal of the attestation of reliability was literally justified by the German or Magyar nationality of a Jew. At the same time, I realized that many among those who made decisions on political reliability themselves would not have survived a thorough investigation. [In the process] they [clerks] give Jews language tests; in Bratislava they even hired an etymologist and, I am certain, that any Slovak would fail with him too. Although in western Slovakia a Jew, as a rule, speaks three languages, they [clerks] nonetheless mark Jews' nationality as German or Magyar.¹⁷⁰

In short, due to the common use of “private language” (spoken at home) as the main criterion for the determination of nationality, a Jewish applicant who spoke German or Magyar “to his mother” was automatically classified as a German or a Magyar.¹⁷¹ Thus, Winterstein argued, serious concerns arose about the status of these Jews who could not speak Slovak at all.

The allegation of “linguistic promiscuity” among the Jews in Slovakia and the problems of attesting to their reliability were not merely manifestations of prejudice among lower rank clerks.¹⁷² Rather, they stemmed from a commonly held belief in the negative role of German and Magyar Jews in Czechoslovakia that permeated all strata of society, including high political echelons. For example, Minister of Culture and

¹⁷⁰ For the original Slovak version, see address of Vojtech Winterstein in Košice, 4 November 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS. In my collection, the earliest mention of Jewish problems concerning certificates of reliability came from the Winterstein's address in response to the pogrom in Topoľčany in September 1945. Winterstein mentioned that after liberation “certificates of national and political reliability they [government, offices] did not issue to us [Jews]” (*Svedectvá o národnej a politickej spoľahlivosti nám nevydávali*). See address of Vojtech Winterstein in Bratislava, in response to the pogrom in Topoľčany, September 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS. For more allegations concerning language tests, see document on certificates of political reliability issued for Jews of Hungarian and German nationality in Slovakia, 29 October 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁷¹ Letter to the president of the Czechoslovak Republic generated in the circles of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP, Fall 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁷² The term “linguistic promiscuity” borrowed from Zvi Y. Gitelman and Roman Szporluk.

Information Václav Kopecký – an influential communist politician – declared in July 1944,

Those Jews who feel themselves to be Germans or Hungarians must face the same measures that will be taken against the Germans and Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. The liquidation of antisemitism does not mean that we will grant the Jews special privileges if they feel themselves to be Germans or Hungarians. Nor will we allow those who feel themselves to be Germans and Hungarians to hide their true feelings behind the claim of Jewishness. Liquidation of antisemitism cannot be allowed to cause harm to the national and Slavic character of the future Czechoslovak Republic.¹⁷³

This statement implied that German Jews were forces of germanization and that Hungarian Jews were forces of magyarization.¹⁷⁴ Considering the government's policy of ethnic homogenization, such alleged Jewish practices were considered harmful.

Without a doubt, the most frequent accusation against Hungarian-speaking Jews in postwar Slovakia was their alleged allegiance to active magyarization (enforcement of Magyar language and culture in their milieu). This accusation had a long history, dating back to the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁵ It is worth noting that, in September 1946, Minister of the Interior Vaclav Nosek issued a decree which stated that if a petitioner was suspected

¹⁷³ Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948*, 68-9.

¹⁷⁴ See instructions of the ministry of the interior in Prague to decree no. B-300/10.690, 13 September 1946, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

¹⁷⁵ The literature on the subject includes George Barany, "Magyar Jew or Jewish Magyar? Reflections on the Question of Assimilation" in *Jews and non-Jews in Eastern Europe 1918-1945*, ed. Bela Vago and George L. Mosse (1974); Nathaniel Katzburg, "The Jewish Question in Hungary during the Interwar Period – Jewish Attitudes," in *Jews and non-Jews in Eastern Europe 1918-1945*, ed. Bela Vago and George L. Mosse (1974); George Barany, "Magyar Jew or Jewish Magyar? Reflections on the Question of Assimilation" in *Jews and non-Jews in Eastern Europe 1918-1945*, ed. Bela Vago and George L. Mosse; William O. McCagg, Jr, *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary* (East European Monographs, 1986); William O. McCagg, Jr, *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670-1988* (Indiana University Press, 1989); Victor Karady, "Religious Divisions, Socio-Economic Stratification and the Modernization of Hungarian Jewry after the Emancipation," in *Jews in the Hungarian Economy, 1760-1945*, ed. Michael Silber (1992); Michael K. Silber, "The Entrance of Jews into Hungarian Society in Vormärz: The Case of the 'Casinos,'" in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein; Maria M. Kovacs, *Liberal Professions and Illiberal Politics: Hungary from the Habsburgs to the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

of germanization or magyarization, his request for Czech and Slovak nationality would be denied.¹⁷⁶ Germanization and magyarization were defined as follows:

Germanization (or magyarization) is understood as an activity, which aimed at spreading Germaneness (or Magyariness) [*němectvo/madžarstvo*] on the Slovak soil at the time of the First Republic and before. For example, it [germanization and magyarization] entails the foundation of German (or Magyar) schools and cultural institutions within Slovak communities (Schulverein, Turnverein, Nordmark, Kulturverein, etc., and alike). Further, the additional endorsement of these institutions, for example, that persons under consideration, working as employers or chief clerks, exerted direct or indirect economic pressure on Slovak employees so they would have sent their children to the German (or Magyar) schools, participated in the German or Magyar cultural, sporting, or political life, voted for the German or Magyar political parties, etc. In particular, the problem refers to instances in which it was documented that the persons under consideration financially (economically) or morally endorsed German or Magyar irredentism in the period of the increased threat to the republic, or that they employed out of principle persons of German or Magyar nationality as chief workers in their enterprises in the Slovak regions.¹⁷⁷

Mere affiliation to German and Magyar nationality, the use of the German or Magyar language and ignorance of Slovak, as well as participation in German and Magyar federal (*spolkovy*) or cultural life, insofar as it did not entail endorsement of germanizing or magyarizing pursuits, was not supposed to qualify as germanization or magyarization activities.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, a person who had not declared German or Magyar nationality in a census after 1929, but rather had consistently declared Jewish nationality and, at the same time, pursued germanizing or magyarizing activity, was considered a

¹⁷⁶ Decree regulated the determination of Czechoslovak citizenship and the rules of deportation for Jews of German and Magyar nationality. It stated that if “a person of Jewish origin” had declared German or Magyar nationality before the war and Czech or Slovak nationality “in the period of increased threat to the republic,” he or she should be considered Czech or Slovak, except in cases of presumed germanization and magyarization. Instructions of the ministry of the interior in Prague to decree no.B-300/10.690, 13 September 1946, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Instructions of the ministry of the interior in Prague to decree no.B-300/10.690, 13 September 1946, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

traitor to the Czech and Slovak nation.¹⁷⁹ Germanizers and magyarizers were to be deprived of Czechoslovak citizenship and property and expelled (*vystěhování do ciziny*), although not under the law of transfer (*ač odsunu nepodléhají*).¹⁸⁰

Closely related to the allegations of germanization and magyarization was the accusation that Jews had sympathized with Magyar fascists during the war.

Representatives of the Slovak Jewish communities repeatedly responded to both accusations. In November 1945, in Košice, Winterstein said,

They [Slovaks] reproach Jews on speaking Magyar and welcoming Horthyho [Miklós Horthy – the regent of Hungary in the years 1920-44]. It is true that there were individuals among the Jews who were members of the Magyar nationalist parties, but they were the minority. To be just, however, one must consider that all of this happened at a time when Jews had a choice between the fascist Slovak State and the liberal Magyar state. Yet those who were in *Kompasze* and against the Czechoslovak Republic were lost for us.¹⁸¹

In the same address he continued,

As far as the reproach that Jews magyarized [*maďarizovali*] until 1918 is concerned, I have to say that it would be a mistake not to recognize that there were many like that; however, from 1919 the majority of Jews sent their children to Slovak schools and earnestly pursued assimilation to the Slovak environment. It is also said that in Komárne and in Košice Jews speak Magyar. To that I will add a “but,” because in the First Republic [1918-38] ninety to ninety-five percent of Jews affirmed their Czechoslovak statehood...¹⁸²

Winterstein’s argument was correct despite the exaggeration in percentages and numbers.

As Bruno Blau pointed out in his article in 1948, during the nine years between the censuses of 1921 and 1930, the number of Jews in Slovakia who declared Czecho/Slovak

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Address of Winterstein in Košice, 4 November 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁸² Ibid.

nationality rose from 29,136 to 44,009, an increase of fifty-one percent.¹⁸³ At the same time, the number of Jews declaring Hungarian nationality fell from 21,584 to 9,728, a fall of fifty-five percent.¹⁸⁴

In October 1945, the ÚSŽNO and the SRP indicated that the major problem about attesting the political reliability of German- and Magyar- speaking Jews (apart from the issue of language and political accusations) was the lack of clearly stated criteria for eligibility. The representatives of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP complained that attesting the reliability of Jews of German and Magyar nationality had not yet been determined in a manner comparable to that of persons of Czech, Slovak, and other Slavic origins.¹⁸⁵ In a letter to the president of the Czechoslovak Republic from November 1945, Winterstein complained that the national committees “did not know how to manage” (*nevedia si rady*) the people who had declared “Jewish nationality” because the status of Jewish nationals had not yet been legally clarified.¹⁸⁶ The author recommended that “Jewish nationality” (*židovska národnosť*) be considered “Slavic nationality” (*národnosť slavianska*) in attesting their reliability and citizenship.¹⁸⁷ He also pointed out that the national committees were still making decisions based on “subjective belonging” confirmed by “objective signs,” in other words, previously declared nationality in the census of 1938 and membership in political organizations.¹⁸⁸

The first attempt to regulate the status of “persons of Jewish origin” was an ordinance of the commissioner of internal affairs issued in November 1945. In

¹⁸³ Blau, "Nationality among Czechoslovak Jews," 151.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: 152.

¹⁸⁵ Document concerning certificates of political reliability for the Jews of German and Hungarian nationality in Slovakia, 29 October 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁸⁶ Letter to the president of the Czechoslovak Republic generated in the circles of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP, Fall 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

accordance with article I of the ordinance, “persons of Slovak, Czech, or other Slavic nationality” alone were eligible for the attestation of reliability. Article XI of the ordinance stated that

Persons of Jewish origin, who declared Jewish nationality, if they were and remained loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic and never betrayed the Czech and Slovak nation, should be granted certificates of national, state, and people’s democratic reliability under the above conditions as if they were of Slavic nationality...¹⁸⁹

The instructions for the ordinance, sent three months later from the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava to the district national committee in Vrábľe, clarified the above noting that “the provisions of article XI in the cited decree did not refer to persons of Jewish denomination (origin, nationality) who, in official reports, of their own volition or under pressure, declared German or Magyar nationality.”¹⁹⁰ Jews who declared German or Magyar nationality in any census immediately before or during the war would be considered Germans or Magyars following presidential decree no. 33/1945.¹⁹¹ The attestation of reliability would not be granted unless an applicant could prove “extenuating circumstances” at the time of his or her declaration of nationality. In other circumstances, when the applicant declared German or Magyar nationality of his own will or did it before the occupation, then the attestation of reliability was out of question. Article XII of the ordinance stated that in the determination of nationality “decisive, in

¹⁸⁹ Instruction on ordinance no. 2607/4-II/1-1945 from the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava to the district national committee in Vrábľe, 20 February 1946, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 490, SNA.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ In the census of 1921, of 354,342 Jews living in Czechoslovakia, 48,628 declared German nationality while 21,584 declared Hungarian nationality (mainly in Slovakia). In the census of 1930, of 356,930 Jews living in Czechoslovakia, 45,732 declared German nationality while only 9,728 declared Hungarian nationality (mainly in Slovakia). As I mentioned before, approximately forty-three percent of the Jewish survivors had declared either nationality before or during the war. Also see Blau, "Nationality among Czechoslovak Jews."

particular, would be language used in familial contacts or membership in a German or Magyar political party after October 6, 1938, or the declaration of nationality at the last census.”¹⁹² If at least one of the above conditions was not met, then the attestation of reliability would be denied unless other exceptional circumstances were in place in accordance with presidential decree no. 33/1945.¹⁹³

By March 1946 not much had improved. Representatives of Slovak Jewry still complained that “in many places and in an increasing number of instances, Jews were refused certificates of national reliability merely on the basis of the language they spoke “privately” without regard to their declared nationality...”¹⁹⁴ The same letter pointed out that the entire attestation process usually took a year or two, and that working was practically impossible during the wait.¹⁹⁵ In September 1946, in the midst of the reslovakization process, the ÚSŽNO and the SRP complained that Jews of German and Magyar nationality in Slovakia still struggled to maintain citizenship and secure attestations of reliability. The national committees across Slovakia did not follow official circulars and constantly created obstacles to granting Jews attestations, justifying their decisions with the claim that Jews were Germans, Magyars, and traitors.¹⁹⁶ The ÚSŽNO and the SRP also requested that the language used “within the family” should not serve as the main criterion for the determination of nationality, which the commissioner of

¹⁹² Instruction on ordinance no. 2607/4-II/1-1945 from the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava to the district national committee in Vrábce, 20 February 1946, PV – Národné výbory II/1/1946, box 490, SNA.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Letter from the ÚSŽNO to Chairman of the Slovak National Council Jozef Lettrich in Bratislava, 19 March 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

internal affairs dismissed as unwarranted, unlawful, and discriminatory.¹⁹⁷ The commissioner stated that all cases involving the racially persecuted should be carefully investigated and exceptions should be made only to ensure that the language of an applicant did not serve as the sole basis for denial of attestation.¹⁹⁸

September 1946, when the ÚSŽNO and the SRP submitted the complaints, marked the peak of the reslovakization process (see chapter 2). Part of the process was the clarification of the legal criteria for determining nationality in southern Slovakia. In April 1946, the Board of Commissioners in Bratislava issued the initial instructions to the national committees and administrative commissions on the classification of the two groups eligible for reslovakization.¹⁹⁹ The matter was time sensitive since the Czechoslovak government was obliged to submit the final list of Magyars assigned for exchange with Hungary (i.e., expulsion) by the end of August 1946. On June 17, 1946, the commissioner of internal affairs issued an official ordinance, which became fundamental to determining nationality during reslovakization (see appendix 4).²⁰⁰ Based on the government's definition of Magyar nationality, the ordinance declared the following as eligible for Slovak nationality and thus reslovakization: people who declared Slovak, Czech, or other Slavic nationality in the census of 1930 but later changed their declaration to Magyar nationality; who declared the above nationalities now (i.e., 1946 but did not declare such in 1930, 1939, or 1940) and never betrayed the Czechoslovak Republic, were not members of fascist Magyar political parties and organizations, and did

¹⁹⁷ Memorandum of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava on the solution of Jewish question in Slovakia, issued in response to the report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP from September 11, 1946, 10 November 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 81, SNA.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Copy of the instruction of the Presidium of the Board of Commissioners concerning reslovakization, 3 April 1946, Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, SNA.

²⁰⁰ Ordinance of the commissioner of internal affairs no.20.000/I-IV/1-1946 on the reslovakization of citizens, 17 June 1946, Reslovakizačna komisia, 1946, box 13, SNA.

not support magyarization.²⁰¹ Active participation in the fight for liberation of the republic or suffering under Nazi or fascist terror also had to be investigated.²⁰²

To the Slovak Magyars for whom the reslovakization campaign was designed, it was obvious that signing up for reslovakization was the most effective way to escape resettlement. Those who declared Magyar nationality before or during the war were fully aware that reslovakization was the only means to keep citizenship and thus retain all civil rights, including the right to property and a livelihood. For these people reslovakization was “to be or not to be” in Czechoslovakia. On a daily basis, they were bombarded by posters promising, “Persons who sign up will have the possibility to keep Czechoslovak citizenship.”²⁰³ Not surprisingly, then, according to the head of the Central Commission for Reslovakization, there were communities in southern Slovakia (particularly those which traditionally had large Hungarian population) where half or more of the local Magyar population signed up for the program.²⁰⁴

The district census commissions and the district control commissions handled every individual case. The commissions usually consisted of representatives of local administration and intelligentsia: a school inspector, an educational inspector, a district

²⁰¹ Ibid. Magyarization also emphasized in the instruction the Board of Commissioners from April 2, 1946.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Minutes from the conference of the Resettlement Bureau in Bratislava, 14 June 1946, Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, SNA.

²⁰⁴ In Bratislava and Nové Zámky, up to eighty percent of the local Magyars signed up for reslovakization. In Nitra, Vrábľa, Košice, Trebišov, and Michalovce, more than eighty percent of the local Magyar population signed up. But there were also communities like Bajtava where only 152 (twenty-three percent) of those eligible signed up, despite the fact that sixteen years earlier 592 (forty-eight percent) of the residents declared Magyar nationality (651 residents of Bajtava declared Slovak nationality in 1930). Overall, by the end of 1946, a total of 350,000 people had submitted an estimated 100,000 applications for reslovakization – approximately fifty-eight percent of the number who had declared Magyar nationality in the census of 1930. In December 1948, when the entire operation ended, a total of 410,000 people had applied for reslovakization and 320,000 had been approved. Štefan Šutaj, *Reslovakizácia: Zmena Národnosti Časti Obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. Svetovej Vojne* (Košice: Spoločenskovedný Ústav SAV, 1991), 13. Also see minutes from the second meeting of the Central Commission for Reslovakization, 4 July 1946, Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, SNA.

commander of national security, the chief of the city national committee (with a decisive vote), a functionary of the Slovak League, and, finally, “a local specialist on the nationalities’ situation.”²⁰⁵ Šutaj found that the commissions based their entire assessment on so-called objective marks (*objektívne znaky*) of ethnicity in accordance with the ordinance from April 1946,

... manifestations of allegiance to Slovak culture (schools, federations, Slovak political and apolitical organizations), surname (although not always) as well as denomination of an applicant. The most prevalent mark of Slovak origin was accepted command of the Slovak language inherited after parents in the first generation. Other marks of Slovak origin included family tradition, then awareness, that the ancestors were Slovaks who used Slovak language as means of communication at home, applicant’s Slovak kin relations, etc.²⁰⁶

Marriage to a Hungarian and immediate or extended family in Hungary negatively affected an applicant’s eligibility. Criminal history, membership in Magyar fascist organizations, activity against the Czechoslovak Republic under occupation, and support of magyarization were also bases for denial.²⁰⁷

Accusations of magyarization were particularly harmful for Magyar-speaking Jews in Slovakia who wished to reslovakize. As I discussed before, the responsible offices tended to determine the nationality of Jewish applicants as German or Magyar instead of Slovak or Jewish months before the government launched its reslovakization program. Such determination of nationality bore obvious consequences for the applicants: vulnerability to discrimination and possibility of expulsion. In these circumstances the panicked reaction of eighty-six Jewish residents of Kráľovský Chlumec (southern

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 11. The Slovak League (Slovenská liga) was a Slovak nationalist organization founded in 1920, active until 1948. See Róbert Letz, *Dejiny Slovenskej Ligy na Slovensku, 1920-1948* (Martin: Vydavateľstvo MS, 2000).

²⁰⁶ Šutaj Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Slovakia, occupied by Hungary since 1938) who, in May 1946, were denied recognition as Slovak or Jewish nationals due to failure to submit certificates of nationality from the census of 1930 was not surprising.²⁰⁸ In the case of the Jewish community in Kráľovský Chlumec, the ostensible reason for not recognizing the applicants' nationality as Jewish or Slovak was the failure to submit administrative documents. Most often, however, the pretext for denial was arbitrary and based on the language of the applicants, the schools they attended, and possible accusations of magyarization.

Summarizing the results of the reslovakization campaign in September 1946, the ÚSŽNO and the SRP reported that many Jews residing in the south of Slovakia applied to sign up for reslovakization in order to prove their willingness “to assimilate in every respect (*že sa v každom ohľade chcú prispôbiť*) into Slovak culture.”²⁰⁹ The Jews from southern Slovakia believed that by doing so they would “perform a patriotic deed and help to solve the Magyar problem, hence proving their loyalty and devotion to the Czechoslovak Republic.”²¹⁰ However, as early as in July 1946, in some districts of southern Slovakia, most notably Levice (Nitra region) and Košice (Košice region), the percentage of rejected applications submitted by persons of Jewish origin was

²⁰⁸ The certificates were not issued before the deadline due to the overload of applications in the commissioner's office. All eighty-six applicants signed a letter to the commissioner of internal affairs in which they declared their Slovak and Jewish nationality. Although, in the appeal, the signatories cited exclusion from the electoral lists and deprivation of the right to vote as the main sources of concern, they knew that there was much more at stake than the mere inability to fulfill the duties of a citizen. “In our appeal, we referred to the comprehensive statistical report held in the office of the district national committee [Úrad ONV] in Kráľovský Chlumec according to which ninety percent of the citizens of Jewish denomination declared Jewish or Slovak nationality. And now each of us declares Slovak nationality. We feel as the full-fledged citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic who have a right and duty to participate in the elections and thus cannot accept the decision of the appeal committee...” Letter from the Jewish residents of Kráľovský Chlumec to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, 3 May 1946, PV – Národné výbory, II/4/1946, box 550, SNA.

²⁰⁹ Report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

disproportionately high, reaching ten percent in Levice.²¹¹ Part of the problem was that the application forms had no column for denomination, thus leaving no room for affirmations of one's Jewish origins and anti-fascism.²¹² The primary concern was that the majority of applicants were at the mercy of the local national committees and administrative commissions. To make things worse, the Central Commission for Reslovakization was neither willing nor able to supervise and revise every applicant's case in Slovakia. The authors of the report argued that these circumstances generated panic among Jews, who were fully aware of the connection between the reslovakization and the projected expulsion of persons of Magyar nationality. Many Jews who had their reslovakization application rejected, mainly in southern Slovakia, attempted to evade deportation by avoiding their apartments and workplace.²¹³

However, it is doubtful that many (if any) Magyar-speaking Jews were actually deported. During reslovakization and soon afterward, the authorities in Bratislava and Prague issued a number of rules that ultimately safeguarded Jewish status and residence in Slovakia. For example, in June 1946, the commissioner of internal affairs issued a special ordinance to regulate the determination of nationality during reslovakization as well as to regulate the processing of attesting reliability and citizenship of people of Jewish origin (see appendix 5).²¹⁴ The ordinance declared that "persons who declared

²¹¹ Letter of the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP to the commissioner of the internal affairs in Bratislava, 15 July 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹² The participants of the fourth meeting of the Central Commission for Reslovakization explained the absence of questions on denomination as "oversight" (*nedopatrenie*) and refused to attach any meaning to this mistake except for possible incompleteness of the final demographic-statistical summary. See minutes from the fourth meeting of the Central Commission for Reslovakization, 16 August 1946, Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946-47, box 1, SNA.

²¹³ Report of the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹⁴ Ordinance no.15.820/1/1946-III/2 on the determination of nationality of persons of Jewish origin issued by the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava, 4 June 1946, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

Jewish nationality in 1938 should be placed on an equal footing [with persons who declared Slavic nationality] as long as decisions on ...reliability and citizenship are concerned.”²¹⁵ Without the declaration from 1938, Slovak nationality should be determined if petitioners declared “Slovak or Czech nationality at present... if else they met conditions of the instructions for reslovakization”; if they knew the Slovak or Czech language; if they had evidence of any declaration of Slavic nationality (the census of 1930, military registration, police application, etc.), or evidence of attendance at a school with Slavic language instruction.²¹⁶ Any of the above sufficed if petitioners “were and remained loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic, never betrayed the Czech and Slovak nations, and their present life answered for this spirit.”²¹⁷

In the opinion of the leaders of the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP, the best way to circumvent the problems of Jewish nationality and reliability was to promote legal recognition of all Jews residing in Czechoslovakia as persecuted under the Nazi regime. Such recognition, the leaders believed, could serve as the most efficient grounds for presumption of political reliability of all Czechoslovak Jews. As early as October 1945, ÚŠŽNO and SRP representatives recommended that all Slovak Jews be considered politically reliable in principle – on grounds of fascist persecution – until proved otherwise.²¹⁸ Jews who declared German or Magyar nationality during the war did so, the authors argued, under duress or in circumstances “deserving particular consideration.”²¹⁹ In short, from the Jewish perspective, the matter was simple: anyone persecuted by the

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Document concerning certificates of political reliability for the Jews of German and Hungarian nationality in Slovakia, 29 October 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Nazis was worthy of good treatment after the war. At the time, however, the commissioner dismissed the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP's appeal to consider all racially persecuted persons as politically reliable a priori as unjustified (*ničím neodôvodnené*) and opposed to the present law.²²⁰

The ordinance of the commissioner of internal affairs from November 1945, discussed earlier in regard to Jewish nationality, also complicated the matter by narrowing the definition of "persecution" to racially motivated internment. In a letter to the president of the Czechoslovak Republic, a representative of the SRP expressed concern that such a narrow definition of persecution would leave out those Jews who were not sent to camps.²²¹ In September 1946, the minister of the interior in Prague clarified the matter. He decreed that the people whom "Nazism persecuted as 'Jews' or 'half-Jews' (*židovské míšence*) and who lived in the occupied territory or in the territory indirectly governed by the Germans, should, with minor exceptions, be considered as persons who suffered under Nazi or fascist terror."²²² In other words, an individual whom the law of the fascist regime considered Jewish or half-Jewish should be considered racially persecuted and thus eligible for Czechoslovak citizenship and property ownership (confiscated otherwise). The remaining conditions entailed loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic and a pledge of never having betrayed the Czech and Slovak nations.

Following the government decree, in November 1946, the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava issued an instruction to all the district national committees,

²²⁰ Memorandum of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava on the solution of Jewish question in Slovakia, issued in response to the report of the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP from September 11, 1946, 10 November 1947, PV – Secretariat 1947, box 81, SNA.

²²¹ Letter to the president of the Czechoslovak Republic generated in the circles of the ÚŠŽNO and the SRP, November 1945, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²² Ibid.

the administrative commissions, the national committees in Bratislava and Košice, the Central Commandership of National Security, and the Resettlement Bureau in Bratislava.²²³ The instruction mirrored the governmental decree:

Persons whom the fascist regime marked as of “Jewish origin” or “Jewish half-blood,” or persons to whom the fascist laws on legal position of Jews or Jewish half-bloods referred to, should not be counted on the lists of persons of German or Magyar nationality about to be expelled, and these persons do not come under the deportation laws under any circumstances. If [such persons] are found in concentration camps for people who are to be deported, they should be immediately released.²²⁴

The instruction also followed the ministerial decree on the regulation of maintenance of Czechoslovak citizenship and the attestation of national and political reliability discussed before. The commissioner recommended that in the cases of suspected germanization or magyarization among persons of Jewish origin, only a court of law could settle the matter.²²⁵ If, however, there was no evidence that a racially persecuted person betrayed the Czech and Slovak nations, an application for Czechoslovak citizenship should be immediately processed and approved.

Along with racial persecution under fascism (detainment), participation in the national fight for liberation was yet another category of eligibility for the determination of Czech and Slovak nationality, political reliability, and citizenship. Law no. 255/1946, issued in December 1946, defined “a participant in the national fight for liberation” as one who,

²²³ Instruction of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava regulating possible deportation of persons of Jewish origin, 5 November 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

between March 15, 1939 and May 4, 1945 was restricted in his personal freedom by imprisonment, internment, deportation, or else was in favor of anti-fascist struggle ..., or on grounds of political, national, racial or religious persecutions; the restriction of personal freedom lasting at least three months, or else a shorter period but [a person] suffered the actual detriment of health or a more severe harm to the body or died as a result of the restriction of personal freedom.²²⁶

By the beginning of 1947, evidence of racially motivated detainment should have sufficed for the attestation of reliability. An applicant should not have had to present proof of participation in the fight for liberation if he or she could document persecution. However, the request for additional proof must have happened often since representatives of the SRP complained in December 1947 about the poor or non-existent implementation of the laws issued in the previous year.²²⁷

Conclusion

A close reading of primary sources on postwar Jewish history in the two countries reveals that nationality was as critical in establishing communal and national boundaries in Czechoslovakia as it was in Poland. The governments in Prague (and Bratislava) and Warszawa were building nation-states where “good” nationality was a condition for inclusion into the citizenry. “Good” translated into Slavic: Polish, Czech, and Slovak nationalities guaranteed citizenship. “Bad” – German nationality in Poland and German and Magyar in Czechoslovakia – hampered chances for citizenship. However, the determination of who was and who was not Polish, Czech, Slovak, German, and Magyar turned out to be more complicated than expected.

²²⁶ Digital data of historical legislation of the ministry of the interior of the Czech Republic, *Zákon o příslušnících československé armády v zahraničí a o některých jiných účastnících národního boje za osvobození*, 19 December 1946, <http://www.mvcr.cz/sbirka/1946/sb107-46.pdf> (accessed September 2007).

²²⁷ Letter from the SRP in Bratislava to the minister of national defense in Prague, 20 December 1947, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

In the two countries, the central governments that formulated the legal criteria and the local administrations that implemented them struggled to find an optimal method of selecting nationals from non-nationals. What was the result? The two central governments in Warszawa and Prague found the rhetoric of “behavior” particularly useful since it helped to expand their control over the politics of inclusion by drawing clear-cut lines between traitors and patriots, insiders and outsiders. The rhetorical creation of an apparent overlap between political behavior under occupation and ethnicity (Germans and Magyars considered to be traitors and Poles, Czechs, and Slovaks seen as anti-fascists) loomed as an effective means in the grand project of “social closure.”²²⁸

At the same time, however, the government in Bratislava and lower rank bureaucrats in this region considered the language used in the family to be the most credible indicator of one’s national belonging. For them, language marked loyalty or betrayal and thus translated into the most suitable criterion of belonging in the wake of the recent war and governmental instructions. However, experiential and linguistic criteria of nationality were incompatible, as the cases of German- and Magyar-speaking Jews from western and northern Poland and southern Slovakia proved. Their stories illuminated the gap between law and praxis; a gap which became an area of conceptual tension and conflict between the central policies and the actual principles guiding the determination of citizenship.

For Jewish survivors, the employment of ethno-linguistic criteria of belonging presented fundamental obstacles to citizenship. In Czechoslovakia, the government did

²²⁸ In Slovakia, in particular, where the question of responsibility for war crimes was more complicated than in the Czech lands, the Slovak government overstressed “inherent” Magyar fascism and Slovak anti-fascism to avoid discussing Slovak collaboration. Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*.

not treat Jews as a separate national category, leaving them in what I call a *grey zone of belonging*. Jewish survivors could claim the right to citizenship as Slovak, Czech, German, and Magyar nationals but not as Jews. In contrast, the Polish government considered Jews (not without ambiguity) as a separate minority group of interest. Thus it was more explicit and seemed more accommodating as far as the legal status of Jews was concerned. For example, the July Manifesto promised Polish Jews legal equality as early as the summer of 1944. Subsequent anti-German legislation described Jews as special victims of the Nazi regime. Polish politicians pronounced their special concern for Jews, promising equality and the opportunity to pursue a "normal life."

Despite these differences, Jews who spoke languages of "bad" nationalities – German or Magyar – were equally disadvantaged in both countries. This was not surprising since the determination of their nationality mainly depended on the good will of the employees of the national committees and the verification commissions in Slovakia and Poland respectively. By and large, the lower administration tended to consider Jewishness not merely as a nationality but rather as a category modifiable by nationality marked in turn by language. For example, German or Magyar nationality (manifested in language) negatively tempered one's Jewishness whereas Polish, Slovak, or Czech nationality (again, manifested in language) added a positive value to it. In other words, German- and Magyar-speaking Jews who wished for Polish and Czechoslovak citizenship respectively faced as many troubles as non-Jewish Germans and Magyars did. Of course, once labeled as Germans and Magyars, the applicants were vulnerable to expropriation and deportation which was not without significance to the local officials. Notes on personal interests and corruption in bureaucratic dealings, recurrent in Polish

and Slovak sources, unmistakably point to what was apparently a common problem.²²⁹ With or without a personal stake, these administrative decisions obviously rendered nationality a subject of tensions and conflict between the Jewish applicant and the lower rank clerk.

I speculate that the encounters between the petitioners who came to submit, resubmit, or appeal applications, and the clerks of national committees and verification commissions were pivotal moments in interethnic relations in Poland and Slovakia. By labeling and classifying people along ethnic lines, these encounters contributed to shaping the character of ethnic relations across the two countries. Each act of naming a person Slovak, Polish, German, and Magyar had critical consequences for the individual and for the ethnic fabric of society. Individuals marked as Germans and Magyars became outsiders deprived of rights and property; the majority was forced out of the country changing the ethnic composition of society. As local communities, especially in western and northern Poland, were in-the-making, the verification commissions contributed to shaping the profile of the newly created social structures. The ethnic lines drafted at the time laid the foundation for communal relations for the years to come.

By 1950 in Slovakia and 1951 in Poland, the majority of Jews who stayed retained their citizenship despite frequent classification as Germans and Magyars. Although Jewishness by itself was not a pass to citizenship, in the end it *did* help German- and Magyar-speaking Jews to secure civil rights in the two countries. The laws, which favored behavior as a determinant of nationality and which thus protected the citizenship of those Germans or Magyars who had actively participated in the fight for

²²⁹ "...In the majority of cases, it happened that a member of the national committee, often the head of the committee himself, had an interest in the property of the Jew in question." Report of the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Bratislava, 11 September 1946, Winterstein Collection, W4 1946-48, SIHS.

liberation or suffered under the Nazi regime, helped Jewish survivors to secure their civil and material status in postwar Slovakia. Similarly, the equation of Jewishness with special victimhood enabled German-speaking Jews to retain their status in postwar Poland. Thus, suffering from Nazi persecution became the ultimate entry ticket into Polish and Slovak citizenry. Just as traitorous activity had the power to kill, loyal conduct had the power to redeem. This redemption, however, was by no means presupposed but rather resulted from two years of political and social negotiations between the government, the lower administration, and the representatives of Slovak and Polish Jewry.

APPENDICES

1. Directive of the ministry of the Recovered Territories concerning the attestation of Polish nationality for the residents of the Recovered Territories, 6 April 1946.

Article III: Persons who will submit required application and prove their Polish origins or show their unity with the Polish Nation and will declare loyalty to the Nation and the State of Poland will be considered the persons [*posiadające polską przynależność narodową*] of the Polish national affiliation.

Article IV: The interested persons can prove Polish national affiliation by all evidence available, in particular:

1. Polish origins can be proved by id cards or registrar records, or by the sound of a family name, or by blood relations [*pokrewieństwo*] with Poles,
2. Unity with the Polish Nation could be proved by the membership in Polish organizations or participation in fight for Polish cause [*sprawa polska*], or by the inner attitude [*postawa wewnętrzna*] and language, or by cultivation of Polish customs in family, or by the connection with the Polish folk culture and the life of Poles, or by the outer attitude [*zewnętrzna postawa*] during the Nazi rule showing solidarity with Poles while exposing oneself to danger.

Article V: The following persons of Polish origin will not be recognized as persons affiliated [*przynależne*] to the Polish Nation:

1. Who, with the long standing and notorious behavior, showed the full unity with the German nation or hostile attitude toward Polishness [*polskość*],

2. Who committed one of crimes specified in the decree of August 31, 1944 concerning the punishment for fascist-Nazi criminals, guilty of murders and persecutions of civilians, prisoners of war and traitors of the Polish Nation...,
3. Members of the fascist organizations...,
4. Teachers of German schools, professional officers of the German army...,
functionaries of the secret state police (Gestapo), functionaries of concentration and labor camps, publishers of German party printed materials.
Article VI: In principle, the membership in the NSDAP and its branches alone does not make the basis to deny attestation of Polish national affiliation, considering frequently used coercion to join the party.²³⁰

2. Article VIII of the Košice Program, issued by the National Front of the Czechs and Slovaks, 5 April 1945.

The citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic of German and Hungarian nationalities who had Czechoslovak citizenship before the Munich decision of 1938, and who are anti-Fascist, will have their Czechoslovak citizenship confirmed and their return home shall be facilitated; the same applies to those who carried out an active struggle already in the period before Munich against Henlein [Konrad Henlein, a leader of the Sudeten German Party] or the Hungarian irredentist parties, for the defense of Czechoslovakia, and who after Munich and March 15 [1939, the beginning of the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia] suffered persecution at the hands of the German and Hungarian authorities because of their fidelity to the Czechoslovak Republic, to those who were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps, or were forced to flee abroad from German and Hungarian terror, and actively participated there in the anti-fascist struggle for Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak citizenship of the remaining Czechoslovak citizens of German and Hungarian nationality will be invalidated. These citizens have the option to request Czechoslovak citizenship, and the agencies of the republic reserve the right to adjudicate each and every request on an individual basis.²³¹

3. Article I of Constitutional Edict of the president of the republic no. 33/1945 concerning the right to Czechoslovak citizenship of persons of German and Magyar nationality, 2 August 1945.

²³⁰ Misztal, *Weryfikacja Narodowościowa na Ziemiach Odzyskanych*, 350.

²³¹ The English translation of the fragment from Janics, *Czechoslovak Policy and the Hungarian Minority, 1945-1948*, 106. For the original text, see “*Programme československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích, tzv. Košický vládní programme,*” http://www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945_kosvlpr.htm (accessed August 2007).

1. Czechoslovak citizens of German or Magyar nationality who acquired German or Magyar citizenship under the regulations of the foreign occupational forces shall have lost their Czechoslovak citizenship by so doing.
2. The other Czechoslovak citizens of German or Magyar nationality shall lose their Czechoslovak citizenship on the day this edict comes into force.
3. This edict does not apply to Germans or Magyars who, during the period of the increased threat to the Republic (Article XVIII of the Edict of the President of the Republic, dated June 19, 1945 concerning the punishment of National Socialist Criminals, Traitors and their Accomplices and concerning the Special People's Courts) registered as Czechs or Slovaks during the official census.
4. Czechs, Slovaks, and persons of other Slav nationalities who during that time professed themselves Germans or Magyars under duress or under extenuating circumstances shall not be adjudged Germans or Magyars insofar as the ministry of the interior, after a thorough examination of the particulars quoted approves the attestation of national reliability as issued by the appropriate district national committee.²³²

(Article IV specified that married women and juveniles shall be judged separately.

Applications for national reliability “submitted by the wives and underage children of Czechoslovak citizens are to be judged with lenience; until a final decision is made the applicants are to be considered as Czechoslovak citizens.” Article V stated that even

Czechs, Slovaks, and members of other nations, who applied for German or Magyar citizenship during the time of the increased threat to the republic ...without being forced to do so by reason of duress or special circumstances, shall lose their Czechoslovak citizenship as of the day on which this edict comes into force.)²³³

4. Ordinance of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava no.20.000/I-IV/1-1946 concerning the reslovakization of citizens, 17 June 1946.

1. Persons who, in the census of 1930, declared Slovak, Czech, or other Slavic nationality,
2. Persons who declare the above nationalities now and are of Slovak, Czech, or other Slavic origin, if they:

²³² For the original (Czech) text of decree no. 33/1945, see Šutaj, Mosný, and Olejník, *Prezidentské Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v Povojnovom Slovensku*, 118-20. For the English translation, see Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans*.

²³³ Turnwald, ed., *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans*.

- a. betrayed the Czechoslovak Republic,
- b. were not members of fascist Magyar political parties and organizations,
- c. did not support magyarization.²³⁴

When evaluating the facts under points 2 a-c, one must also investigate if the said person actively participated in the fight for liberation of the republic or suffered under Nazi or fascist terror. In accordance with this ordinance, one can declare Slovak or Czech nationality at the registrar [*súpisovy*] commissar's office at the city or district national committee (or administrative commission) until July 1, 1946 [two weeks only].²³⁵

5. Ordinance of the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava no.15.820/1/1946-III/2 on the determination of nationality of persons of Jewish origin, 4 June 1946.

1. Regardless of their language and other marks, persons who declared Slavic nationality [*slovanska národnosť*] in the census of 1938 must be considered as Slovaks or Czechs or members of other Slavic nationality. Persons who declared Jewish nationality in 1938 should be placed on an equal footing [with persons who declared Slavic nationality] as long as decisions on requests for the attestation of national, state, and people's democratic reliability and citizenship are concerned.

2. If, for the technical reasons, the persons cannot submit evidence that they declared Slavic or Jewish nationality in 1938 ..., their nationality should be determined with the use of the following aids [*pomôcki*]:

a. the declaration of Slovak or Czech nationality at present... if else they meet conditions of the instructions for reslovakization,

b. knowledge of the Slovak or Czech language,

c. evidence of the declaration of Slavic nationality in the offices (for example, military registration, police application, etc.),

d. evidence of attendance at a school with Slavic language instruction,

e. evidence of the declaration of nationality in the census of 1930,

any of the above... suffice for the determination of Slavic nationality if the said person was and remained loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic, never betrayed Czech and Slovak nations, and their present life answered for this spirit.²³⁶

²³⁴ Also emphasized in the instruction the Board of Commissioners from April 2, 1946.

²³⁵ Reslovakizačná komisia, 1946, box 13, SNA.

²³⁶ PV – Secretariat 1947, box 79, SNA.

CHAPTER 7

RETURN TO “NORMALITY” (1946-48)

After the First World War, it may have been necessary to try to find some meaning in the senselessness of mass death, in the private grief shared by millions. After the Second World War, the horrors of Nazism and Communism, the mass bombing of civilians, the attempts at genocide, and the brutal uprooting of millions of refugees, it was perhaps necessary to do just the opposite: to turn one's back on death and seek to rebuild, in a strangely anesthetized state, “normal” life.¹

Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann asserted that the enormity of mass death during the Second World War purged the belief that there was “an identifiable meaning” in this life experience; what remained were “deeply disturbing questions and fears, and a desperate flight into normality.”² As people had no tools to narrate the cataclysm they had just experienced, moving on and having a “normal life” again appeared to be the best option.

“Normal life,” however, is a subjective term; its meaning changes according to the times it refers to. What a post-war society construed as *normal* is not necessarily considered *normal* today. For people in the late 1940s, the ideal of normality was peace.³ After the war, normality seemed to be the extreme opposite of war. Survivors imagined normality as not having to hide, not fearing death on a daily basis, not being alone and

¹ Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, "Introduction: Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe," in *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History during the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

lonely; the ideal was to make a living without beggary, and, if age and circumstances allowed, marry and have children, and perhaps belong to a community which would offer emotional and financial support.

There was nothing normal about the “normality” of the postwar individual and collective “life after death.”⁴ There was nothing normal about victims of German persecution, camp inmates, orphaned and sick children, women raped by the Soviets, thousands of traumatized men, soldiers and veterans, and millions of others who tried to put their lives back on track. Neither was there anything remotely normal about the postwar conditions in which they sought to rebuild their lives. Violence, war damage, lawlessness, and chaos were commonplace.

In this situation, the people in charge locally as well as relief and political organizations abroad presumed that Jewish life had to be “reconstructed” and that Jews needed to be “rehabilitated.” Scholars of East European Jewish history, by and large, labeled the entire social change, which unfolded between 1945 and 1948, a “reconstruction” and “rehabilitation” of Polish and Slovak Jewry. These concepts, however, should be used cautiously, being more problematic than they first appear. Historians and anthropologists of other regions and other ethnic groups have pointed to at least two major flaws in these two terms. First, as Richard Black and Khalid Koser argued, these terms “seem typically to refer to top-down development initiatives in postwar societies.”⁵ In other words, they imply that the Jewish return to normality had

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard Black and Khalid Koser, “The End of the Refugee Cycle?” in *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, ed. Richard Black and Khalid Koser (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 25.

nothing to do with individual initiative but was in totality orchestrated by higher institutions, the government, and interested organizations.

Second, as Laura Hammond argued, the terms “reconstruction” and “rehabilitation” are borrowed from the rhetoric of disaster management.⁶ But damage to human beings differs from physical or structural damage and requires a different response and a different terminology:

Many returnees in fact, do not see the object of repatriation as the “rebuilding” or “reconstruction” of their lives. Likewise, they often do not aspire to reclothe themselves in the culture of the past or to rejoin the community that they left.⁷

Hammond suggested that terms like “construction, creativity, innovation, and improvisation” would be more applicable than “reconstruction” or “reintegration.”⁸

Both critiques are applicable to the story of the return to normality of Polish and Slovak Jews. True, Jewish survivors needed relief funds and an institutional network to help them find a place to stay, get medical help, find relatives, and make a living. Dozens of institutions mobilized to provide such support. The Polish government (unlike the Slovak one), the Jewish committees (the CKŻP in Poland and the ÚSŽNO and the SRP in Slovakia), the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews (Obshchestvo Zdravookhraneniia Evreev, OZE-TOZ), and, most notably, American Jewish relief organizations were paramount in helping Jewish survivors to either integrate into the

⁶ Laura Hammond, "Examining the Discourse of Repatriation: Towards a More Proactive Theory of Return Migration," in *The End of the Refugee Cycle? Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*, ed. Richard Black and Khalid Koser (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 235.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 243. Also see Laura Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home: Refugee Repatriation to Ethiopia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

country's economic and social life or emigrate.⁹ Indeed, as I show in this chapter, without their aid, Polish and Slovak Jews would have had a more difficult road toward individual and communal "recovery." Yet, such unilateral emphasis on top-down "reconstruction" fails to record (although does not deny) the individual *initiative, creativity, and improvisation* of Jewish survivors – their strategies of normalization. Especially in Slovakia, where the government did little to help the Jews, people had to count on their own resourcefulness to make ends meet. Thus in this chapter, I attempt to present Jews' postwar "return to normality" as a social process which involved as much individual initiative as top-down institutional aid.

Return to Normality in Poland

After the Kielce pogrom of July 1946 – a central push for emigration – the Jewish population shrank to less than a half of its size from the spring of 1946.¹⁰ According to statistics compiled during the Passover of 1947, the number of Jews registered in Poland fell from 222,000 to 88,270.¹¹ Considering that some Jewish survivors still lived under

⁹ The American JOINT Distribution Committee, the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the American ORT Federation (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training), HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), the American Federation for Polish Jews, and others. The United Nations Recovery and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) also had its share in the general postwar (as well as the specifically Jewish) economic recovery.

¹⁰ The peak of the Jewish population came in the late spring of 1946 when more than 222,000 Jews resided in Poland. Report on the Jewish population in Poland, 30 September 1946, Collection 45/54, File 734, JOINT Archives.

¹¹ On July 1, 1946, there were approximately 192,000 Jews in Poland. After the pogrom, their number dropped to 160,000 in August and to 136,000 in September 1946. Report of Rabbi Philip S. Bernstein submitted to General Joseph T. McNarney in Germany, based on conversations with representatives of the Polish government and leaders of the Jewish community in Poland, 2 August 1946 (report received on September 3, 1946), Collection 45/54, File 734, JOINT Archives. Statistics for particular cities and provinces were the following: the Jewish population of Warszawa decreased from 8,000 on July 1, 1946 to 6,000 on September 30, 1946; Łódź fell from 30,000 to 20,000; Lower Silesia from 90,000 to 65,000; Upper Silesia from 21,000 to 15,500; Kraków from 13,000 to 8,500; Szczecin from 20,000 to 11,500; and other localities from 10,000 to 9,500. Based on report on the Jewish population in Poland, 30 September 1946, Collection 45/54, File 734, JOINT Archives.

assumed Polish names and never registered in any of the eighty-four Jewish communities, there were probably between 95,000 and 100,000 Jews in Poland in the spring of 1947.¹² These numbers remained more or less stable until 1949-51 when the government allowed emigration to Israel and approximately 28,000 people left.¹³

The slowdown in emigration was mainly due to the decline in the violence and chaos of the first eighteen months after liberation. Jews traveling “everywhere without fear” and walking on the streets in the big towns “with long beards and in long coats” – unthinkable in 1945 and 1946 – were normal occurrences in 1947 and 1948.¹⁴ Director of the JOINT for Poland William Bein wrote in March 1947,

Although it [antisemitism] still exists to a great extent, it is undeniable that much of its impetus has been lost and many antisemitic tendencies have stopped. Since the publication of the election results [January 1947] no violence against Jews has been noted, and despite a beneficial relapse, the Jews are still nervous and hope that more and more tolerance will be shown to the small number of surviving Polish Jews. Although many of the Jews are still sitting on their valises, a great number have settled down to work in the hope that they will be able to lead their lives in peaceful surroundings, and there are still thousands of Jews who want to emigrate to Palestine and other overseas countries.¹⁵

Like many Jews in Poland, Bein attributed this new safety to “the strong measures of the government” after the elections in January 1947, the elections, which he claimed, had “a deep effect on the psychology of Jews in Poland.”¹⁶ The struggle for power between the Communists and the opposition, which had plunged the country into civil war, finally

¹² Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. The number of Jewish communities fluctuated from ninety-four to seventy-eight, and to eighty-four between the beginning of 1946 and the end of 1947.

¹³ In 1950, there were 75,000 to 80,000 Jews in Poland. Grzegorz Berendt, *Życie Żydowskie w Polsce w Latach 1950-1956: Z Dziejów Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2006).

¹⁴ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹⁵ Report on the first quarter 1947 in Poland, prepared by William Bein, March 1947, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

¹⁶ The pre-election campaign heightened fear of violence among the Jews aware of the political stakes. *Ibid.*

stood at its conclusion. Victory for the Communists translated into the government taking a tighter grip over law and order in the country. Although repression of the opposition increased, violence on the street, in general, and anti-Jewish violence, in particular, subsided in the first quarter of 1947.

The tighter grip meant more rigorous implementation of laws against antisemitism.¹⁷ People were more and more scared. When a JOINT correspondent asked the proprietors of a small hotel near Wrocław about antisemitism in Poland, they wanted to know the correspondent's identity and the purpose of his visit before answering his question. Finally, they answered, "People say very little. We are afraid to talk against the Jews. We know someone who was very antisemitic and outspoken against the Jews and he was arrested. We do not say anything but we know what we think."¹⁸ Another interviewee, a wealthy owner before the war and a state official when interviewed, said, "Please do not ask me, I would rather not discuss it."¹⁹ Similar expressions reflected not only a fear of the authorities but also the belief that Jews enjoyed special protection due to their involvement in the government – Judeo-communism (see chapter 2).

I suggest that, despite its grip over the popular imagination, belief in Judeo-communism had done little or no harm to Polish Jews since the pogrom in Kielce. People "talked," perhaps "whispered" about Jews "running the show" but this "whispered

¹⁷ Decree concerning "crimes particularly dangerous during the period of the state's reconstruction," declared that "Anyone who publicly calls for nationality, religious, or racial quarrels or praises them...who publicly insults, derides or debases a nationality group or an individual person because of membership in a nationality, religion or race, is subject to imprisonment or arrest....Anyone who commits a criminal act direct against a population group or individual person because of nationality, religious or racial membership is subject to imprisonment for not less than three years or for life or subject to a death penalty if the act resulted in death or serious bodily injury or a disturbance of the normal course of public life or threatens general security," Decree no. 192/1946, 13 June 1946, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 30, 1946. Text is available on the official website of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland at <http://isip.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/index.html> (accessed June 30, 2008).

¹⁸ Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹⁹ Ibid.

antisemitism” failed to ignite violence after 1946. The government also employed propaganda to undercut the rumors. Here is an excerpt from the *Manual of Political Education*, a textbook for a two-year army course for privates,

Do you recall the days before the war, when anti-Semites claimed that all Jews were traders and speculators, and that once Poland got rid of Jews she would be rid of speculation? And what happened? Today there is but a handful of Jews in Poland, very few of them are engaged in business. Is there, however, no speculation in Poland? Yes, there is. As a matter of fact, many Poles are engaged in black market, trade, and speculation...Do Polish Jews work for the Government? Of course, some of them do. Do they hold these jobs because they are Jews? No. They hold them because they are qualified...However, in consideration of what we have said, is it true that Jews hold many state offices in Poland? Of course not. A trip to any ministry, any provincial or any other state institution will convince us that not often will we encounter Jewish officials there...²⁰

Popularity of the belief in Judeo-communism agitated those Jews who held official posts.

They feared that

At the first opportunity... all Jews in high positions would be killed by antisemitic right wing Poles in opposition to the present government and [that these Poles] were supposed to even have prepared a list of all Jews in Poland for use when “the time [would] come.”²¹

However, regardless of suspicion and fear, the stereotype failed to impede the Jewish return to normality, especially in western Poland.

In Lower Silesia, in particular, people spoke with growing “enthusiasm” about rebuilding Jewish life. In 1947, leaders of the Lower Silesian Jewry tended to overemphasize the enthusiasm of Silesian Jews for the regime and for the improvement

²⁰ Excerpts from the *Manual of Political Education* entitled “The Polish Army Learns about Brotherhood,” February 1949, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 7, folder 105, YIVO.

²¹ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

of local conditions.²² Their optimism was not isolated and seemed to reflect the general sentiment among Lower Silesian Jews at the time. For example, Chief Rabbi of Wrocław Trojstman felt that the conditions in 1947 were “much better” than in 1946. He believed that 75,000, or seventy-five percent, of all the Jews in Poland would remain there. He said, “In my heart I feel better. Occasionally there are smiles but there is no danger and that is important. What they think, I do not know.”²³

If the criteria for normality are a non-violent environment, the prospect of starting a family and finding employment, and a sense of communal belonging, then indeed Lower Silesia became a unique milieu for Jewish “normalization.” The absence of antisemitic outbreaks in western Poland was conspicuous in comparison to other parts of the country. Apparently, there was no longer a need “for any special steps to combat antisemitism since the relations between Poles and Jews were generally so good.”²⁴ A JOINT correspondent talked to a non-Jewish bookkeeper and a superintendent of a private car repair shop in the city of Wrocław. Questioned about antisemitism, the superintendent said,

“Why, Jews are very popular here”... After the superintendent had taken on a small workshop, a Jew appeared who had more right to it than he and took it over for himself, with the approval of the authorities. In spite of this, he said he felt no bitterness... [In Wrocław] he found the Jews had changed very much. While before the war they were generally extremely orthodox, now many eat pork and even “join in Catholic holidays.” As a Catholic he feels no religious or racial antagonism toward Jews.²⁵

²² The JOINT interviewed Plockier (the deputy chairman of the Lower Silesian provincial Jewish committee, a Zionist) and Lewi (the general secretary of the committee, a Communist). Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

He and the bookkeeper (a manager of a small bank before the war and a repatriate from Ander's Army) said that "they had suffered so much alongside Jews in German camps that they could have only sympathy for Jews and they felt this was typical of most people in the Regained Territories."²⁶

An American Jewish observer had a more skeptical take on the apparently harmonious ethnic relations and Jewish enthusiasm for life in western Poland,

It must also be stated that the optimism expressed by every Jew interviewed seemed to contain, not unnaturally, a certain, if indefinable and perhaps unconscious, element of bated-breath hopefulness which leads them all to put the best possible face on conditions, perhaps a slightly better face than may be entirely justified – as though wishing hard for ideal conditions might help to make them so. There is no doubt, however, that the situation has greatly improved during the past year, or that the position of the Jews in Poland, and to a lesser extent the relationship between Poles and Jews, is decidedly better than before the war. At the same time, it must be remembered that the average Pole was and largely still is antisemitic. The disappearance of overt antisemitism is in large part the result of conscious *suppression by individuals of instincts* within themselves – as well as partly due to pressure from the authorities. There are also a number of Poles who are fiercely opposed to antisemitism, and it is increasingly being realized that the remnant of the former Jewish population of Poland is no "danger" or problem, and the common decency and the memory of common suffering demand at least intelligent and positive sympathy. Almost every Pole of intelligence is commendably suppressing and trying to outgrow his *inherited antisemitic* sentiments [my emphasis].²⁷

This commentary illuminates the belief that Polish antisemitism was a natural instinct ("sucked with mother's milk") which could be "consciously suppressed" but never fully eliminated.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ In the subsequent decades, this belief or lack thereof became a major distinguishing marker between those Jews who stayed in Poland and those who emigrated in the late 1940s; the former repudiating the notion and the latter, by and large, embracing it.

Whether “suppressed” or not, antisemitism indeed was not a major problem in the postwar years in Lower Silesia. The government policies against antisemitism were a factor but more significant were the specific conditions in the region. In August 1947, a consultant of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York, Mordecai Ezekiel, noted,

In western Poland, especially in the south (Silesia) and the West, where the “New Territories” taken over from the Germans are being resettled, life is pioneer-like, with everyone a newcomer and with an American quality of lack of roots – and even the Poles resettled there from Eastern Poland seem to have left their prejudices behind (except for recurrent clashes between Germanized Poles who now claim Polish citizenship and eastern Poles who want to oust them as Germans and take over their farms).²⁹

I speculate that this “pioneer-like” quality of life was central to peaceful Jewish and non-Jewish coexistence. Everybody was preoccupied with rebuilding their lives; everybody was a settler and a newcomer. Jews were not a threat to the material status quo; they were not seen as returnees eager to regain what had been theirs. In the Recovered Territories, there was no recent history of non-Jewish neighbors taking Jewish property and no sense of guilt. Everybody started anew. What also helped was a common enemy – Germans. Fear and hatred of local Germans united all newcomers by providing a platform for communication between Jews and non-Jews. The central conflicts revolved around those Germans who claimed to be Polish and refused to leave. Importantly, Lower Silesia, as well as other parts of western Poland, had enough German “leftovers” to satisfy the material needs of settlers – countless houses, businesses, and pieces of land.

²⁹ “Observations on Poland and Switzerland” prepared by Mordecai Ezekiel in the Institute on Overseas Studies at the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York, not for publication, 17 August 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

Lower Silesia was also unique in its level of industrialization. In the late 1940s, enthusiasm for manual industrial work was widespread. What a man of the twenty-first century is so tired of and eager to mend, the man of the 1940s held in esteem and strove to “normalize.” Romanticized descriptions of industrialized country land were common, “A city of smoking chimneys, a city of mill furnaces bursting with flames, a city of mines, a city noisy and feverishly busy, bustling with hurrying people – this is Wałbrzych, one of the most precious pearls in the necklace of cities in the Recovered Territories...”³⁰ What place could have been a better venue for creation of a “New Jew” – a proletarian and a farmer.

Employment

The Haskalah’s idea of revised Jewish employment – “productivization” of Jews – recaptured the imagination and activities of those Jewish leaders who advocated the reconstruction of Jewish life in postwar Poland.³¹ The purpose was not only to find employment for Jewish survivors, but also to rehabilitate them psychologically and socially through work. Above all, behind these efforts lay the belief that “productivization” would lead to improved relations with non-Jews. The argument was that antisemitism in Poland stemmed partly from Jewish traditional overrepresentation in trade and liberal professions and hence could be mended only by “the normalization” of Jewish employment. The idea was that to be like Poles – to be the *norm* rather than the *exception* – Jews needed to enter farming and manual labor. Only then would they be

³⁰ Notes from a trip in the Recovered Territories, report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

³¹ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

fully accepted and able to build normal lives. However, this idea should not be interpreted as an attempt at radical assimilation. Michał Grynberg argued that the creation of Jewish cooperatives – a central aspect of productivization – was meant to keep Jews in touch with the Jewish community and not the opposite.³²

The productivization of Jews did not remain on paper. The CKŻP, with the approval of the central government, established the Bank for Jewish Economic Rehabilitation (Bank dla Produktywizacji Żydów) and the Economic Center Solidarity (Centrala Gospodarcza Solidarność) to facilitate Jewish productivization.³³ The Bank, which operated as a credit cooperative, gave loans to all Jewish cooperatives and hundreds of private Jewish businesses (crafts workshops and others).³⁴ The Economic Center *Solidarity* was created to coordinate the development of Jewish cooperatives by supplying them with raw materials and aiding in product sales.³⁵ The Center had twenty-one stores around Poland catering mainly to non-Jews.³⁶ In 1948, when the government strove to eliminate “private initiative” and further the centralization of the economy,

³² Michał Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986), 6.

³³ The Bank was established in Lublin in January 1945 and transferred to Warszawa in March 1945.

³⁴ By November 1947, the Bank had 3,200 members. Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, November 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

³⁵ The Economic Center (Centrala Spółdzielni Wytwórczych i Konsumpcyjnych Solidarność) was established in February 1946 (not to be confused with the famous *Solidarity* trade union in Poland in the 1980s). Not all Jewish cooperatives applied for membership in *Solidarity* but those who did could count on at least institutional support if not on actual aid. At the end of 1947, 155 of 194 cooperatives were members of *Solidarity*. *Solidarity* joined the non-Jewish system of cooperatives in December 1949, marking the end of the Jewish cooperative system. See memorandum from the Research Department at the JOINT, prepared by Leon Shapiro for B.M. Joffe, 30 June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives. For the history of the Center and Jewish cooperatives in postwar Poland, see Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*.

³⁶ Good quality, appearance, and low price of the products from the Jewish cooperatives were cited as a main magnet for buyers. Translated Yiddish letter from J. Geldblum of Warszawa, attached to correspondence between JOINT offices in Paris and New York, 3 June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives. Also see JTA News, 13 February 1948, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives.

including cooperatives, it made an exception for the Economic Center.³⁷ In recognition of the special needs of the postwar Jewish rehabilitation, *Solidarity* was allowed to operate independently with the stipulation that all Jewish cooperatives would join it.³⁸

In 1945, there were only twenty Jewish cooperatives (of a total thirty-seven) in Poland.³⁹ But, two years later, their number increased to 200, with a total employment of 5,000.⁴⁰ The largest number of Jewish producer cooperatives was in Lower Silesia – ninety-four, or sixty-seven percent of all cooperatives in the region.⁴¹ The first Jewish fishing cooperative (*Spółdzielnia Rybak Szczeciński*) in Polish history was established in Szczecin (northwestern Poland).⁴² The remaining cooperatives were in Kraków, Katowice, Warszawa, and other towns of central Poland.⁴³

Many Jewish cooperatives were grass root initiatives of individuals and groups determined to go off welfare and support themselves with methods conformable with the prevailing ideological climate. The majority of the co-op founders were repatriates from the USSR, who had experienced cooperatives in interwar Poland and the wartime Soviet Union.⁴⁴ Some had neither skill nor capital. In 1945, many initiatives failed due to the

³⁷ JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

³⁸ The concern was that the JOINT would lose their interest in supporting cooperatives financed by the government. Flow of cash loans, supplies, and machinery would cease, lowering the cooperatives' standard. The government excluded seventeen non-producer Jewish cooperatives from *Solidarity* while ordering the remaining Jewish cooperatives to join it. Ibid.

³⁹ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 52.

⁴⁰ Memorandum from the Research Department at the JOINT, prepared by Leon Shapiro for B.M. Joffe, 30 June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives. Also see report "Jewish Life in Poland," prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, November 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. Ibid. Compare to Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*.

⁴¹ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 8.

⁴² *Rybak Szczeciński* was liquidated by the summer of 1948. See JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

⁴³ Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

inability to find a locality, machinery, and capital.⁴⁵ Local authorities were not always eager to invest in these undertakings either. For example, Mojżesz Gries, who lived in Palestine in 1947, authorized an attorney to carry reprivatization or establishment of a cooperative in the enterprise of *Tomaszek i Gries* (buttons and buckles) which he had left behind in Kraków.⁴⁶ But nothing was accomplished in this venture due to municipal inertness. For similar reasons, Izak Thorn failed to transform his factory *Ritsch* (zippers) in Kraków into a cooperative in spite of having enough machinery and raw material to give jobs for twenty people.⁴⁷

The productivization of Jews, with its network of institutionally coordinated aid and government support, contributed to higher employment rates and changed patterns of occupation. It should be noted that in addition to a relatively small number of surviving children and the aged, a large segment of the adult Jewish population in postwar Poland could not work due to war-related illnesses.⁴⁸ Of all Jews residing in Poland in 1947, approximately thirty-three percent, or 33,000, were “gainfully employed.”⁴⁹ Of the employed, thirty-eight percent worked in cooperatives (artisans), twenty-seven percent were employed in white-collar jobs (state administration, Jewish institutions, “socialized

⁴⁵ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 53.

⁴⁶ Letter from attorney Schlang to the government commissioner for productivization of the Jewish population in Warszawa, 27 February 1947, Collection of the AAN, office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*.

⁴⁹ “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. Estimates confirmed by other sources including dispatch of the JOINT, “Economic, Cultural Revival of Jews in Poland Reported by JOINT Director of Activities There,” 25 September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. In September 1946, the percentage of employed Jews was similar – 39,100 out of 136,000. See report on the Jewish population in Poland, 30 September 1946, Collection 45/54, File 734, JOINT Archives. Another thirty-three percent of the remaining Jewish population was unable to work due to age or illness. One-third of the remaining thirty-four percent intended to emigrate (about 10,000 people) and the rest (20,000) were unemployed but young and fit enough to pick up a new skill and support themselves. For data, see JOINT memorandum for the Committee on Reconstruction Planning, Information concerning Poland, 1 April 1947, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives.

industry,” and others), and ten percent in the steel industry, transportation, and mining.⁵⁰ Four percent of the employed Jews worked in agriculture.⁵¹

In 1948, these trends fluctuated minimally.⁵² By October 1948, Jewish involvement in trade made up four percent and five percent in liberal professions (of the overall Jewish employment), thus shifting a prewar stereotypical paradigm of “Jewish merchants and doctors.” In 1945-46, Jewish peddlers (mainly women) still carried goods from one storekeeper to the next in towns and cities.⁵³ As time passed, peddling gradually decreased, except in regions with less industry and less opportunities. Also, as Jacob Pat claimed, there were “plenty of Jewish ‘silent partners’ in gentile undertakings.”⁵⁴ These people were obviously not registered as employed in business. The most complicated was the employment of older religious Jews “who were not so easily able to learn a new profession, and who before the war were mostly merchants. It seldom happened that a Jew with a beard and a long coat would join a cooperative.”⁵⁵ If they did, they usually struck an agreement with the management that instead of working on Saturday they would work a little longer each day.

⁵⁰ “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁵¹ In Warszawa, in November 1947 for example, of 6,000 Jewish residents, 2,500 were white collar workers. At the same time, in Łódź, of 20,000 Jews, 1,500 worked in state industry, another 1,500 were employed in private firms, mainly small industries, and 1,800 found jobs as craftsmen. In Upper Silesia, of 10,000 Jews, forty percent were employed. Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, November 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁵² More than 5,500 were members of cooperatives, 4,000 to 5,000 were employed as white collar workers, and 4,000 worked in state factories. Confidential report prepared by William Bein, 6 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

⁵³ Jacob Pat and Leo Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire* (New York: International Universities Press, 1947).

⁵⁴ Jacob Pat was a journalist, writer, and activist born in Bialystok in 1890. He served as general secretary of the Jewish Labor Bund's Central Association of Yiddish Schools in Warszawa before the war. He survived the war in the United States. After the war, Pat became active in the Jewish Labor Committee in the US. In the beginning of 1946, he came to Poland as the representative of the Jewish Labor Committee to distribute relief funds among Polish Jews. *Ibid.*, 32-3.

⁵⁵ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

Lower Silesia exemplified the new pattern of Jewish employment. In September 1947, the WJC reported that more than fifty percent of “employable” Jews were “gainfully employed” in Lower Silesia – a total of 15,000 people.⁵⁶ Approximately 4,000 worked in state-owned heavy and light industries, 2,000 were employed in cooperatives, 2,400 worked in social organizations (mainly Jewish), and 300 worked in agriculture. National and municipal administration in Lower Silesia employed about 1,300 Jews. Others found jobs in the liberal professions, private enterprises, artisanship, and trade, among others. With pride, Lower Silesian Jews noted that the first tramcar driver in Wrocław after the war was a Jewish woman.⁵⁷ Dr. Plockier said that “the Jews here are especially anxious to engage in ‘productive’ work, as against trade...”⁵⁸

Five hundred Jewish “heroes of labor” in Lower Silesia, a hundred of them in mining, showed that Silesian Jews indeed managed to build *normal* lives, i.e., lives which fit into the normative reality around them.⁵⁹ In October 1948, there was apparently a Jewish cooperative “on nearly every street” of Wałbrzych, “a city of workshops and

⁵⁶ “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. Also see report on Lower and Upper Silesia and Łódź “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, 1 September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. According to this report, 15,000 of the total “employable” Jewish population in Lower Silesia found job in various branches of economy in the first half of 1947. Plockier estimated that 15,000 of employed Silesian Jews made up seventy percent of the total employable Jewish population in Lower Silesia. See report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. In October 1948, the number of employed Lower Silesian Jews increased to 17,600. Twenty-six percent of this number worked in factories and mines, twenty percent in cooperatives, seventeen percent in government administration and social institutions, and seven percent in trade. See report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

⁵⁷ Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

working people, a city of creative effort. It is no accident that it has become the seat of many of the Jewish productive cooperatives.”⁶⁰

Take, for instance, the largest labor cooperative of needle workers in Wałbrzych. It was originated at the end of 1945 by twelve persons, recruited from among demobilized soldiers, former partisans in the People’s Army and former inmates of Hitler’s concentration camps. One year later, the cooperative employed seventy-six people and the ratio of the cooperative’s own capital to foreign capital was 1:4. Today [October 1948] there are 160 employees and the ratio of capital is almost 1:1. Business increases amazingly...⁶¹

Each success was widely publicized. The Jewish cooperative *Metalowiec* (Metal-worker) in Łódź was celebrated when it won a contest announced by the Central Union of the Textile Industry for construction of a “precision machine” – a machine “indispensable” in the textile industry but, until the fall of 1948, imported from abroad.⁶²

Farming was a particularly sensitive matter for Jewish leaders promoting the productivization of Polish Jews. In 1947, across the country, there were approximately 200 Jewish farming families, comprising more than 500 people (four times more men than women) – mainly farming co-op members.⁶³ The majority of Jewish farmers worked in Lower Silesia, becoming the pride of the local Jewish community.⁶⁴ For example, in Kidlin, near Dzierżoniów (known as Rychbach), one of large farming cooperatives was operated by Jews.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. In Wałbrzych, of 5,500 Jews, 2,000 were employed as physical workers in heavy industry, mining, cooperatives, and other state and private enterprises. Also see report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁶² Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

⁶³ Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. This number grew to 700 in 1948. Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

⁶⁴ Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

This farm, formerly belonging to a German count, consists of 260 hectares. Seventeen Jewish families live together in the extensive buildings and between them provide twenty farm hands. Policies and other decisions are arrived at by vote during periodic meetings. There is a Jewish farm manager in addition to the German overseer, who has stayed on in an advisory capacity [sic!]. The manager assigns the next day's work every evening during a common meeting. Asked about the success of the cooperative effort, he said that a few of the first settlers on this estate had to be asked to leave, as they did not have either the temperament or the desire to cooperate. Now, however, the operators of the farm work in great harmony. This farm has been operated for nearly three months and they have obviously done an excellent job. The crops looked as good as any seen on the tour...⁶⁵

The deputy chairman of the Jewish committee in Dzierżoniów said that relations between members of the Jewish cooperative farm in Kidlin and their Polish neighbors “were very good. He agreed, however, that the situation here [Lower Silesia] is quite different from the norm in Central Poland, where peasants, having occupied the same villages for many generations, tend to be ultra conservative...”⁶⁶

These efforts were not merely means to rehabilitate Jewish survivors and integrate them into the economy of the country. Their purpose was to break the stereotype of a “Jew-merchant” by providing evidence that Jews were productive as manual workers in industry and farming. The chairman of the Wałbrzych Jewish committee, Fischbein, said, “Before the war Poles tended to think of Jews only as tradesmen, now they respect them as fellow workers.”⁶⁷ That Polish peasants admired Jewish farmers was a cause for satisfaction. In northern Poland, on a train to the Jewish farm cooperative *Wspólne Sianie* (Common Sowing), an American reporter and a local peasant allegedly struck the following conversation,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

“Are you on your way by any chance to see those devils?”

“What devils are you talking about?” I asked.

“Why, those Jews, I take it, who settled here and established a farm cooperative,” was his answer. I thought that I ran into an anti-Semite, most likely, an enemy of the new, democratic Poland. Soon however, my neighbor corrected me.

“You’ll see for yourself, sir, that they are real devils. In my life I knew two Jews: Moszek the tailor and Kiwka the shoemaker. But such Jews like those on the cooperative I have never met. They’ve made fertile many acres of land, and all in one year.”⁶⁸

Further, the secretary of the cooperative talked about Jews taking care of livestock,

You should see and hear how our Jews take care of our beasts, even talk to them. Perelman, one of our members, while attending to the swine last Saturday, thus addressed them: Listen, you swine, you’re taken care of by the Jews, so don’t act like pigs. You’ve got to remember that Saturday is Sabbath day among the Jews, so don’t act like pigs.⁶⁹

As a “New Jew,” however, the farmer did not mind attending his pigs (of all animals...) on Sabbath.

In Lower Silesia, there was a widespread belief that Polish Jewish relations were better than ever and better than anywhere else in Poland due to the apparent success of Jewish productivization,

In fact, Poles have taken part in all recent Jewish celebrations in Lower Silesia. Relations between the two *cultural* groups are better now than they were ever before the war. This is partly because *the Jews have turned out to be such good workers*, once they had a chance to show what they could do. *The Polish community admires and likes this*. There is enthusiasm everywhere in the Recovered Territories for productive work. A year ago, after the Kielce pogrom, the Jews, even here, had only one interest – flight. Now this is entirely changed [my emphasis].⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, December 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

Whether employment of Jews in state industry and cooperatives affected Jews' image and their relations with coworkers after the war remains an open question. I suggest, however, that the productivization offered an argument for the state-sponsored campaign against antisemitism while industry provided a venue for indoctrination of large numbers of workers. Lectures, morning talks (*poranki*), and radio programs, all were deployed for the cause.

Outside this "postcard world," there was a world of day-to-day relations or absence thereof in the work place. Especially in central and eastern Poland, there were still small industries and private businesses (like non-Jewish crafts workshops) that refused to hire Jews, religious or not.⁷¹ At the same time, the state heavy industry did not discriminate against Jews, at least on paper. In the Kraków province, Jews were employed in energy plants, light industry, state offices, hospitals, and other non-Jewish institutions.⁷² In Lower Silesia, in industry, mining, and even in farming Jews and non-Jews, including Germans, mingled together. For example, in Dzierżoniów, in 1946, there were thirty-six farms occupied in more than eighty percent by Jews. Jewish and non-Jewish farmers often co-owned a farm.⁷³ Also, the majority of Dzierżoniów farms employed seasonal workers of various ethnicity (equal numbers of Jews, Poles, and

⁷¹ "Unfortunately, we have to stress that very often a Jew could not work in a Polish workshop and, facing the lack of Jewish institutions, went to trade." Annual report on the productivization of Jews in Kraków province in 1947, December 1947, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr. Also see discussion between representatives of the provincial Jewish committee in Kraków (KWŻ) and the governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Kraków province, 2 December 1946, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-3, APKr

⁷² Annual report on the productivization of Jews in Kraków province in 1947, December 1947, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr.

⁷³ Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of Jews in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

Germans), including Jewish farms employing Germans.⁷⁴ The government representative, however, commanded that the Germans be exchanged for Jewish workers in the Jewish farms.

It should be noted that Jewish farming and cooperation between Jewish and non-Jewish farmers was limited to Lower Silesia. In central and eastern Poland Jewish farming was almost non-existent.⁷⁵ Jewish owners of landed property hoped to recover and sell it, and move to a nearby city or abroad. But even in Silesia, the overall picture was not thrilling, especially as far as the beginnings of Jewish farming in the summer of 1946 were concerned. First, most Jewish settlers had no farming experience, being artisans, merchants, or white collar workers before the war.⁷⁶ Some saw farming as a temporary occupation before returning to their original profession or before emigration. Second, the shortage of basic furniture, equipment, agricultural machinery, and cash greatly hampered Jewish (and non-Jewish) farming. Finally, Jewish repatriates, who constituted the majority of Jewish farmers, were psychologically and physically exhausted, even “apathetic.”⁷⁷ For them, toiling on the soil and keeping a household was

⁷⁴ A farm at Świdnicka Street in Piotrolesie in Lower Silesia was settled by six Jews and five Poles. Report on the farm at Świdnicka Street in Piotrolesie, 15 November 1946, Report on farming in Wrocław province prepared by the provincial commissioner for the productivization of Jewish population in Wrocław province, 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of Jews in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM. A Jewish farm in Piotrolesie, owned by four Jewish families, employed five extra workers – one of them German. See report on the farm at Nadbrzeźna Street in Piotrolesie, 15 November 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of Jews in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

⁷⁵ Only nine families (twenty-seven people) agreed to settle on a farm in the entire Kraków province (of the population of 8,000). See annual report on the productivization of Jews in Kraków province in 1947, December 1947, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr.

⁷⁶ Collection of seventy-three questionnaires taken among Jewish repatriates-farmers and six non-Jewish families in the Szczecin province, October 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

⁷⁷ Letter from the governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in the Szczecin province to the governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Warszawa, 30 October 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

often too much to handle, at least for a few weeks or months upon return.⁷⁸ Only gradually, in 1947 and 1948, did Jewish farming improve, and so did the conditions of living.

As for Jewish cooperatives, hardly any of them employed Jews alone. On account of having taken over some small Polish cooperatives already in existence or due to a shortage of Jewish specialists, Jewish cooperatives frequently employed non-Jews who made up twenty to thirty percent of the employees.⁷⁹ Especially the lack of Jewish women translated into a higher employment of non-Jewish women. For example, in the cooperative *Tricot* (Hosiery), Polish women constituted forty percent of the employed.⁸⁰ The cooperative *Teatr Dzieci Warszawy* (Theater of Warszawa's Children) had half Polish and half Jewish membership.⁸¹ In Kraków's cooperative *Metaloteknika*, a third of the employees were Jewish.⁸² Jewish cooperatives made sure, however, that "in no instance was a Jew unable to join a cooperative because of non-Jewish membership."⁸³

Overall, Jews and non-Jews mingled in the workplace without major incident between mid 1946 and the end of 1948. Yet, there were problems which soured relations among workers. For instance, when a growing number of Jewish employees wanted to leave *Metaloteknika* in 1946, the Jewish committee in Kraków blamed low salaries, the

⁷⁸ As the governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Szczecin alluded, "conditions of Jewish apartments and hygiene left much to be desired" in the fall of 1946. Ibid.

⁷⁹ Letter from J. Geldblum of Warszawa, attached to correspondence between JOINT offices in Paris and New York, 3 June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives.

⁸⁰ Report "How Many Jews are in Poland," undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

⁸¹ The cooperative was established to bring Jewish and non-Jewish children together. Letter from the cooperative *Theater of Warszawa's Children* to the governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Warszawa, 18 October 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for the Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

⁸² Governmental inspection of the office of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Kraków, 1-8 December 1946, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr.

⁸³ JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

financial problems of the cooperative, and the antisemitism of its non-Jewish members.⁸⁴ By and large, the distribution of financial aid seemed to have been the most common source of conflict. In Lower Silesia, Plockier mentioned that Jewish miners received JOINT supplements to their salaries while non-Jews did not. He presumed that it must have caused some sense of frustration and injustice among non-Jewish miners.⁸⁵ In October 1946, the provincial commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Szczecin wrote about relations between Jewish and non-Jewish farmers,

Emphasis should be laid on the very civic and reasonable position of the [Jewish] Committee which provides the same aid to Jewish as to Polish workers who come together with Jews in the transports [repatriation from the USSR]. In landed property, for example, in Kelpin, relations between Jews and Poles are very familiar (simply cordial). However, in other properties, where Jews came separately and where Poles do not receive any help and do not use the cows from the [Jewish] Committee, the relations are not good, because they [Poles] feel wronged.⁸⁶

In the summer of 1947, the same provincial commissioner in Szczecin reproached the provincial Jewish committee for removing non-Jewish members from the list of those allowed financial aid in the Jewish fishing cooperative.⁸⁷ Apparently, the provincial Jewish committee in Szczecin left out non-Jewish workers when it distributed food packages. The commissioner pointed out that such intentional omission of non-Jewish

⁸⁴ Annual report on the activity of the productivization department of the KWŻ in 1946, 303/IV/74, AŻIH.

⁸⁵ Plockier mentioned these supplements in report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁸⁶ Letter from the provincial governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Szczecin province to the governmental commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Warszawa, 30 October 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of the Jewish Population in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

⁸⁷ Letter concerning aid to members of cooperative from the provincial commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Szczecin province to the provincial Jewish committee in Szczecin, 5 August 1947, Collection of the AAN, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

workers caused jealousy and sense of injustice and could contribute to the rise of antisemitism.⁸⁸

Despite higher employment rates, many Jews still needed relief between 1946 and 1948. The cost of living rose gradually and what seemed a sufficient wage at the beginning of 1946 was not enough in the summer of 1947. Prices of some foods doubled or tripled within a year.⁸⁹ Food ration cards, which up to December 1946 provided about nine million workers with minimum calories, were limited to seven million people by October 1947.⁹⁰ Wages varied depending on occupation. In the first two years after the war, people in liberal professions could make “big money,” especially lawyers.⁹¹ However, the government’s policy of eliminating “private initiative” cut their earnings (public jobs paid less than the private sector). Owners of small private enterprises, although “doomed,” could still make about 60,000 to 70,000 zloty per month.⁹² The imposition of high taxes was the most efficient way to drive private entrepreneurs toward cooperatives. The minimum wage in an average Jewish cooperative was 8,000 zloty; in leather cooperatives – 25,000. Very good cooperative specialists could make 45,000 to

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ For example, one kilo of bread cost thirty-four Polish zloty in July 1946, forty zloty in April 1947 and a hundred in May 1947; the price of a kilo butter increased from 342 zloty in July 1946 to 600 zloty in April and May 1947; the price of a kilo meat went up from 204 to 320 zloty; the price of one liter of milk jumped from twenty-seven zloty in 1946 to sixty zloty in 1947; the soap’s price increased from 200 to 600 zloty; and men’s suit from 5,500 to 12,000 zloty within a year. Between 1945 and 1948, an official exchange rate in a bank fluctuated from 100 to 400 zloty to one American dollar. Letter from Henrietta K. Buchman, Executive Assistant, to Elizabeth Reiss from American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service in New York, 9 October 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. See also confidential report prepared by William Bein, 6 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

⁹⁰ Letter from Henrietta K. Buchman, Executive Assistant, to Elizabeth Reiss from American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service in New York, 9 October 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

⁹¹ Lawyers could make more than 200,000 per month. See chapter on property and report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

⁹² Ibid.

50,000 zloty per month.⁹³ At the same time, the salary of teachers in public schools did not exceed 7,000 to 8,000 in September 1948.⁹⁴

In an average household of four (Jewish and non-Jewish alike), with an average salary of 8,000, both spouses had to work to make ends meet. There was hardly a family where one person could maintain a home by working in a factory or an office.⁹⁵ After paying rent and covering bare necessities, there was not much left to clothe a family or defray medical expenses. In April 1947, Bein complained that the average earning of a Polish Jew was not sufficient to buy shoes.

The economy of the Jews still does not permit them the purchase of clothing needed. Practically no Jew can afford the purchase of a good pair of shoes. Parents of children who need three to four pair of shoes a year can under no circumstances afford to buy this. Based upon our experience, we estimate that we will have to clothe 20,000 men [of the total of 45,000], 15,000 women [of 40,000], and 10,000 children [of 15,000], nearly half of the Jewish population.⁹⁶

In 1948, the JOINT tried to convince Polish Jews to contribute money to provide sufficient finances to support the needy but not many could donate.⁹⁷ Many young Jews in their prime had emigrated, affecting the general demographic and financial capacities of the Jewish population as a whole. In this situation, the aid from Jewish foreign and

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Teachers in private institutions could make 18,000 to 19,000 per month. JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

⁹⁵ Confidential report prepared by William Bein, 6 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

⁹⁶ Correspondence between JOINT Warszawa and JOINT Paris, William Bein's report "Supply Requisition Second Half of 1947," 25 April 1947, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives.

⁹⁷ Confidential report prepared by William Bein, 6 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

Polish relief organizations was priceless, especially when the UNRRA terminated its activities in Poland in 1947.⁹⁸

Family, Education, and Language

Reunion with family, whether close or distant, was to play a central role in rebuilding normality after the war. The following letter from an agricultural laborer, Pinia Thur, from Słupsk provides a glimpse into what family meant to survivors.

I thank you [the JOINT] with all my heart for locating my family in Poland and Canada. Since I have been contacted by your office, an immense change took place in my outlook on life and in my feelings. Until now I was completely broken down and resigned. Now everything is changed. The contact with my relatives is a great moral support to me and allows me to hope for a happier future.⁹⁹

For many survivors, the sense of absolute loneliness, aggravated by a difficult living situation and constant reminders of the war, made it very hard to imagine a normal life in Poland. Emigration and the search for a new life in a new place were common responses, especially among the single and the youth. The rediscovery of long-mourned relatives, meeting a new life-partner, or having a baby could make life in Poland imaginable.

Although at the beginning of 1947, there were still disproportionately few Jewish children under the age of sixteen (17,000 out of 100,000 of the Jewish population), these statistics were to change. The baby boom of 1946 and 1947 in Poland did not exclude

⁹⁸ The cited report included information that fifty percent of the national budget in 1948 had been allocated for public welfare (including education). This information was not confirmed elsewhere. Report "Social Welfare in Poland," prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, March 1949, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 16, folder 108, YIVO.

⁹⁹ The Location and Search Service of JOINT Poland helped, according to their unconfirmed data, in uniting about 6,000 families in 1947. Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

Polish Jews. In 1947, the birthrate increased notably with 2,000 children born.¹⁰⁰ In August 1947, Mordecai Ezekiel reported that, “in the urban cooperatives many are marrying and settling down, and the birth rate is already very high.”¹⁰¹ An increase in the number of Jewish kindergartens reflected the slow return to normality.¹⁰² So did the decrease in the number of orphanages. In 1946, the CKŻP maintained thirteen children homes whereas in October 1948 only eight.¹⁰³

In the quest for stability and normality, people rushed to marry. Pat wrote from his trip to Poland in the beginning of 1946,

Poland’s Jews are getting married. Abraham Kravietz, the new Rabbi of Łódź, tells me that he has already performed 372 wedding ceremonies. Everyone wants to get married: middle-aged Jews, eager to build normal homes again and to forget the ghetto ghosts which now [remind] people of their loneliness; repatriates from Russia who did not find their families alive; young people who are tired of their outlaw youth, and who now want what all their ancestors have wanted – a wife, a child, a home; widows and widowers whose first mates were among the Jews’ six million martyrs, and who now want to start from scratch. And finally there are those whose marriage takes them into another world, into other circles, other peoples. Their marriage, they believe, will help them to escape forever from all Jewish sorrows, perhaps even from Poland itself.¹⁰⁴

In the beginning of 1947, there were more Jewish men (45,000) than women (40,000) survivors, which turned Jewish women into “a commodity in demand.” Dichter’s mother told him, “Young Jews marry one another... I’ve already been proposed twice. They had

¹⁰⁰ Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. The death rate was small since there were only 3,300 elderly (between sixty- and ninety-nine years old) people registered.

¹⁰¹ “Observations on Poland and Switzerland,” prepared by Mordecai Ezekiel in the Institute on Overseas Studies at the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York, not for publication, 17 August 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹⁰² The Committee ran about thirty-two kindergartens by September 1948. JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Pat and Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire*.

had crushes on me already in high school. But they are beggars now. They themselves need help.”¹⁰⁵

The shortage of Jewish women was only one of many factors contributing to the rise in intermarriages. Another, more important, factor was the abundance of opportunities to meet non-Jews at school and work. When accompanied by lack of personal hesitation – perhaps loss of faith, perhaps the refusal to consider national or cultural attachment in the choice of a spouse – and the absence of family and communal pressure, romantic involvements with non-Jews ceased to be a dangerous exception but an accepted norm. Pat described a secular marriage ceremony between the daughter of Alter Kacyzne, Shulamith Kacyzne, and the Italian ambassador, Eugenio Reale, in a Warszawa courtroom in February 1946,

“Your faith?” asked the Catholic judge turning to the Jewish poet’s daughter.
“No faith,” she answered quietly.
“Your faith?” the judge asked the Ambassador, a member of the Communist “Polit-Bureau” of Italy.
“Roman Catholic,” said the groom...

In the Kraków’s registrar office, between November 1946 and August 1947, ninety-three mixed couples got married.¹⁰⁶ Assuming that the average was about eighty-five to ninety mixed marriages per half a year, a total of approximately 500 couples intermarried in Kraków within three years. Five hundred of 4,000 Jewish adults was a considerable percentage, although still the majority of Jewish survivors sought to settle down with a Jewish spouse.

¹⁰⁵ Wilhelm Dichter, *Koń Pana Boga* (Kraków: Znak, 1996), 81.

¹⁰⁶ Report on the activity of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Kraków province between November 1, 1946 and August 15, 1947, August 1947, Collection of the KWŻ, KWŻ-2, APKr.

At the root of the desire for intermarriages lay the urge toward assimilation; the belief that to build a normal life one needed to leave one's community of origin and integrate fully into the majority. Similar motivations lay partly behind the changing of names. Applications for a change of name, collected in the Institute of National Memory in Kraków (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej), illuminate the main motivations of the claimants.¹⁰⁷ Whether the driving force was the need for acceptance, fear of rejection, or the simple need to get and keep a job otherwise in jeopardy, those who assumed "Polish-sounding" names did so in the hope of building a normal life in a homogenous country where a "Jewish-sounding" name stood out and could cause trouble. Menasche Keller wrote the following in his application to assume the name Mieczysław Dąbrowski:

During the occupation, I was forced to change my first and last name and I assumed [the name] Mieczysław Dąbrowski in order to avoid the fate of the Jews persecuted for racial and political reasons by the fascist occupier. Being aware that the environment, infected by Hitlerism poison, still hates a foreign race, and considering that I do not want to have a German-sounding name, I decided to continue living under the name assumed after liberation.¹⁰⁸

Keller wrote it in Vienna, but his reasoning could be well suited for any applicant in Poland. A professor of the University in Łódź, Witold Steinberg, applied to assume the name Rudziński because he did not want to bear a "German-sounding" name, which had been "imposed on his ancestors."¹⁰⁹ Sala and Feibisch Goldhirsch justified their

¹⁰⁷ Applications for permission to change a name, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.1-2, the Institute of National Memory in Kraków, Kraków (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, hereafter cited as IPN).

¹⁰⁸ Menasche Keller's application for permission to change a name, 21 October 1946, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.2, IPN.

¹⁰⁹ Witold Steinberg's application for permission to change a name, May 1945, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.2, IPN.

application to change their names to Zofia and Franciszek Złotoleń by the non-Polish sound of their birth names.¹¹⁰

Besides the willingness to shed any visible mark of Jewishness in apprehension of antisemitism, the simple force of habit, and the need to get papers ready pushed Jewish survivors to assume their war pseudonyms. That was especially true for applicants who filed from abroad. Herman and Feiga Grünwald, for example, had used the assumed names Jan and Maria Nowak consistently since 1943. After the war, when the Grünwalds emigrated to Hungary and had new passports issued, they urgently needed Polish identity cards with assumed names.¹¹¹ Occasionally, it was mere force of habit, without bureaucratic urgency, that pushed people to apply for a name-change. Arnold Rothblum, for example, applied for permission to change his name after he safely landed in Jerusalem. Born in Kraków in 1923, Rothblum used the pseudonym Adam Bernat during the war and had been known as such ever since. Having settled in Israel, he did not want to return to his Jewish name since he had spent most of his adult life as Bernat.¹¹²

Yet, others like Izaak Lieber cited their “moral obligation” to give up a “German sounding” name. At the time of his application, Izaak with wife and child were in Prague on their way to the United States. Lieber wrote,

First, during the German occupation, I was hiding under the name Józef Libera [Lieber attached a fake baptismal certificate that he had used during the war]. Second, my real name Lieber has a German sound and spelling, hence I – a citizen of the Polish state – consider its change my moral obligation [*obowiązek moralny*].¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Sala and Feibisch Goldhirsch’s application for permission to change a name, 23 December 1948, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.1, IPN.

¹¹¹ Herman and Feiga Grünwald’s request for issuance of new id cards and certificates of Polish citizenship to the district office (*starostwo grodzkie*) in Kraków, 12 January 1947, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.1, IPN.

¹¹² Arnold Rothblum’s application for permission to change a name, undated, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.2, IPN.

¹¹³ Izaak Lieber’s application for permission to change a name to the voivode office in Kraków, 24 March 1948, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.1, IPN.

Most commonly, Polish Jews cited a “non-Polish sound” and the use of a “Polish-sounding” name during the war as reason for the application, knowing the regulations concerning the change of names. In accordance with a decree from November 1945, every citizen of Poland could change names if his or her real name was “degrading or ridiculing” human dignity (*hańbiące albo ośmieszające lub nielicujące z godnością człowieka*); if a claimant used a pseudonym in the Army, underground activity, any other fight for liberation, or to avoid German terror (*celem uchronienia się przed aktami gwałtu najeźdźcy niemieckiego lub jego popleczników*) and wished to keep it as his or her formal name; or if a last name had a non-Polish sound or a form of a first name.¹¹⁴

Perhaps those who changed their names and chose non-Jewish spouses “still felt and considered themselves, as the *marans* once did, as Jews.”¹¹⁵ Perhaps, some chose a non-Jewish spouse and non-Jewish name in a calculated attempt at assimilation. Yet, there were those who wanted to build their lives somewhere in-between Jewishness and non-Jewishness. The most telling example were people who bore two names – a “Polish sounding” name for their job and a “Jewish sounding” name for their social life among other Jews.¹¹⁶ Establishing what percent of the people wanted to shed their Jewish identity and to what degree poses difficulties. Only speculations are left as far as shades of acculturation and assimilation are concerned. The most difficult to trace were those

¹¹⁴ Decree no. 310/1945 concerning changing and determining first and last names, 10 November 1945, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws) no. 56/1945, <http://isip.sejm.gov.pl/prawo/index.html> (accessed June 30, 2008).

¹¹⁵ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹¹⁶ Pat claimed that “the number of these double-named Jews is surprisingly large.” Pat and Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire*, 32.

who wanted to radically assimilate since they put extra effort not to leave any evidence of Jewishness in public or private life.¹¹⁷

The general census of all Jews during the distribution of *matzoh* for the Passover of 1947 cast some light on the problem. In the town of Zabrze (Silesia), the Jewish committee estimated that 308 or ninety percent of local Jews showed up for the registration.¹¹⁸ Some of them lived under double names – they had been registered in the committee under their Jewish names but lived their “public lives” under their assumed non-Jewish names. When asked to fill in a section on their assumed names, they all refused to disclose it. Five individuals had never been registered in the Jewish committee under either name but showed up for the distribution anyway. They only agreed to be recorded on a list of *matzoh* receivers but not in the official registers of the committee.¹¹⁹ To sum up, in Zabrze, the overwhelming majority of local Jews lived openly “Jewish lives” under their unchanged names while the absolute minority cut almost all ties with the community of origin. In larger cities, the number of radically assimilated Jews may have been greater, but the proportions were hardly different.

Language offers another clue to Jewish acculturation and assimilation in postwar Poland. After the war, Yiddish, Polish, and Hebrew competed to become the central vehicle of communication for Jews in Poland. Polish eventually prevailed: Hebrew

¹¹⁷ Requests for non-disclosure of the change of name in a periodical were an example of such efforts. In January 1946, Józef Grzybowski – a head of the investigation department in a police station in Kraków – requested forbearance of public notice on his name-change in a local newspaper. Grzybowski cited his job as the grounds for request. Of random twelve applicants for a name-change, filed between May 1945 and September 1948 in the Kraków office, three asked for non-disclosure. Letter from Dr Józef Henryk Grzybowski to the administrative department at the voivode office (Urząd Wojewódzki, UW) in Kraków, 22 January 1946, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.1, IPN. Also see applications for permission to change a name, IPN Kr 0125/243, t.1-2, IPN.

¹¹⁸ Letter from the Jewish committee and the Jewish Religious Congregation in Zabrze to the provincial Jewish committee in Katowice, 5 May 1947, Collection of the CKŻP Secretariat, 303/II/132, AŻIH.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

speakers left for Israel while Yiddish speakers mostly assimilated and turned to Polish in and outside their homes. However, in the first years after the war, linguistic assimilation was not yet predetermined. The emphasis on Yiddish in education and institutional life showed that Jewish leaders believed that the reconstruction of Jewish life in Poland was tied to the Yiddish language. The use of Yiddish in primary Jewish schools, for example, was an informed intellectual and political decision. In the beginning of 1946, the CKŻP summoned representatives of Jewish education to Warszawa in order to discuss Jewish schooling. They decided on establishing a network of schools in which the language of instruction would be Yiddish.¹²⁰

In September 1947, the CKŻP maintained thirty-four primary schools (3,000 pupils) based on the educational program of the government, with Yiddish as the language of instruction and Polish taught from the first grade and Hebrew from the third.¹²¹ The CKŻP also organized Yiddish afternoon courses.¹²² The Council of Jewish Religious Congregations maintained thirty-six *Yesodei Torah* schools (1,100 pupils) which taught in Yiddish and focused on religious subjects.¹²³ Besides Yiddish schools, there was a system of Hebrew schools. Zionists supervised eleven *Tarbut* schools (1,000 pupils) which had Hebrew as the language of instruction and were designed to prepare

¹²⁰ Issue of *Poland of Today*, vol.3, no.6, published by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

¹²¹ In 1948, facing the inclusion of Jewish schools in the public system, the CKŻP secured a promise from the government to keep Yiddish classes starting from the third grade and Hebrew starting from the fourth grade. Special seminars for teachers of Yiddish would also be established after nationalization. "Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland," prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. See annual JOINT report in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, and JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland," prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. See annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

students for emigration to Palestine. They also organized courses in Hebrew and training camps.

Overall, at an elementary level, Jewish children had the most opportunity to learn and speak either Yiddish or Hebrew. In 1946 and 1947, the majority of Jewish children lived in separate Jewish orphanages, studied at Jewish elementary schools, and played in Jewish “recreational centers,” having limited contact with non-Jewish children.¹²⁴ Yet, despite these opportunities, the overwhelming majority of Jewish children knew Polish exclusively or best, having survived in non-Jewish homes and monasteries. Six- or seven-year-olds knew only Polish. Older children could not understand Yiddish either. When Pat visited one of the Jewish schools in Kraków and wanted to speak Yiddish to the children, the teacher, who did not know Yiddish herself, told him that “only a few of the children understood Yiddish. The others knew Polish only.”¹²⁵ The lack of Yiddish teachers was another problem. In the nine largest Yiddish schools in Poland (with more than one hundred students), instruction was in Yiddish in seven and in Polish in two.¹²⁶ One of the Kraków Jewish orphanages had no Yiddish instructor because the institution could not find one.¹²⁷ Since seminars organized for Yiddish teachers did not attract enough candidates, the CKŻP considered importing them from abroad.¹²⁸

In 1947, about 1,500 Jewish children attended public schools with Polish as the language of instruction. Sending a child to a public or Jewish school was the individual (and political) choice of parent(s) or a parenting institution; a decision with important

¹²⁴ There were approximately fifty-four recreational centers for Jewish kids. “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. See annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹²⁵ Pat and Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire*, 236-8.

¹²⁶ Minutes from a meeting of the presidium of the CKŻP, 1947, 303/I/7, AŻIH.

¹²⁷ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

consequences for the child. The chairman of the Wałbrzych Jewish committee, Fischbein, said,

In the mixed schools in the beginning there were difficulties between Jewish and Polish children, but this was no longer so [1947]. The initial difficulties were not surprising, since children are often most heedlessly unkind.¹²⁹

According to Pat, by the beginning of 1946, fifty-seven children had transferred from public to Yiddish schools due to an “unwelcoming” atmosphere.¹³⁰ To avoid unpleasant situations, Jewish children tended to hide their background. For many children, especially those who survived with Polish families, that was a matter of habit.¹³¹ However, some believed that mixed schools and more contact between Jewish and non-Jewish children could “eliminate antisemitism.” For example, a principal of a Jewish orphanage in Kraków asked the provincial commissioner for the productivization of Jews to arrange contact with a public orphanage in the city.¹³²

At higher levels of education, contacts between Jewish and non-Jewish students intensified. In the absence of Jewish institutions (there was only one Jewish high school in Wrocław and one music school) about 2,000 Jewish students chose to attend public high schools and universities.¹³³ In 1947, Jews made up only 0.4 percent (100,000 of twenty-three million) of the general population and two percent of the student body (956

¹²⁹ Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹³⁰ Pat and Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire*, 58.

¹³¹ Passing as Poles during the war, Jewish children had to play games like “liquidation of a Jewish ghetto” with non-Jewish children. See testimony of Szlama Jakubowicz, Collection of testimonies, CKŻP 301/2427, AŻIH.

¹³² Government inspection of the office of the provincial commissioner for the productivization of Jews in Kraków, 1-8 December 1946, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr.

¹³³ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, November 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

Jewish students in colleges).¹³⁴ The majority of them used Polish in their daily communication. They may have still spoken Yiddish at home if one or both parents were alive, but “on the street” they switched to Polish. The only place where this was not true was Lower Silesia, where Jews spoke Yiddish openly. As Pat described Dzierżoniów,

Evening comes and everything is as it should be – no nervousness, no terror, no sneaking home for fear of pogrom mongers. I look up one of the streets that cut through the market place and for the first time I set foot in postwar Poland I see a large sign saying in Yiddish letters: Community Center. It is simply impossible to imagine such a sign in any other Polish city – Warszawa, Łódź, Białystok, or Kraków – all great Jewish centers once. “This is going to be a Jewish city,” says the Yiddish actor Simcha Nathan...¹³⁵

Across Poland, the choice of language at home and on the street was a matter of prewar background, age, political outlook, and economic standing. Remaining in Poland and integrating into the Polish economy usually meant turning from Yiddish to Polish, at least in one’s work or on the street. In the new postwar conditions, knowledge of the Polish language became a necessity. A survey of the WJC of September 1947 stated that, “in today’s Poland, the Polish language is spoken by the overwhelming majority of the population. Among the Jews, the majority is now composed of Polish speaking elements.”¹³⁶ The Jewish community, by and large, considered ignorance of the Polish language as a disadvantage at best, and an unacceptable error, at worst. Describing a *Tarbut* school in Szczecin, the governmental commissioner wrote, “One of the teachers did not know any Polish at all which was pointed out as inadmissible (*co wyknięto jako*

¹³⁴ “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. Also see report “Jews in Reborn Poland,” 1947, Collection of the American Federation for Polish Jews, RG 1015, box 4, folder 27-8, YIVO.

¹³⁵ Pat and Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire*, 143.

¹³⁶ “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

niedopuszczalne).”¹³⁷ In Jelenia Góra, in a questionnaire of the Jewish Committee’s youth department, “lack of qualifications and ignorance of the Polish language” were cited as major difficulties and drawbacks of youth employment in the town.¹³⁸

The appropriation of the Polish language should not be construed as a mark of radical assimilation. In the late 1940s, Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska conducted a survey on national self-identification among Polish Jews. Twenty-two percent claimed to be Polish (among those, two percent thought of themselves as Polish and Jewish at the same time) whereas seventy-four percent considered themselves to be “members of the Jewish nation.”¹³⁹ The majority of Polish Jews in 1946 and 1947 were still culturally, socially, and politically Jewish while speaking Polish. By culturally, socially and politically Jewish, I mean respect for Jewish tradition without religious adherence; subscription to the idea of common origin and common experience (especially World War II); close social interactions – friendships and marriages – mainly with other Jews; and favoring political solutions which met the interests of Jews as a cultural and national community. Only beginning in 1948 and 1949 did radical assimilation start making inroads among Polish Jews. After liberation, the ideal was acculturation without assimilation. As the deputy-chairman of the Lower Silesian provincial Jewish committee, Plockier, noted, “The [Jewish] leaders are “trying to preserve *Jewish national culture* while developing a *thoroughly Polish spirit*. As their cultural life develops they are anxious to *retain their*

¹³⁷ Report for December 1946 from the provincial commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population in Szczecin to the governmental commissioner in Warszawa, 23 January 1947, Collection of the AAN, RG 15.003 M, USHMM

¹³⁸ The Jewish youth department in Jelenia Góra had 117 members. Questionnaire of the youth department at the Jewish committee in Jelenia Góra, 1946, 303/XI/4, AŻIH.

¹³⁹ Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1986).

Jewish character and not to be assimilated (my emphasis).”¹⁴⁰ Developing Yiddish schools and organizing Jewish cultural life, while using the Polish language during their conferences and meetings, were the ways in which the Jewish leadership lived this ideal.

Community

If cultural life reflected a level of communal return to normality, a large segment of Polish Jews had achieved that by the end 1947. At the time, about thirteen Jewish periodicals, with a circulation of 60,000, were published in Poland (in Polish and Yiddish).¹⁴¹ Three Jewish theaters (the biggest ones in Wrocław and Łódź) performed in Yiddish and Polish.¹⁴² Across the country, Jewish survivors organized twelve choral groups, including one in Otwock by the famous Jewish composer Leo Weiner, orchestras, art studios, libraries, sport clubs (especially soccer), twenty-six dramatic groups, and a Jewish children ballet (Wrocław). In 1947 alone, four cultural conferences and thirty-six concerts were organized, and 156 radio programs (mainly in Yiddish) were broadcast. The Society for Fostering Jewish Art was established in 1946. The Society organized exhibitions of the art of Maurycy Gottlieb, Artur Markowicz, Jonas Stern, and others. In November 1947, the Jewish Cultural Association was founded.¹⁴³ The Film Section of the Cultural Division of the CKŻP made three short documentaries and one feature length

¹⁴⁰ Report on a Two-Day Tour of Jewish Communities in Lower Silesia, undated (1947), Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹⁴¹ *Dos Naye Leben* (New Life), the main Jewish newspaper in postwar Poland, was published in Yiddish.

¹⁴² The shift from the prewar government to the postwar “liberation” of all spheres of life was one of favorite ideological themes of the new authorities. The famous Yiddish actress Ida Kamińska returned to Poland and toured Jewish communities across Poland. At the season opening, with a play directed by Kamińska in the theater in Łódź, in November 1948, the government’s representatives spoke, “For the first time in the annals of our culture in Poland a Jewish actor can present his art openly to the Polish public, since with the liberation of Poland, there disappeared the walls of the cultural ghetto which separated the Jewish public from the Polish.” Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, December 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

¹⁴³ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, January 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

movie entitled *We Who Survived* – a portrayal of Jewish postwar economic and cultural recovery in Poland.¹⁴⁴ The Central Jewish Historical Commission, centered in Warszawa with branches in each major city of Poland, published books and bulletins, and organized lectures.

Cultural activities drew friends, associates, and coworkers together, making a community possible. So did political activism. Natalia Aleksiu, in her study of the Zionist movement in postwar Poland, showed that the Zionist party and kibbutzim replaced lost families by meeting basic material and emotional needs of Jewish survivors.¹⁴⁵ The Zionist movement created a community of friends, which offered a home and a work place. Although the movement's main objective was emigration to Palestine (more than 100,000 emigrated from Poland to Palestine between 1945 and 1948), it also created opportunities for normal lives “here,” in Poland. No other political movement at the time, including Bundism, accomplished that.

The system of cooperatives, although smaller in scope, was almost as effective as the Zionist movement in engendering a sense of community. Grynberg showed that Jewish cooperatives were the makers of Jewish communal life after the war – “a business card” (*wizytówka*) of the Jewish postwar community.¹⁴⁶ Cooperatives organized cultural and sport clubs, amateur theaters, libraries, reading rooms, and professional training courses, keeping their members in touch with Jewish cultural and social life. Similar to the Zionist movement, cooperatives replaced the lost families and facilitated making new

¹⁴⁴ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, April 1948, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 7, folder 107, YIVO.

¹⁴⁵ Natalia Aleksiu, *Dokąd Dalej? Ruch Syjonistyczny w Polsce 1944-1950* (Warszawa: Trio, 2002).

¹⁴⁶ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 68.

friendships and relationships. They became quasi-homes. Pat quoted a cooperative member in Lower Silesia,

“I could earn the little I need working by myself,” says a Jewish tailor. “I might even make more that way. But I joined the co-op because I am lonely. My thoughts keep going back to where I came from – to the furnaces [concentration camps]. When we’re all working together we can forget and be a little happier.”¹⁴⁷

As Pat concluded, “with twenty workers and ten sewing machines in one room, life becomes merrier...”¹⁴⁸ Moreover, cooperative workers usually lived in workers’ hostels, getting an additional sense of community and togetherness.

Overall, the cooperatives took over many functions of Jewish committees, financing the latter. The “cooperative community” was by no means negligible in size either. By the end of 1947, it had 5,000 employees.¹⁴⁹ With families, the members of cooperatives made up a society of about 15,000, or fifteen percent of the entire Jewish population in Poland. It should be noted that, like the Zionist movement, the Jewish cooperatives had a strong ideological edge. The very idea of cooperative employment was embedded in socialist thinking. The Jewish communist party (the Fraction PPR) was the most involved in the project of the productivization and the creation of cooperatives, and prewar communist activists were among the co-op initiators.¹⁵⁰ In cooperatives, there were also frequent talks and lectures on “socio-political topics” and other activities in tune with the prevailing rhetoric at the time.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Pat and Steinberg, *Ashes and Fire*, 37.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 86.

¹⁵⁰ August Grabski, *Działalność Komunistów Wśród Żydów w Polsce 1944-1949* (Warszawa: Trio, 2004).

¹⁵¹ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 137.

The community which seemed to have lost the most appeal among Jews in Poland was the community of religion. The WJC survey from September 1947 stated that “the majority of Polish Jews were religiously minded.”¹⁵² Verification of this claim, however, is difficult without statistics and without definition of what “religiously minded” meant. In January 1948, Chief Chaplain of the Polish Army and Chairman of the Organizing Committee of Jewish Congregations David Kahane gave an interview to the Jewish Press Agency. When asked about the attitude of Polish Jews to religion, Kahane answered,

We notice a marked revival of religious feelings. Proof thereof is the mass attendance at religious services. Requests for circumcision of infants and enrollment for pre-Bar-Mitzvah instruction (confirmation) are growing, and there is a steadily increasing demand for kosher meats.¹⁵³

However, when Zachariah Shuster from the JOINT European office attended Kahane’s Friday service in the sole remaining synagogue in Warszawa, in April 1948, he found “exactly a ‘*minion*’ of Jews huddled around the Rabbi...”¹⁵⁴ Shuster was also told that this synagogue filled up on major religious holidays only. Overall, about sixty percent of the Jews would celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kipur.¹⁵⁵ The general revival that Kahane referred to appeared illusive or relative at best. The common impression was that “One barely sees a bearded Jew in traditional garb.”¹⁵⁶

The secularization of Polish Jews had less to do with communist ideological inroads and more with a loss of faith among survivors as well as mass emigration of those

¹⁵² “Survey on Community Interrelations: Poland,” prepared by S.D. Wolkowicz for the WJC, September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives. The WJC survey estimated that 15,000 [sic!] Jews were “converted or crypto-Jews. These people may be considered as lost for Judaism.”

¹⁵³ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, January 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹⁵⁵ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

who still believed. The demographics of survivors and repatriates from Russia did not favor religious devotion either. Mainly young and middle aged, these people were less prone to attend religious services on a regular basis. Finally, the necessity to integrate into Poland's economic and cultural framework, including work shifts on Saturdays, also contributed to the gradual emptying of synagogues.

In mid 1947, there were thirty-eight synagogues per 100,000 Jews, thirty kosher kitchens (down from fifty-seven in September 1946), and sixteen *mikvat*.¹⁵⁷ In Białystok, with 400 Jews, a *schochet* conducted all religious ceremonies.¹⁵⁸ In 1947, the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland distributed *tefilin*, prayer shawls, and gifts to 350 boys (before *bar mitzvah*).¹⁵⁹ In the same year, the JOINT supplied the CKŻP and the Council of Jewish Religious Communities with 5,000 prayer shawls for holiday services. Considering the total population of 100,000 people, religious needs seemed to have been minimal. By 1948, there were sixteen to eighteen rabbis left in Poland due to mass emigration.¹⁶⁰ Most importantly, overall, the orthodox – a minority among survivors – were the most willing to leave Poland.¹⁶¹ As a result, as Ezekiel reported, there were “isolated cooperative farms [for example, where] Jewish farmers complained about isolation” from religious and cultural activities.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹⁵⁹ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, April 1948, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 7, folder 105, YIVO.

¹⁶⁰ By the end of 1947, there were only eighteen rabbinical offices in Poland. Annual report of the JOINT in Poland, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

¹⁶¹ JOINT report, Poland: June-September 1948, September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

¹⁶² “Observations on Poland and Switzerland,” prepared by Mordecai Ezekiel in the Institute on Overseas Studies at the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York, not for publication, 17 August 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

On a brighter note for the religious community, in larger cities where buildings of worship were preserved and a large Jewish population survived religious activities were in full swing.¹⁶³ In Kraków, Łódź, Wrocławek, Dzierżoniów, and Wałbrzych brand new *matzoh* bakeries began operating in 1947 and 1948.¹⁶⁴ In the fall of 1948, a new slaughter house was built and opened in Kraków.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, the prewar law forbidding religious meat slaughter in places where Jews constituted less than three percent was not abolished after the war. Instead, it was not implemented and kosher meat was available everywhere where Jews lived. In the Recovered Territories, the law had never been in force and Jews were getting a monthly allocation of kosher meat that surpassed their needs. Hence, the Poles were buying it “because they didn’t have to stand in queue.”¹⁶⁶

Similar to Slovakia, for a couple of postwar years, there was detectable tension between the CKŻP and the Council of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland. The two institutions functioned separately, often arguing about, for example, the distribution of foreign aid. The CKŻP and the Council finally completed the institutional unification under the conditions that the CKŻP’s offices would close on Saturdays and that *kashruth* would be observed in public canteens, among others. The CKŻP accepted the conditions except the observance of Sabbath.¹⁶⁷

Finally, it should be noted that a return to normality would have been impossible without individual and collective mourning – without narrating the trauma.

¹⁶³ Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na Tle Polityki Wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945-1968*, *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 2171 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999).

¹⁶⁴ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, April 1948, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 7, folder 105, YIVO.

¹⁶⁵ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 729, JOINT Archives.

¹⁶⁶ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

Memorialization of wartime suffering was a way to help individuals to come to terms with their experiences.¹⁶⁸ The major commemorative events included the opening of the Museum of Jewish Martyrdom in Majdanek and the fifth anniversary of the Warszawa ghetto uprising in 1948.¹⁶⁹ At the center of the commemoration was the unveiling of a granite monument (the work of Nathan Rapaport) in the heart of the former Warszawa ghetto. Besides thousands of Polish Jews, fifteen to twenty percent of the 20,000 attendees at the ceremony were non-Jews.¹⁷⁰ That could, but did not necessarily indicate, public interest or sympathy. Possibly, many attended the commemoration because their institution delegated them, because they were curious, or because they genuinely considered it a proper thing to do. The Polish Research and Information Service at the JOINT in New York estimated that in Upper Silesia, for example, twenty-five percent of the money donated for the monument came from non-Jews.¹⁷¹

Return to Normality in Slovakia

In general, with exception of Polish Lower Silesia, Slovak Jews enjoyed a relatively more peaceful environment in their return to normality (finding a job, starting a family, and belonging to a community) than Polish Jews. Slovak Jews lived in a country spared from civil war, where the level of violence never reached the Polish heights.

¹⁶⁸ Sabine Behrenbeck, "Between Pain and Silence: Remembering the Victims of Violence in Germany after 1949," in *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History during the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁹ Report "Jewish Life in Poland," prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, April 1948, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 7, folder 105, YIVO.

¹⁷⁰ JOINT report from Europe, 15 June 1948, Collection 45/54, File 751, JOINT Archives. Also see letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

¹⁷¹ Report "Jewish Life in Poland," prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, January 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives. In Kraków, for example, Polish members of Jewish cooperatives were reported to donate some money for the event. See annual report on the productivization of Jews in Kraków province in 1947, December 1947, Collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr.

Having said that, it should be noted that the anti-Jewish riots in Slovakia lasted much longer than in Poland. In Poland, anti-Jewish violence reached its apogee and ended in 1946, whereas in Slovakia it never reached a peak but never ceased either. In August 1948, when Poland had been clear of pogroms for almost two years, Slovak Jews still suffered violence in the capital city of Bratislava.

In Slovakia, like in geographically proximate Poland, the economic situation improved by the second half of 1946 in comparison to 1945. The government still approved of small and medium private enterprise. Production and export increased and a scarcity of workers opened prospects for employment.¹⁷² The severe winter of 1946/47 changed this pattern, slowing down agriculture. Eastern Slovakia, like Poland, suffered floods in the spring of 1947. By the summer of 1947, food shortages and rising prices were a daily reality. Although food was more easily obtained and prices increased more steadily in Slovakia than in the Czech lands, some products were not easily available. For example, in the fall of 1947, the shortage of flour and bread led to small scale demonstrations in Nitra.¹⁷³ First male workers and, a day after, their wives demonstrated in front of the district national committee's office in Nitra, demanding more governmental food supplies.¹⁷⁴

In 1948, bad harvests caused further food shortages. The buying power of the currency diminished and the unofficial rate of the Czechoslovak crown went from 150 to 300 to an American dollar by March 1948.¹⁷⁵ After the coup d'état of February 1948, the

¹⁷² Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between July and November 1946, prepared by Sidney Bortheim, 26 February 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

¹⁷³ Letter from the district national committee in Nitra to the commissioner of internal affairs in Bratislava concerning demonstrations in Nitra, 25 October 1947, ONV Nitra, Presidium 1947, box 12, SAN.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Strictly confidential report on the European affairs prepared by the JOINT reconstruction department in Paris for JOINT New York, 3 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

Slovak economy moved gradually toward adjustment to the economic policy of the rest of Czechoslovakia. In April 1948, all enterprises employing more than fifty people were nationalized.¹⁷⁶ Certain branches of industry – for example, food production – would be nationalized regardless of number of employees. Only about eight percent of the total volume of industry and trade remained private.¹⁷⁷ The social security system, taxation, and land distribution would undergo reforms. It was still unclear, however, how the new political and economic situation would affect Slovak Jews.

In the first three years after the war, the Jewish population in Slovakia fluctuated between 28,000 and 33,000. In June 1947, Zachariah Shuster from the American Jewish Committee (AJC) estimated that there were 33,000 Jews in Slovakia (as opposed to 23,000 in the Czech lands).¹⁷⁸ In March 1948, the number of Slovak Jews was estimated at 30,000.¹⁷⁹ The largest Jewish community lived in Bratislava. In April 1946, of 7,000 Jews in Bratislava, only 1,000 lived in the city before the war.¹⁸⁰ In 1948, the number of Bratislava's Jews dropped to 5,000.¹⁸¹ The second largest Jewish community was in Košice (4,000). These two cities were, by far, the biggest Jewish centers in Slovakia. The third largest Jewish population was in Dunajská Streda with 771 Jewish residents, followed by Nitra (703), Michalovce (606), and Nové Zámky, Prešov, and Žilina with the

¹⁷⁶ Although initially Jewish cooperatives were supposed to be exempted from the process, they all were soon nationalized. The Galanta's Jewish cooperative was the first one to be placed under national management. Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

¹⁷⁷ Report on Czechoslovakia, undated (after April 28, 1948), Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

¹⁷⁸ Memorandum from Zachariah Shuster to the Foreign Affairs Department at the AJC, 20 June 1947, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

¹⁷⁹ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

¹⁸⁰ Prewar Jewish population of Bratislava was 15,000. Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

¹⁸¹ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

Jewish population of about 500 each.¹⁸² The remainder of more than a hundred Jewish communities in Slovakia varied in population from twenty to 300.

Slovak Jews, by and large, were younger than Czech Jews. Leon Shapiro, whose reports from Eastern Europe were regularly published in the *American Jewish Year-Book*, wrote that “forty-three percent of the local Jews in the Czech lands are over fifty years of age, and about twenty-five percent belong to the same age group in Slovakia.”¹⁸³ In terms of age, Polish and Slovak Jews were more alike than Slovak and Czech Jews. In Poland, in 1947, adults in their twenties and thirties constituted 27.7 percent of the Jewish population. Five- to nine-year-old children constituted 5.3 percent and people over sixty made up only 1.8 percent of the Jewish population in Poland.¹⁸⁴ Slovak Jews had a similar demographic profile. As in Poland, Jewish survivors in Slovakia were, by and large, sickly despite their youth. A third of Jews suffered from tuberculosis and other war-related illnesses.¹⁸⁵

Employment

In the middle of 1947, the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, wrote, “Jews are participating to a large extent in the economic life of the country.”¹⁸⁶

And further, “Rehabilitation goes on apace in Slovakia.”¹⁸⁷ In the end of 1945, the JOINT

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Report on “JOINT Reconstruction Activity in Czechoslovakia,” prepared by Leon Shapiro, undated, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

¹⁸⁴ Grynberg, *Żydowska Spółdzielczość Pracy w Polsce w Latach 1945-1949*, 24.

¹⁸⁵ Confidential report on Czechoslovakia in May and June 1946, prepared by the JOINT Paris office, 30 June 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

¹⁸⁶ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson’s report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

estimated that every third Slovak Jew still needed and received cash relief.¹⁸⁸ In April 1947, the JOINT assisted 4,700 Jews in Slovakia, including children, youth, the sick, the elderly, single mothers, and the unemployed.¹⁸⁹ Among the assisted, there were more than 1,000 people who were healthy enough to work but could not find a job.¹⁹⁰ Among them, 450 lived in groups of two to three in small villages, in an entirely non-Jewish environment. Between July and October 1947 alone, 1,600 to 3,000 people still received monthly allowances from the JOINT.¹⁹¹ All sources agreed that Jews in eastern Slovakia were in the direst economic situation.

This data shows that two-thirds of Slovak Jews found employment as early as 1945. Since then, rates of self-support only increased. Fragmentary sources suggest that Slovak Jews returned to prewar patterns of employment to a greater extent than Polish Jews. According to JOINT reports, “a considerable number of Jews” successfully reestablished themselves in the textile trade after the war.¹⁹² They succeeded thanks to relatively less stringent controls in the Slovak economy, independence from the Czech authorities, and the absence of an over-all rationing system in Slovakia.¹⁹³ In contrast to postwar Poland, Jewish tradesmen in Slovakia were the powerhouses of the local Jewish

¹⁸⁸ The JOINT was not the only source of relief, but since they covered the overwhelming majority of needs, their data is the most comprehensive. Report on a visit to Czechoslovakia between September 18 and November 29, 1945, prepared by Harry Viteles, 20 December 1945, Collection 45/54, File 202, JOINT Archives.

¹⁸⁹ Attachment to the letter of Israel G. Jacobson to the JOINT Paris office, concerning Czechoslovak Jews in April 1947, 18 April 1947, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between July and October 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. See quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. In March 1948, 2,000 Slovak Jews received JOINT relief. See report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

¹⁹² Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

¹⁹³ Report entitled “Reconstruction,” undated (probably December 1947), Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

economy. By the end of 1947, they held the vast majority of shares in the Jewish credit cooperative.¹⁹⁴

Private business owners panicked when the nationalization loomed large. In January 1947, the government reduced the allotment of goods to the retail textile trade, forcing many Jewish entrepreneurs to shut down their businesses.¹⁹⁵ In general, nationalized industry received preference in allocations, leaving “private initiative” in a problematic position. Starting a new business – re-qualification – was equally difficult since the authorities were unwilling to grant new trade licenses to individuals in accordance with the policy of restricting private enterprises. Cooperatives, being in line with the official economic ideology, had better chances of securing a license.¹⁹⁶

Overall, Slovak Jews seemed less willing to join the socialist economy than Polish Jews. In the end of 1945, a JOINT correspondent wrote,

The social, national, and economic revolution, so far bloodless... will increase the difficulties of economic re-adjustment of the Jews who have survived. The Jews may have to think less of the restitution of their property, the panacea for their recovery, and think more of the complete restitution of all local rights for all Jews. ... If they wish to remain in Czechoslovakia, [they] will have to reconsider their approach and attitude.¹⁹⁷

Jews in Slovakia were not in any peculiar way “naturally” anti-cooperative or anti-socialist. They merely had to work with the available resources. Between 1945 and 1947, trade and light textile industry had optimum conditions for growth and profit in Slovakia.

¹⁹⁴ “The wealth of Slovak Jewry and their capacity to contribute towards Jewish reconstructive activities and other Jewish purposes was primarily dependent on the Jewish merchants and their opportunities for profit.” Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. The JOINT also helped Jewish cooperatives in obtaining necessary licenses.

¹⁹⁷ Report on visit to Czechoslovakia between September 18 and November 29, 1945, prepared by Harry Viteles, 20 December 1945, Collection 45/54, File 202, JOINT Archives.

Heavy industry was mainly concentrated in the Czech lands. At the same time, in contrast to Poland, neither the Jewish community leaders nor the Slovak government advocated “the productivization” of Slovak Jews. For example, the government did not facilitate the supply of raw materials to Jewish cooperatives in contrast to the Polish government, which did so regularly.

At first, there were even concerns that the government would not allow the establishment of Jewish cooperatives in Czechoslovakia.

It is necessary to proceed cautiously with the organization of workers’ production cooperatives, which is the most difficult and least successful type of cooperative action. The law also prohibits strictly sectarian-cooperatives. One of the difficulties which the few Workers’ Productive Societies organized and being organized in Czechoslovakia for joiners, tailors, spinners, and weavers, is that the question of admission of non-Jewish members will arise with probable unsatisfactory results in the long run – that is accepting non-Jews which is bound to cause internal dissension in Slovakia, or not accepting a sufficient number of non-Jewish members and therefore being ordered by the Government to liquidate.¹⁹⁸

Neither was it certain that the government would permit the foundation of the loan bank intended for Jewish rehabilitation. For the most part, however, these fears turned out to be ungrounded. The ban on sectarian cooperatives, if legislated, was never implemented.

Four exclusively Jewish producer cooperatives were established in Slovakia starting in 1946 – two in Bratislava (with branches across Slovakia), one in Rimavská Sobota (south-central Slovakia), and one in Galanta (southeastern Slovakia). The first one established was a weaving cooperative in Rimavská Sobota. The town had a recent tradition of Jewish weaving. During the war, the Hungarian authorities granted a few Jews permission to weave cloth, which they did until deportation. After the war, Arthur

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Enyedi – one of 150 Jewish returnees in the town – decided to organize a weavers’ group which, he hoped, would provide economic means for Jewish survivors.¹⁹⁹ In a broken-down warehouse where prewar Jewish property had been dumped, Enyedi found several working looms and spinning machines. Having received a loan from the JOINT and permission to operate from the commissioner of industry in Bratislava, Enyedi started the weaving cooperative in February 1946. Members-employees had the machines in their homes and visited the central office to take raw material and deliver the final product. Of thirty-five members, thirty-one were women, mainly widows. In the first four months of 1947, the cooperative had to temporarily close due to lack of raw materials. By April 1949, the new management “made known its intention of changing the purely Jewish character of this institution.”²⁰⁰

Following the example of Rimavská Sobota, young women and widows established another weaving cooperative, *Rukotex*, in Bratislava in March 1947.²⁰¹ They all first attended the eight-to-ten week long JOINT courses, taught by two women from the Rimavská Sobota’s cooperative. In the Bratislava’s course, of thirty-three participating women, eighteen were widows.²⁰² At the time of its establishment, *Rukotex* had a hundred members – almost all women – employed in four branches in Bratislava, Košice, Michalovce, and Žilina. In Bratislava, there was one more Jewish cooperative of

¹⁹⁹ “Weaving a New Life,” a story of Rimavská Sobota prepared for release by JOINT Publicity Director Raphael Levy, 18 October 1946, Collection 45/54, File 219, JOINT Archives.

²⁰⁰ Memo on “Reconstruction Activities in Czechoslovakia,” 12 April 1949, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

²⁰¹ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁰² Letter from Aaron Berkowitz to Noel Aronovici (JOINT) concerning weaving courses in Bratislava, 8 December 1946, Collection 45/54, File 219, JOINT Archives.

joiners and auto mechanics (*Všeodborové Družstvo*).²⁰³ This cooperative of fifty members secured work for months ahead. In 1948, many of its Jewish experts emigrated and were replaced by non-Jewish skilled artisans.

Finally, a carpenters' cooperative in Galanta, established with JOINT funds, employed more than 120 workers and became the second largest furniture export business in Slovakia.²⁰⁴ While twenty shareholders were Jewish, the majority of the workers were not. Jacobson wrote that this cooperative was not "able to recruit Jewish carpenters as few survived the concentration camps."²⁰⁵ By the end of 1947, it lost its "predominantly Jewish character."²⁰⁶ In 1948, it was nationalized, causing concerns that other cooperatives might follow. Indeed, all Jewish cooperatives were nationalized in 1949.²⁰⁷

In contrast to Poland, the ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training) entered Slovakia late (1947) and was active for a few months only, until a change of regime hampered its activity in 1948. In the absence of the ORT, the JOINT and the Zionist youth movement (the *Hachsharah*) ran training courses for young Slovak Jews. In 1947, almost 200 young people worked as apprentices in *Hachsharah* groups and

²⁰³ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁰⁴ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives. The report from the first quarter of 1947 cited 250 workers employed in the Galanta's cooperative. See quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁰⁵ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁰⁶ Report entitled "Reconstruction," undated (probably December 1947), Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

²⁰⁷ By July 1949, three weaving cooperatives were nationalized with the remainder to be nationalized in the near future. See confidential report on Czechoslovakia prepared by Hirsch Silberberg, 29 July 1949, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

another 300 underwent apprenticeship-training while receiving financial aid.²⁰⁸ By November 1946, more than 250 Jewish women in Slovakia requested participation in skill-training courses, sewing, weaving, and others.²⁰⁹ In February 1947, a total of forty women, mainly widows, attended shirt-making courses in Dunajská Streda and another twenty girls attended a WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) sewing course in Košice.²¹⁰ The *Hachsharah* also organized agricultural courses, for example, in Vereckne in western Slovakia.²¹¹ These groups gradually decreased due to emigration to Palestine.

Graduates of the training courses were eager to join cooperatives or create their own workplaces. For that they needed loans. In September 1946, the Jewish credit cooperative (*Pomocna Pokladnica*), with about 700 shareholders (merchants, artisans, and farmers), started in Bratislava and Košice.²¹² The *Pokladnica* was designed to provide loans to "Czechoslovak citizens of Jewish faith" both as individuals and as registered members of cooperatives in Slovakia. It could also loan non-Jewish citizens in "exceptional and singular cases."²¹³ By November 1946, the *Pokladnica* had benefited

²⁰⁸ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson's report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁰⁹ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²¹⁰ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson's report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²¹¹ Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between April and June 1948, prepared by the JOINT Budget and Research Department, 29 September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²¹² Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²¹³ Decree of the Slovak commissioner of finance regarding the resumption of the activity of the Jewish Credit Cooperative *Pomocna Pokladnica*, Bratislava, 22 August 1946, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

about 1,500 people, mainly private Jewish entrepreneurs.²¹⁴ During 1948, when the government restricted the issuance of trade licenses, the *Pokladnica* had less and less applications. By April 1949, it still existed but had ceased most of its activities.²¹⁵

To sum up, in Slovakia, there was a total of five Jewish cooperatives per 30,000 Jews – four producer-cooperatives and one credit cooperative.²¹⁶ In comparison to 200 Jewish cooperatives per 100,000 Jews in Poland, the Slovak Jewish cooperative system seemed negligible. A ratio of 6,000 people to a cooperative in Slovakia versus 500 people to a cooperative in Poland left no doubt that the Jewish cooperative system in Slovakia did not measure up to the Polish counterpart. This discrepancy had at least two sources. First, the Jewish organizations, supported by the Polish government, put a great effort to push forward the idea of productivization of Polish Jews as a remedy for antisemitism – a panacea for all the ills of Polish-Jewish relations. In contrast to the Czechoslovak authorities, the Polish government not only allowed but even encouraged the creation of sectarian, purely Jewish cooperatives. It also created the office of commissioner for the productivization of the Jewish population, solely for the purpose of integrating Jews into the Polish economy. Second, the unique nature of Lower Silesia, a region without an equivalent in Slovakia, made the perfect milieu for Jewish cooperative engagement in Poland. Silesia buzzed with the excitement of new settlement, “pioneering,” and the

²¹⁴ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²¹⁵ Memo on “Reconstruction Activities in Czechoslovakia,” 12 April 1949, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

²¹⁶ In April 1947, in Czechoslovakia, there was a total of seven Jewish producer-cooperatives with a membership of 200 and two credit cooperatives with a membership of 1,000. Attachment to the letter of Israel G. Jacobson to JOINT Paris office, concerning Czechoslovak Jews in April 1947, 18 April 1947, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

novelty of everything, including new forms of economic endeavor.²¹⁷ It was also a highly industrialized region with all branches of industrial production. Slovakia, by and large, lagged behind the Czech lands and western Poland in industrialization. Conditions changed in 1948, when the authorities took steps toward heavier industrialization of the region. By that time, however, it was too late for Jewish cooperatives to benefit since nationalization had erased their ethnic character.

Although, by the end of 1947, the majority of Slovak Jews were self-supporting, individuals and institutions still required financial aid. In contrast to Poland, the Bratislava government did not participate in Jewish relief. Thus, American Jewish relief organizations took over organizing aid for Slovak Jews. The JOINT was the most active aid organization in Slovakia. Until the mid 1947, it fully sponsored an old people's home and a Jewish hospital in Bratislava, orphanages in Bratislava and Nové Mesto, TB sanatoria, as well as a convalescent home for the rehabilitation of over sixty children in the Tatra mountains (*Villa Vlasta*). In 1948, the need for funding decreased. As a result of heightened emigration, some of the sponsored institutions were liquidated (*Villa Vlasta*) or nationalized (the Bratislava Jewish hospital).

Family, Education, and Language

As in Poland, the return to normality among Slovak Jews involved building a new family to replace the lost one. The search for missing loved ones continued into 1947 but as chances of finding relatives grew slimmer, the willingness to build a new family grew

²¹⁷ Sudetenland in the Czech lands was comparable to Lower Silesia as far as availability of abandoned German property and new settlement was concerned. Other industrial regions in the Czech lands were Moravska Ostrava and Kladno.

stronger.²¹⁸ The following matrimonial ads in the Jewish newspaper *Tribúna* (Tribune) in January 1948 were symptomatic of this: “Fifty-five-year-old lady, well-to-do, will marry an intelligent Israelite,” or “Forty-five-year-old widow with business in the countryside will marry an intelligent man, businessman if possible.”²¹⁹ In the same column of ads, Eva Mayerova and Rudolf Elefant invited all relatives and friends for their wedding.²²⁰ Regardless of age, Jewish survivors looked for partners to beat loneliness; to move on and have a life as normal as they imagined “a normal life” should be. As a result, in the first quarter of 1948, Slovak Jews had in their midst “a large group of married people up to the age of forty and a large number of newly born children.”²²¹

Without any data on intermarriage, I cannot assess how widespread mixed marriages were in Slovakia. Testimonies left evidence of interethnic dating.²²² How many of these relationships led to marriage remains an open question. Neither can I estimate the number of applications for name change. There is no doubt that both intermarriages and changes of names were not isolated incidents but assessment of their prevalence requires more research. In the state archives in Nitra, in the files from 1945, I found four applications for change of name of Maxmilian Weiner, Karol Füredy, Adriena Júlia

²¹⁸ Local Jewish committees helped to find relatives. The JOINT also had search offices in Prague and Bratislava. In the JOINT office in Prague, 400 people requested to locate their relatives between December 1946 and March 1947 alone. Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson’s report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²¹⁹ “Drobný Oznamovateľ” (Trivial advertiser), in *Tribúna* no.1, vol.1 (7 January 1948):4.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives. In the first quarter of 1947, 144 low-income families with new born children received assistance from the JOINT. Sixteen of these children were born in Slovakia; the remaining children were born in the Czech lands. Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson’s report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²²² Testimony of Georg Keleti, Collection of testimonies, Acc.1995.A.564, USHMM.

Neumanova, and Eugen Rosner.²²³ Respectively, they changed their names into the “Slovak sounding” Milan Vinický, Karol Fedor, Adriena Júlia Novák, and Eugen Kubin.²²⁴ The author of *A Holocaust Odyssey* changed his name from Jozef Kornfeld to Jozef Kalina – “a common Slovak surname” – in the summer of 1945. The book's epilogue gives a hint into Kalina's motivations,

He [Kalina] wanted to dissociate himself from its German derivation. He wanted nothing to do with anything German. Nor did he wish to carry a name that had drawn to him so much unwelcome attention. In the few months since returning to Prešov from his Holocaust odyssey, when an acquaintance recognized him in the street and called Kornfeld...; when he went to government offices on business, and the clerk called out “Kornfeld;”...the fear and threat he had endured for so long jolted him again. The war was over but Jozef Kornfeld's wounds were still open and raw. The change of name would help him to begin a new identity in a new life. Joseph Kalina remained in Czechoslovakia until the Communists came to power in 1948.²²⁵

If, indeed, these were the reasons that pushed Kornfeld to become Kalina, then there was hardly any difference between the motivations of Polish and Slovak Jews. Both wanted to become “invisible” in their respective societies. The assumption of “Polish” or “Slovak sounding” names offered illusive protection from hostility.

Indeed, “invisibility” was helpful at public schools. There was no system of Jewish schools in Slovakia comparable to the one run by the CKŻP in Poland. There were too few Jewish children and the state reform of education allowed only public schools to operate.²²⁶ Also, like Poland, Slovakia lacked Jewish secular institutions of higher education; hence a relatively large number of Jewish students decided to attend

²²³ Nitra had the Jewish population of 700.

²²⁴ Documentation concerning change of names between June and December 1945 in the district national committee in Nitra, ONV Nitra, administration 1945, SAN.

²²⁵ Joseph S. Kalina and Stanley R. Alten, *A Holocaust Odyssey* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 187.

²²⁶ Emanuel Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 248.

public high schools and colleges. At the end of November 1945, 300 students attended secondary schools and colleges and almost 270 received JOINT grants in the spring of 1947.²²⁷ In 1945, the JOINT did not expect that the state would grant aid to Jewish students in Slovakia (in contrast to the Czech lands).²²⁸ Indeed, by the spring of 1947, only Jewish students “without any resources” were given governmental aid (of ninety-seven students with JOINT funding, ten received additional aid from the government). “Resources,” however, were understood in a very peculiar way. For example, property which had not been restituted yet but belonged to parents of a student before the war was considered a “resource.”²²⁹ Nonetheless, with JOINT’s help, Jewish students attended non-Jewish high schools and colleges and received useful certificates. As in the Czech lands, Jewish students in Slovakia were mostly interested in medicine and engineering.²³⁰

These students were mainly native speakers of Slovak. Similar to the CKŻP in Poland, the official language of the country was also the official language of the two major Jewish organizations in Slovakia – the neolog ÚSŽNO and the secular SRP. The ÚSŽNO’s weekly newspaper *Tribúna* was published in Slovak.²³¹ By July 1948, *Tribúna* had a circulation of 4,000, of which a few hundred went for free to non-Jews as a part of the project to combat antisemitism in Slovak society.²³² ÚSŽNO and SRP leaders were

²²⁷ Report on visit to Czechoslovakia between September 18 and November 29, 1945, prepared by Harry Viteles, 20 December 1945, Collection 45/54, File 202, JOINT Archives. Also see quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid. Also see abstract of Jacobson’s report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Vojtech Winterstein was the initiator of the publication. Memorandum from Zachariah Shuster to the Foreign Affairs Department at the AJC, 20 June 1947, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

²³² Joel D. Wolfson spoke of 5,000 copies, of which 1,000 went to non-Jews. Letter from Joel D. Wolfson to John Slawson concerning Czechoslovakia, 15 July 1948, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1,

particularly sensitive about Jews speaking Slovak “on the street.” Aware of common accusations against Jews – that they spoke languages other than Slovak and were disloyal to the state – the ÚSŽNO and the SRP attempted to caution all Slovak Jews in this matter. They sent out a circular to Jewish communities across the country, requesting that “their official bodies use the language of the state and that Jews speak Slovak in public, so as not to provide any grounds for complaints.”²³³

In southern Slovakia, many Jews (some neologs and orthodox) spoke Magyar natively or as a second language which, as I described before, drew a lot of criticism from non-Jews. Some spoke Slovak with a strong “foreign” accent. Gottschalk wrote that many Jews did not speak Slovak at home since their parent(s), for example, knew only Yiddish, “as happens very often.”²³⁴ That may have hampered the confidence of one’s spoken Slovak in public. A minority also spoke German natively or as a second language. However, it seemed that accusers of Slovak Jews – alleged speakers of German in public – most often confused Yiddish with German. Overall, I speculate that, in comparison to Polish Jews, Slovak Jews were less linguistically assimilated. There was one more indication of this: the large number of Orthodox religious communities that were mainly made up of Yiddish and Hungarian speakers.

Community

Shuster of the AJC wrote in June 1947,

box 11, YIVO. Four thousand was cited by Emanuel Frieder who was on the publishing committee of *Tribúna*. See Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*, 254.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 270.

²³⁴ Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives. Common use of Yiddish is confirmed in other sources. See, for example, memorandum from Zachariah Shuster to the Foreign Affairs Department at the AJC, 20 June 1947, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

The Jews of Slovakia are... more segregated from the general population than their brethren in Bohemia-Moravia. They live in special districts, many of them use Yiddish as their language, some are dressed in the traditional garb of Eastern European Orthodox Jews and maintain a net of religious educational institutions of their own...²³⁵

The sheer number of religious congregations in proportion to the population as well as the prominent position of the chief rabbi of Slovakia, Armin (Abba) Frieder, in the leadership of Slovak Jews, spoke to the predominantly religious orientation of Jews in this country, much more so than their Polish counterparts.²³⁶ According to data gathered by the Slovak government, of the 25,000 “faithful of Jewish denomination,” 15,000 “perhaps registered Jewish denomination” (*asi hlási k židovskej konfesii*) by February 1946.²³⁷ Orthodox leaders argued that neologs represented only ten percent of the Jewish faithful population.²³⁸ The remaining 5,000 of 30,000 were thus secular Jews.

In March 1948, there were 126 Jewish religious congregations per 30,000 Jews in Slovakia while in Poland there were only eighty congregations per 100,000 Jews – more than one and a half as many for a population three times as small.²³⁹ It should be noted, however, that these numbers illuminate not only the higher reliance on communal

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Vojtech Winterstein, a Zionist, was the accepted secular leader of the Jewish community Slovakia.

²³⁷ “Počet veriacich židovskej konfesie... po oslobodení Slovenska následkom deportácie ze slovenskej fašistickej éry klesnul približne na 25,000, z ktorých sa asi 15,000 hlási k židovskej konfesii...” Memo from the presidium of the commissioner of education in Bratislava to the Office of the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners in Bratislava concerning the orthodox Jewish population in Slovakia, 20 February 1946, Urad Predsednictva – Sbor Poverenikov, 283, box 7, SNA.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives. Authors of a detailed report on cash relief from the beginning of 1946 counted 180 Jewish communities all over Czechoslovakia. See attachment (data from November 1945) to the report prepared by Harold Trobe and attached to the letter to Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia Zdenek Fierlinger, 16 January 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives. In February 1949, there were only forty-one congregations left in Slovakia. See Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*, 256. For Poland, see Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na Tle Polityki Wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945-1968*, 52.

institutions and the more religious needs of Slovak Jews but, more importantly, the greater dispersal of Slovak Jews, and thus their general sense of security. In contrast, fearing violence, Polish Jews tended to avoid dispersal and concentrated in larger numbers in fewer places.

Bratislava and Košice were the two main Jewish religious centers in postwar Slovakia. In Bratislava, the orthodox Jewish community started its services shortly after liberation. The neologs soon followed. Five prayer houses were opened and two synagogues held services.²⁴⁰ The orthodox community hired a Jewish teacher for religious education. There were three *shochtim*, a *chazan*, and several rabbis.²⁴¹ Gottschalk wrote that of 150 rabbis from before the war, only fifteen were alive and seven were still active in Slovakia.²⁴² Despite this shortage, in places like Dunajská Streda (known as *Small Jerusalem* before the war) and Nové Zámky, Jewish religious life apparently "flourished" after the war.²⁴³

Agudat Israel opened two Beth Jacob homes in Bratislava and Košice for approximately 90 to 100 girls.²⁴⁴ The Beth Jacob in Bratislava organized lessons in Slovak, "since most of them [students] had never attended Slovak schools. In this way

²⁴⁰ Description of Jewish communities in Slovakia after the war prepared by Benjamin Eichler, September 1979, Collection of Benjamin Eichler, RG 1097, box 1, YIVO. Benjamin Eichler was a leader of the orthodox community in Bratislava before his emigration to Toronto, Canada.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁴³ Description of Jewish communities in Slovakia after the war prepared by Benjamin Eichler, September 1979, Collection of Benjamin Eichler, RG 1097, box 1, YIVO.

²⁴⁴ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives. By September 1948, twenty-five girls emigrated and some seventy still remained. See report on JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between April and June 1948, prepared by the JOINT Budget and Research Department, 29 September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

they will be able to secure permits to re-enter the economic life of the country.”²⁴⁵ Mizrachi (religious Zionists) opened a children’s home in Košice in September 1946. More than forty children between the ages of eight and fourteen lived in the home by November 1946.²⁴⁶ Orthodox Slovak Jews also maintained two Talmudic colleges – Yeshivas – in Bratislava and Košice.²⁴⁷ Both were closed by May 1948, following the emigration of “virtually the entire student body.”²⁴⁸ As for elementary religious education, every community was responsible for its own schooling. The greatest problem was a lack of children to teach.²⁴⁹ The congregations also struggled with a shortage of instructors in prayer, Hebrew, and religious subjects.²⁵⁰ The ÚSŽNO tried to help by publishing a monthly magazine for the youth, entitled *Ha-Lapid* (The Torch), which focused on one religious subject per month.²⁵¹

Religious communities across Slovakia were surprisingly self-supporting. In March 1948, of 126 congregations, sixteen financed their activities in full while the remainder relied on help only periodically.²⁵² By and large, the Slovak Jewish congregations did relatively well, covering the costs of most religious, cultural, and

²⁴⁵ Confidential report on Czechoslovakia in May and June 1946, prepared by the JOINT Paris office, 30 June 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁴⁶ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁴⁷ List of Jewish institutions in Slovakia, undated (probably April 1946), Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁴⁸ Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between April and June 1948, prepared by the JOINT Budget and Research Department, 29 September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁴⁹ Only sixty children under fourteen and 110 between fourteen and eighteen years of age attended religious schools in Slovakia in April 1946 (no other source confirmed this information). Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁵⁰ Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*, 248.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁵² Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

administrative functions (except for welfare, which was covered by the JOINT and the ÚSŽNO).

[They derived] revenues from their *kashrut* programs, from *shochtim*, from the sale of kosher meats, from collections during the holidays, and from the sale of seats in the synagogues. Funds were also raised at weddings, births, and funerals. In some communities over fifty percent of the total budgets were met locally.²⁵³

That also meant that the economic standing of the congregations gradually improved. In 1948, the director of the JOINT, Julius Levine, wrote that "a good percentage of our Slovakian Jewry were able to get back into profitable businesses shortly after the liberation, and *Gemeinde* [Jewish congregations] support was re-established..."²⁵⁴ The decrease in the number of public kosher kitchens also showed that more and more individuals ran self-sufficient households. In the spring of 1946, communities maintained more than fifty kosher kitchens.²⁵⁵ By June 1946, twenty of them closed down as "people in the communities developed their own facilities to cook for themselves."²⁵⁶

Conflicts were another mark of normality. As there was no danger, Jewish religious communities could afford disagreement. Orthodox and neolog congregations had been in constant conflict for the first two years after the war. This clash stemmed mainly from the refusal of orthodox leaders to accept the neolog ÚSŽNO and Rabbi Armin Frieder as the representative of Slovak Jews. Such representation would have

²⁵³ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson's report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁵⁴ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁵⁵ List of Jewish institutions in Slovakia, undated (probably April 1946), Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁵⁶ Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between July and November 1946, prepared by Sidney Bortheim, 26 February 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

given the ÚŠŽNO the right to manage the financial resources of the whole community, including the property of the orthodox. In the orthodox view, Neolog Judaism was first, in the minority and, second, it was an “a-religious group,” which disregarded orthodox religious laws and tended toward total assimilation.²⁵⁷ The orthodox congregation also refuted the idea that they were somehow obliged to join neologs due to the dramatic decrease in the Jewish population. The orthodox Jewish communities of Bratislava and Košice openly refused to accept the ÚŠŽNO as their representative until its composition was more reflective of Slovak Jewry.²⁵⁸ Although neologs had more leverage due to better contacts with the Slovak government, it was orthodox Jews who constituted the majority of Slovak Jewry. According to Jacobson’s estimates from the end of 1946, seventy percent of Slovak Jews could “be classified as members of Orthodox Jewry.”²⁵⁹

In the beginning of 1947, orthodox and neologs finally unified within the ÚŠŽNO. The board of the ÚŠŽNO now consisted of nine orthodox (Agudat Israel, Mizrachi, and General Orthodox) and nine neolog members.²⁶⁰ Emanuel Frieder, brother of Rabbi Armin Frieder, took over chairmanship in the ÚŠŽNO.²⁶¹ The Board of Orthodox Rabbis secured sole authority in “the matters of *kashrut*, personal and marital status, and

²⁵⁷ Grievance of the leaders of the orthodox Jewish congregations in Slovakia against decision of the Board of Commissioners from September 1945 concerning the liquidation of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in Slovakia, submitted to the Supreme Court in Bratislava, 16 November 1945, Urad Predsednictva – Sbor Poverenikov, 283, box 7, SNA.

²⁵⁸ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives. Emanuel Frieder downplayed this problem entirely in his and his brother’s memoir. See Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*.

²⁵⁹ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (July-November 1946), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 17 January 1947, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁶⁰ Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*, 252. JOINT sources spoke of twelve members; six neolog and six orthodox. See quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson’s report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁶¹ Rabbi Armin (Abba) Frieder died in June 1946.

halakhah.”²⁶² From that point, the ÚŠŽNO indeed came to represent all Slovak Jews. The unification, however, did not put an end to the quarrels. One example was the Jewish hospital in Bratislava. Created before the war by the orthodox Chevra Kadisha, the hospital was now entirely controlled by the orthodox camp.²⁶³ The ÚŠŽNO was suspicious of the hospital’s practices, including the selective picking of doctors permitted to use the hospital for paid patients. That, apparently, stirred strong competition among Jewish doctors in the city. The conflict was nowhere near resolution in March 1948, although there were talks of the hospital’s nationalization at the end of the year.²⁶⁴

Slovak Normality Interrupted

In the end of December 1947, AJC representative in Czechoslovakia Milton Winn wrote,

[A]ll hands agree that the entire situation here has become more tense. This is not strictly speaking a Jewish matter. It is a reflex of the uneasy situation in which all Europe, and particularly this portion of it finds itself as a result of the tensions between the Great Powers. Everybody here feels insecure, and all are wondering what is going to happen next. In the middle and upper classes of all groups, religious and otherwise, there is a rather panicky feeling which rose to a rather high pitch after the failure of the London Conference... Now they feel that inevitably Czecho-Slovakia will suffer in the intensification of the polarization between East and West. To this overall feeling there is added the rather puzzled feeling that domestic problems have reached a critical stage. The food situation has tightened ominously... People in all walks of life are greatly concerned about what will happen in the elections next May. Those who have conservative leanings are more worried about what will happen to them and their fortunes or businesses in the event of a decisive victory for the Communist Party. A substantial portion of these express a desire to leave the country.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*.

²⁶³ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Letter from Milton Winn, 30 December 1947, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

In February 1948, the Communist Party indeed took power in a non-violent coup d'état in Prague. The event marked a radical change for all, Jews and non-Jews alike. But Jews seemed particularly worried. Levine reported a month after the February events,

It is interesting here to note that daily during the recent political events, we had people express themselves in effect – “This is so like what happened to us before the German invasion, and it is so frightening.” And there was an overwhelming feeling of vital changes taking place over which the individual had no control. While the fear of general antisemitism has lessened considerably, this has been exchanged for a fear of imminent war, and the result is an intensified desire on the part of the Jewish population, and considerable of the non-Jewish population, to leave Europe. Everywhere the conversation turns quickly to the possibility of emigrating – where and under what conditions becomes less important than previously. In fantasy, mass emigration is taking place, but the actual figure... is not available.²⁶⁶

“Hysteria” was a term often used to describe the mood among Slovak Jews after February 1948 – like “panic” came to define Polish Jews after the Kielce pogrom. “Hysterical fear of war” and “anxiety that seems to run rampant” were to describe the “reality” of the Slovak Jews. If indeed Slovak Jews experienced these feelings, it was not merely from fear of the Third World War, although admittedly this fear was not alien to East Europeans at the time. More importantly, Slovak Jews responded to a complex political as well as social and economic change, or the potential thereof. The fear of borders closing was not ungrounded. Indeed, passports were more and more difficult to secure, a heavy taxation on the resources of emigrants was imposed, as well as tighter restrictions on property allowed out of the country. Rumors spread that the government had started punishing retroactively for actions which a year or two before had not been

²⁶⁶ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

considered illegal.²⁶⁷ Levine wrote that even those Jews who “succeeded in getting key positions in the public administrative set-up” were “overly-conscientious in their political acceptance due to their own insecurity,” fearful of what the near future might bring.²⁶⁸

Nationalization, growing food shortages, tightening government control over economic endeavors, prices, and distribution of commodities, and government plans to make work compulsory did not encourage staying either.²⁶⁹ Especially those who lost their businesses – their sources of income – were eager to leave. These ex-entrepreneurs were not keen to adjust to the industrial nationalized world – to a new socialist normality. Their departure meant the weakening of the small Jewish religious congregations which depended on their wealth and interest. As Levine reported, “Rapidly community interest is disintegrating, and this is more evident daily. A visit to community leaders these days will find the conversation directed almost invariably to emigration planning. The situation has reached a fairly hysterical pitch...”²⁷⁰

Finally, the “traditional” pushes for Jewish emigration – anti-Jewish violence in Bratislava in August 1948 and the overwhelming popularity of Zionism – were also present. Gottschalk claimed that ninety-five percent of Slovak Jews were Zionists.²⁷¹ Although possibly exaggerated, his claim illustrated the overwhelming political tendency among Slovak Jews. When Communist activists purged and replaced Zionists in Prague after the coup d’état of 1948, Zionist leaders in Slovakia remained relatively unaffected.

²⁶⁷ Quarterly report on Slovakia for July-September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁶⁸ “...and there is a general feeling of distrust.” Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁶⁹ Memorandum from M. Jacob Joslow to Moses A. Leavitt on evaluation of conditions in Czechoslovakia, 26 October 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁷⁰ Report on Czechoslovakia between January 1 and March 31, 1948, submitted by the director for the JOINT in Czechoslovakia, Julius Levine, March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁷¹ Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

There were simply not enough Jewish Communists “to act and to take over” after the Zionists.²⁷² As in Poland after the war, Zionists became the most powerful, the most popular, and the best organized political movement among both religious and secular Jews in Slovakia. Jewish leaders Rabbi Armin Frieder, his brother Emanuel, and Vojtech Winterstein were all ardent Zionists. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the ÚSŽNO worked hand in hand with the Zionist Organization in Bratislava to organize mass *aliyah* from Slovakia.²⁷³ The Czechoslovak and Slovak governments viewed these activities favorably and did not interfere.

In the first half of 1948, Czech Jews were particularly anxious to leave and, in fact, emigrated; “Unpredictability and tension prevailed.”²⁷⁴ Between January and March 1948, 1,893 new passport applications were submitted in Prague and about 700 people left the Czech lands. In Bratislava, in the same period, 466 applications came in and 142 people left. Between April and June 1948, 1,238 emigrated from the Czech lands and more than 300 left Slovakia.²⁷⁵ The trend was definitely the same in both regions but the absolute numbers were four to five times greater in the Czech lands than in Slovakia. Overall, between January and September 1948, more than 6,000 new applications came in and a total of 3,600 left Czechoslovakia.²⁷⁶ In April 1949, about 20,000 Jews were expected to leave Czechoslovakia within a few months.²⁷⁷ By July 1949, of 126 Jewish

²⁷² Confidential report on Czechoslovakia prepared by Hirsch Silberberg, 29 July 1949, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

²⁷³ Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust*, 278-86.

²⁷⁴ Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between April and June 1948, prepared by the JOINT Budget and Research Department, 29 September 1948, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Report on the JOINT activities in Czechoslovakia between July and September 1948, prepared by the JOINT Budget and Research Department, 15 January 1949, Collection 45/54, File 199, JOINT Archives.

²⁷⁷ Memo on “Reconstruction Activities in Czechoslovakia,” 12 April 1949, Collection 45/54, File 209, JOINT Archives.

communities in Slovakia, only twenty-five were left.²⁷⁸ At the time, of the Jewish population of 33,000, 14,000 were left and another 10,000 were registered to leave.²⁷⁹ At a rate of 2,500 people per month, it seemed that the Czechoslovak Jewish community would cease to exist within three months.²⁸⁰ And, indeed, in the end of 1949 only a few thousand Jews remained in the country.

The year 1948 also marked heightened anxiety among Polish Jews. At the end of 1948, they became more and more eager to leave when the elimination of “private initiative” – nationalization – seemed inescapable.²⁸¹ Shop-owners and artisans, who were not registered in cooperatives, were the most eager to leave, as they were “...not able, from a psychological point of view, to get used to the new order and new social conditions which are now in Poland.”²⁸² There was also fear that the borders would close for good soon. Of the community of 100,000, about 80,000 Polish Jews were still in the country by May 1949 and 60,000 by the mid 1950.²⁸³ Despite this apparent similarity, the post-1948 emigration did much more damage and marked much more radical change for Jews in Slovakia than in Poland. The Slovak Jewish population almost ceased to exist, losing eighty percent of its members, whereas the Polish Jewish community decreased “only” by forty percent. Jewish normality in Slovakia was truly and permanently interrupted.

²⁷⁸ Confidential report on Czechoslovakia prepared by Hirsch Silberberg, 29 July 1949, Collection of the AJC, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 11, YIVO.

²⁷⁹ In all of Czechoslovakia, there was the total of 20,000 Jews left (14,000 in Slovakia and 6,000 in the Czech lands). Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Report from Poland, January 1949, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Report from Poland, May 1949, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the war, the desire to emigrate was common and Zionism was the most popular political and social movement among both Polish and Slovak Jews. This common longing to leave could be explained not only by antisemitism and political change, but also by the ubiquity of ruins – reminders of the trauma. After eighteen months in Poland, the JOINT director for Poland, Bein, wrote in March 1948,

When I look out of my window in Warszawa I see only ruins. I have become so accustomed to that sight in Poland that it would be unusual to see something else. Every Jew looking out of his mental window sees a graveyard, a cemetery, ruins. For example, I am now working on the visa of a lady. Although she does not know it, her husband tells me that she awakens every night and screams. This woman was actually five times at the Gestapo headquarters in Poland and if they would have discovered that she was a Jew she would have been shot on the spot. She must leave Poland because *she will never be a normal person until she leaves the country*. There are some musts like that. Other people want to join relatives abroad. Other people want to leave an area which they feel they might not be able to leave later on. Some people may not like the political regime in the country.²⁸⁴

Similarly, in Slovakia, Gottschalk estimated (based on questionnaires sent by the JOINT to all Jewish communities) that seventy-five percent of Slovak Jews wanted to emigrate and sixty percent wanted to go to Palestine in April 1946.²⁸⁵ A year earlier, a JOINT correspondent Viteles wrote,

A considerable proportion of the youth (under thirty) wished to emigrate, preferably to Palestine, because there was no future in Czechoslovakia. And there are also an appreciable number of the older groups (over thirty) who for psychological reasons, pride [?], that is a feeling that they are no longer welcome in Czechoslovakia and in Europe, also wish to emigrate. It would be too simple and probably not entirely accurate to attribute this to over-sensitiveness or to an

²⁸⁴ Confidential report prepared by William Bein, 6 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

²⁸⁵ Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

intensification of the inferiority complex. The desire to live and the ability to accommodate ... is strong among those who survived. ... The effects of the Nazi regime on the Jews are deep and difficult to analyze and understand. The replies recorded from the same people to the same questions but on different dates vary and are influenced by the external conditions on the day when the questions were asked. For the above reasons it is impossible to estimate the number of Jews who would wish to emigrate and where they wish to emigrate.²⁸⁶

Although other correspondents agreed that “most of the people one spoke to in Slovakia stated [that] they would like to emigrate” and that eastern Slovakia presented the direst conditions, hundreds of Slovak Jews applied for “reconstruction loans” at JOINT offices in 1946.²⁸⁷ An explanation was that while emigration facilities were not yet available, future émigrés wanted to earn a living instead of relying on welfare. Perhaps, however, some of them were not entirely sure if they would, in fact, leave the country.

In March 1948, Bein gave insight into the motivations of those Jews who decided to remain in Poland,

Who wants to remain in Poland? First of all, those who feel that the only regime that protected the Jews as such was the regime of democratic forces, so that they would not have to suffer as Jews. Second, there are some people who are established in Poland and who have a small apartment and are working and they do not want to go off on another emigration. Then there are some like a boy I know who was twice in Siberia and who is tired and wants to stay. There are others whose age is a handicap; others who feel that it is impossible to get anywhere, that it is a long procedure and they may as well stay.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Report on visit to Czechoslovakia between September 18 and November 29, 1945, prepared by Harry Viteles, 20 December 1945, Collection 45/54, File 202, JOINT Archives.

²⁸⁷ Confidential report on Czechoslovakia in May and June 1946, prepared by the JOINT Paris office, 30 June 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives. Gottschalk wrote, “Considering the shrewdness of many of them [the Slovak Jews] and their ability to deal with the authorities, life would be possible there [in Slovakia] in the future, except in parts of eastern Slovakia.” Confidential report on the Jews in Czechoslovakia, prepared by Max Gottschalk, April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

²⁸⁸ Confidential report prepared by William Bein, 6 March 1948, Collection 45/54, File 730, JOINT Archives.

In 1947, violent antisemitism was no longer a push for emigration. In August 1947, Ezekiel, a consultant of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York, speculated that only “a distinct minority among Polish Jews as a whole” still felt insecure and wanted to leave.²⁸⁹ A year later, a JOINT correspondent wrote,

I met many Jews who are feeling strongly Jewish and who are not Communists. They are decided to stay in Poland. They are fatalists from one side and tired from the second one. They are settled here, know the language, have good jobs [“comfortable life”], and what is most important are already too tired to begin a new life and to fight for a new existence. ‘Let come what may come’ is their devise.²⁹⁰

Importantly, those Jews who decided to stay imagined the possibility of normality; that one could build a normal life in Poland as well as in Slovakia – of course, within the paradigm of normality of those days.

For Polish Jews, in comparison to Slovak Jews, normality began later, lasted longer, and consisted of “abnormal” highs and lows. Between liberation and the post-Kielce panic in the summer of 1946, migrations and ongoing repatriation from the USSR, insecurity caused by persistent anti-Jewish violence and civil war, administrative chaos, and the general persistence of material and psychological damage permeated daily life and hampered attempts to build stability. Nothing in the environment reflected a peacetime normality; it was as if the war had not yet ended. In the spring of 1947, when panic after the Kielce pogrom subsided and the state clamped down on antisemitism, those Polish Jews who stayed slowly balanced their lives. Places like Kraków ceased to be mere transit-points between the USSR and the west of Poland or Europe. Nineteen

²⁸⁹ “Observations on Poland and Switzerland,” prepared by Mordecai Ezekiel in the Institute on Overseas Studies at the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds in New York, not for publication, 17 August 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

²⁹⁰ Report “How Many Jews are in Poland,” undated, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

forty seven was possibly the most “stable” year, especially in western Poland. In places like Lower Silesia, it seemed that Jews not only built individual lives, but flourished as a cultural and social community.

Upon his return to the United States in 1948, Bein declared, “The Jewish population of Poland has made ‘amazing strides’ towards re-establishment, self-support and cultural expression in the past year and a half [1946 and the first half of 1947].”²⁹¹ The AJC representative, Shuster, was impressed with Polish Jewry’s “tremendous vitality, their *genuine and deep-rooted Jewishness*... [Polish Jews being] a reservoir of Jewish energy [my emphasis].”²⁹² After a brief tour in Poland, the director of the Central European Information Bureau JOINT in Paris, Charles Malamuth, said,

In the field of social welfare and rural economy more has been accomplished in Poland than in any other country occupied by the Hitlerites. Welfare institutions here have higher standards and practices than that of similar institutions in other countries.... On the whole... the Jews in Poland are better off than those in France [doubtful], or the refugees in Germany and Austria.”²⁹³

JOINT Director for America Moses Leavitt and Director for Europe Joseph Schwartz both praised Polish Jews’ achievements, especially in Lower Silesia. Schwartz said, “In none of the European countries have I seen such progress in work after two postwar years as in Poland – economy, social welfare, children’s care, cultural work...”²⁹⁴

²⁹¹ Dispatch of the JOINT, “Economic, Cultural Revival of Jews in Poland Reported by JOINT Director of Activities There,” 25 September 1947, Collection 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

²⁹² Letter from Zachariah Shuster to John Slawson concerning Jewish situation in Poland, 7 May 1948, AJC-FAD, FAD 41-46, RG 347.7, box 42, YIVO.

²⁹³ Report “Jewish Life in Poland,” prepared by the Polish Research and Information Service in New York, April 1948, Collection of the ORT Federation, RG 380, box 7, folder 105, YIVO.

²⁹⁴ Minutes from a meeting of the presidium of the CKŻP with JOINT representatives, 1 June 1947, 303/I/7, AŻIH.

In Slovakia, there was no place like Lower Silesia where Jews would be “enthusiastic” about the possibility of establishing normal life in the country. For example, a JOINT correspondent wrote about Prešov in eastern Slovakia in April 1946,

A visit to Prešov was made on April 29, various communal buildings; synagogue, mikve, kitchen, etc. were visited. Later that afternoon a meeting was held with the leaders of the Jewish community and a general discussion was held regarding the various needs and problems of the community. It was the consensus of opinion that only about half the people had received their polit. spolahlivost (political reliability) and that antisemitism was current and that the future position of Jews was untenable. It appeared that most of them felt that young people would leave and that the older ones would stay on. They did not feel it was necessary to repair and remodel the large synagogue, which was badly damaged.²⁹⁵

This sentiment was widespread among Jewish communities in eastern and central Poland. Despite that, the term “return to normality” seemed more applicable for Slovak Jews who perhaps never reached the highs of Lower Silesian Jews, but neither did they reach the lows of pre-July 1946 in Poland.

For Slovak Jews, the return to normality began earlier but also ended earlier. While Polish Jews struggled until late 1946, Slovak Jews seemed to have had enough stability to gradually build their lives from the end of 1945 onwards. Jewish migration and repatriation never reached the magnitude of 120,000 Polish Jewish repatriates from the USSR, and there was no civil war imbuing daily life with a constant sense of insecurity. Antisemitism in Slovakia and related violence never became sufficient motivation for Slovak Jews to emigrate because the intimidation never reached a tipping point similar to the Kielce pogrom in Poland. Kielce was the last anti-Jewish outbreak of the 1940s – a watershed moment which caused massive Jewish emigration and catalyzed

²⁹⁵ Confidential monthly report on Czechoslovakia in April 1946, prepared by Philip Ruby from the JOINT Paris office, 30 April 1946, Collection 45/54, File 201, JOINT Archives.

the government crackdown on antisemitism, effectively halting anti-Jewish attacks. In Slovakia, anti-Jewish riots did not stop until 1948 and yet, since these were mainly isolated events, they did not affect daily life to a degree that would warrant panicked emigration. Only after the political coup d'état in February 1948, did Slovak Jews enter a phase of intense fright, comparable to the mood among Polish Jews after Kielce. The fear of terrorization and nationalization pushed thousands of Jews to leave Slovakia, decisively ending the Jewish presence in this country. By that time, the majority of Polish Jews were settled enough and integrated enough into the Polish economy, culture, and politics to stay despite the political transformation.

What did normality mean for Jews after the war in the two countries? What was a normal life for a Jew in postwar Poland and Slovakia? It was mainly a city life (with the exception of a few hundred Jewish farmers in western Poland). In central and eastern Poland, there were hardly any Jewish residents in villages and small towns although there were locations like Niepołomice (Kraków province) where five Jews lived, Chocznią near Wadowice with one Jew, or Sanki near Chrzanów with two old sisters.²⁹⁶ Jews mainly concentrated in big cities, still constituting only a small part of the entire city population – 6,000 in Kraków or 17,000 in Łódź.²⁹⁷ Considering that fifty percent of Polish Jews lived in Lower Silesia, Polish Jews were Lower Silesian Jews. In Slovakia,

²⁹⁶ Annual report on the activity of the KWŻ in 1946, 25 January 1947, 303/IV/74, AŻIH. Before the Kielce pogrom, there were forty-five communities in the province of Kraków. Tarnów's Jewish populations fluctuated from 1,000 before the pogrom in Kielce to 355 in January 1948. Annual report on the activity of the KWŻ in 1946, Collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of Jews in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM. In towns like Nowy Sącz and Chrzanów, 107 and forty-five Jews lived respectively by the end of 1946. In villages around the towns, there were no Jews at all. See files from collection of the KWŻ 1946-47, KWŻ-1, APKr and annual report on the activity of the KWŻ in 1946, 25 January 1947, 303/IV/74, AŻIH. In Kraków province, for example, there were twenty-three locations with 1,546 Jews registered in January 1947.

²⁹⁷ Data from November/December 1946 and January 1947. See statistical data in various files from collection of the AAN, Office of the Government Commissar for Productivity of Jews in Poland, RG 15.003 M, USHMM.

considering the larger number of Jewish communities, the concentration in a few localities was smaller. Still, Jacobson reported in July 1947, “The influx into the cities of Jews from the Slovakian villages where but a few Jewish families lived before the war and now the survivors either do not wish or are afraid to remain, has further aggravated the housing shortage in the larger communities.”²⁹⁸

Normal life after the war was the life of a person suffering from tuberculosis or other disease contracted during the war. It was a life in which individuals had to come to terms with recent traumatic experiences, with personal and material loss. Normal life was a life without extended family but, perhaps, with a new spouse (sometimes non-Jewish), and perhaps, if age allowed, a new baby on the way.²⁹⁹ Normal postwar life focused on new friendships (old friends most certainly perished) and communal bonding – a replacement for the families lost. Spouses and friends were mainly Jewish or mixed, rarely exclusively non-Jewish. Both in Poland and Slovakia, there was a drive to create a Jewish community in friendly cooperation with non-Jews but separate nonetheless. Radical assimilation was not a popular solution yet; instead a double life – Jewish socially and “non-Jewish” at work – was the norm. Normal life was lived in the language of the country, although Yiddish sustained a significant presence in both Poland and Slovakia. Normal life after the war was also marked by making a living with the means available. Black marketeering and street peddling were one extreme while employment in

²⁹⁸ Quarterly report on Czechoslovakia (December 1, 1946-March 31, 1947), submitted by the JOINT director for Czechoslovakia, Israel J. Jacobson, 7 July 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives. Also see abstract of Jacobson’s report, received on July 10, 1947, Collection 45/54, File 200, JOINT Archives.

²⁹⁹ In the 1950s, number of divorces increased. Whether postwar Jewish and mixed marriages survived the passage of time remains an open question.

heavy industry was the other. The majority found employment in cooperatives or state institutions (Poland) and trade or small textile business (Slovakia).

In the two countries, increased political intervention into private life became normal as well. A reading of the memoirs of Maria Dąbrowska, a renowned Polish writer, gives the impression that politics crept into her home relatively late, in January 1947, but did so nonetheless.³⁰⁰ Until then, Dąbrowska's thoughts were mostly detached from high politics. She was concerned with Warszawa's ruins, loss of loved ones, and reestablishment of her professional life. This capacity to ignore politics in the first two years after the war was not only restricted to the literati. Indeed, in that period, an average citizen who was not involved in state administration or political opposition could forget about the higher echelons and focus on the day-to-day struggles. In the late spring of 1946, before the referendum, the first signs of the invasion of politics into the private sphere, so notorious in the coming decade, were seen. From the elections of January 1947, politics became impossible to ignore; its ubiquity became normality. By 1948, both the Polish and Slovak governments significantly expanded the sphere of their intervention into citizens' lives, making it normality and routine. The nationalization of production, education, and culture, all seemed to have become "natural" and "normal."

To sum up, the Jewish return to normality was exceptionally hard, even in comparison with other peoples of Eastern Europe. Jews could not rely on the assistance of better situated relatives in Poland nor Slovakia. Neither could they reach to reserves in cash or property. But despite that and thanks to an institutional network of aid and individual resourcefulness they managed to rebuild normal lives within the available frameworks of normality. They managed to find partners, make friendships, get jobs, and

³⁰⁰ Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki 1945-1950* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988).

build communities. At times, they did that in cooperation with non-Jewish spouses, neighbors, strangers and friends, but more often without them. The government was more helpful in these endeavors in Poland than in Slovakia. But even in Slovakia, Jews managed to succeed as professionals and members of the larger community. In other words, they all worked out successful *stratagems of normalization*.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

After a war, ethnic minorities seem to rely on the state more than usual. The Talmudic rule – *dina de malchuta dina* (the law of the land is the law) – never seems more vital for Jews than in the face of destruction and endangerment. State protection becomes a necessity and loyalty seems the best way of ensuring it. After the Second World War, the two Jewish communities in Poland and Slovakia pledged loyalty to their respective governments, manifesting their willingness to oblige the powers-that-be. In this, they carried on the long tradition of Jewish communal reliance on the state as the sole protector against a hostile environment.

However, the benefits of this tradition depend on government reciprocity. The Slovak government refused to view Jews as a distinct subject – a special victim of the Nazi regime. In contrast, the Polish government defined Jews as a group of particular interest immediately after liberation. As discussed elsewhere, the different attitudes of the two central administrations stemmed mainly from the different legacies of the war and the different political stances they shaped. Also, since the interwar period, Jewishness had been a stronger category of identity in Poland than in Slovakia. In Poland, for example, a significant segment of society considered the Jews – as Jews – a “threatening other” of the nation. In Slovakia, this role was ascribed to the Magyars. In addition, the

Slovak administration (like the Czechoslovak government before the war) used language as an important criterion for the determination of nationality. As a result, Magyar-speaking Jews were categorized as Magyars (as before the war).

These two different approaches had far-reaching consequences for the overall postwar experience of Jews in the two countries. The Polish state was much more protective of Jews than the Slovak. In Slovakia, the flexible categorization of Jews as Magyars and lack of a definitive government stance on Jewish survivors made them vulnerable to anti-Magyar discrimination. Although German-speaking Jews in the Recovered Territories also suffered discrimination, they could count on state protection and, usually, a positive outcome in a conflict. For example, the notorious confiscation of landed property endured by the Magyar-speaking Jews in Slovakia did not happen to German-speaking Jews in Poland. The authors of an annual report of the JOINT noted in 1947,

With respect to the restitution of property, it is worthy of note that the Polish Government authorities make no distinctions whatsoever with regard to Jewish claims. On the contrary, as regards property of former German citizens, which ordinarily is taken over by the Government, an exception is made in the case of former German citizens belonging to those groups who were persecuted by the Nazis. In this way German Jews retain the same property rights as the Polish nationals.¹

Due to the fact that the treatment of Jews in Slovakia was not regulated, their fate depended more on the whims of low rank officials than the fate of their counterparts in Poland. From the Jewish perspective, the seemingly omnipotent national committees made the most vital decisions concerning citizenship and property. As indicated

¹ Annual report of the JOINT on Poland, 1947, Collection of the JOINT no. 45/54, File 731, JOINT Archives.

elsewhere, material interests seemed to have been a primary motivation for these officials. Sources suggest that bribery worked. Restitution in Slovakia offers a case study for this kind of behavior. Having said that, ethnic prejudices of bureaucrats should not be underestimated. One of the main complaints of Slovak Jewish organizations was that the cadres hardly changed after the collapse of the fascist regime. It happened (though difficult to assess how often) that wartime administrators remained in their posts after the war. I also speculate that proportionally fewer Jews were employed in public offices in Slovakia than in Poland.

Since the central government in Bratislava was much less accommodating of Jews, Jewish leaders in Slovakia had to engage in “negotiating justice” on a scale incomparable to Polish Jews. They had to fiercely negotiate their standing vis-à-vis the state administration, without legal protection from the central government. Restitution law, for example, was not merely top-down legislation in Slovakia. Frequent letters and reports from Jewish leadership to appropriate authorities suggest active Jewish participation in political debate surrounding the legislation and its implementation. They requested, appealed, protested, and recommended with regard to restitution and fought against confiscation of their property. They remained in constant, and often tense, dialogue with the legislative and executive power in Bratislava, as well as with the National Assembly and the relevant ministers in Prague. However, the extent to which Slovak Jews affected the final decision-making and the content of law remains debatable.

These bureaucratic struggles also showed that “proper” ethnicity played a paramount role in public life. Ethnicity became a central lens through which a dominant national community strove to recreate its shattered inner hierarchy and outer boundaries.

Interestingly, the state administrations revised criteria of ethnicity by adding an experiential factor: behavior during the war. The fight against fascism and loyalty made “Poles” and “Slovaks” while betrayal made “Germans” and “Magyars.” Classification as Polish or Slovak (and Czech) meant admittance to the national community. All other classifications carried the threat of potential expropriation and expulsion. This social and ethnic engineering deeply disintegrated communities, already devastated by the war. Not surprisingly, “elbowing” one’s place in the newly rearranged society added to the experiences of the war and postwar violence in intensifying ethnic resentment.

Struggling for their place in a reconstructed society and for the opportunity to rebuild their lives, Polish and Slovak Jews were so entangled with the rest of the country that their experience becomes unintelligible outside its context. Some experiences are incomprehensible even outside of a regional context, proving that large national narratives can be deceptive in the way they homogenize experience. The postwar “return to normality” depended on the opportunities to have a family, to find employment, and to pursue communal activities. In other words, Jewish survivors depended on ongoing economic, political, social, and cultural processes, including daily violence, mass migrations, pressing shortages, economic quick fixes and long-term reforms, political maneuvers, and so forth.

In the chaos of the transitional period, Jewish emigration and integration were not inevitable outcomes. Thousands chose neither. There was nothing inevitable in the mass emigration of Polish and Slovak Jews and in their ultimate radical assimilation in later decades. Comparative analysis undermines easy insights such as that as Jews suffered pogroms, they realized the impossibility of rebuilding a Jewish life and emigrated en

masse. Those who did not emigrate assimilated, having no other option. Close examination of the two histories shows that, despite intense violence in Poland, Polish Jews succeeded in building relatively normal lives in selected parts of the country. Moreover, they could do so as Jews, without the need to radically assimilate. Half the Jewish population after the war chose life in western Poland which offered a conducive milieu. True, more than 100,000 Jews emigrated after the pogrom in Kielce, but, at the same time, 100,000 stayed, 50,000 in Lower Silesia.

In Slovakia, there were anti-Jewish pogroms and there was emigration as well. But, again, closer examination shows that there was no easy and direct link between the two. Slovak Jews left en masse not after the pogroms in Topolčany in 1945 or Bratislava in 1946 and 1948, but after the political coup d'état in February 1948 when fear of the consequences of political change, including nationalization and terror, stirred panic. The establishment of Israel created the possibility. (Interestingly, preliminary study reveals that the majority of Slovak Jews immigrated to Israel while the Polish Jews dispersed across the West and Israel.) It should be noted that, by emigrating after change of regime, Slovak Jews voted "with their feet" against the new government and thus broke with the tradition of minority loyalty to the authority. They did so in much greater proportions than Polish Jews – eighty percent of Slovak Jews left at the time in comparison to forty percent of Polish Jewish survivors.

Also, in striking contrast to Polish Jews and despite, or perhaps because of the government's indifference, Slovak Jews reestablished a community which was in continuity with its interwar predecessor. An analysis of Jewish economic and religious patterns in the two countries after the war shows that they changed more dramatically in

Poland than in Slovakia. After the war, the majority of Slovak Jews remained active in orthodox congregations and occupied stereotypical “Jewish” occupational niches – private trade. Polish Jews radically shifted their prewar economic and religious patterns by finding employment outside private business and liberal professions and by leaving religious communities.

This apparent Slovak continuity and Polish break resulted not only from the distinct histories of the two Jewish populations but also from the distinct environments that the two states and societies created after the war. In Poland, the government and the Jewish leadership were set on making a change, a break from the past. They were all involved in this project, trying desperately to change the face of Jewish postwar community. In Slovakia, the government did not put forward any idea concerning the life of Slovak Jews, and were conspicuously uninvolved. Neither did the Jewish leadership in Slovakia champion the idea of productivization.

These two opposing approaches stemmed not only from varying policies on Jews, but, more importantly, from practical considerations. Violence against Jews on the Polish street had no parallel in Slovakia. True, Slovak Jews suffered pogroms, but, as I argued elsewhere, none reached the Polish intensity. The numbers of Jewish casualties in Poland and Slovakia were also telling. Religious Jews in Slovakia did not have to hide or cut their beards in fear of backlash like their Polish counterparts. Slovak Jews could also rebuild their lives in villages and small towns to a degree unparalleled in Poland. Anti-Jewish violence in Slovakia, although present, was not widespread enough to divert Jews’ religious and professional choices. In Poland, on the other hand, antisemitism and related violence were central obstacles in the rebuilding of Jewish lives. The government and

Jewish leaders believed that if Polish Jews changed, rebuilding would be possible: non-Jews would correct their opinions about Jews and both would be able to live peacefully ever after.

In the aftermath of the war, common issues of modern Jewish history – choice between “hereness” and “thereness,” acculturation and radical assimilation, building relationships with the powers-that-be and the majority population – were present. But, in contrast to the times of peace, these issues were heightened and individualized to a much greater degree. In the wake of the Shoah, individual Jewish returnees had to make life decisions within a short period of time and in extreme circumstances. Homelessness and loneliness on a personal level and enormous destruction and chaos on the street was the context, in which survivors had to make life choices. Especially immediately after liberation, when communities only started to rebuild, individuals were left by themselves. Only later on, when the political and professional communities revived, could survivors rely on an institutionalized advisory network.

Importantly, the study presented in this dissertation suggests that Jews and non-Jews “shared” these experiences only partially. Yes, everybody suffered war related human and material losses. Everybody struggled with shortages, devastation, and administrative chaos. Everybody was scared of violence on the street and many Jews and non-Jews alike fell victim to murder. Yet, Jews had a sense of absolute homelessness, loneliness, and victimization which was not shared by non-Jews. Poles and Slovaks knew the extent of destruction the war had brought to their Jewish neighbors but were too preoccupied with their own losses to acknowledge the tragedy of the others. Caring about

their own material survival, they often refused to return property or grant help. By the end of 1948, Jews and non-Jews remained apart.

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